

# VICTORIAN HISTORICAL JOURNAL



1872 EDUCATION ACT SESQUICENTENARY ISSUE

VOLUME 94, NUMBER 1, JUNE 2023

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

# VICTORIAN HISTORICAL JOURNAL



## ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

The *Victorian Historical Journal* has been published continuously by the RHSV since 1911, thus comprising a unique and growing collection of Victoria's history. It is a double-blind refereed journal issuing original and previously unpublished scholarly articles on Victorian history, or occasionally on Australian history where it illuminates Victorian history. It is published twice yearly in hard copy and digital form by the Publications Committee, overseen by an Editorial Board, and indexed by INFORMIT, Scopus and the Web of Science.

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**Richard Broome, Chair, RHSV Publications Committee**

## John Adams Prize Winners

### 2017–2018

Nicola Cousen, 'The Legend of Lalor's Arm: Eureka Myths and Colonial Surgery',

*Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 88, no. 2, November 2017, pp. 212–34

### 2019–2020

Charles Fahey, 'Happy Valley Road and the Victoria Hill District: A Microhistory of a Victorian Gold-rush Mining Community, 1854–1913',

*Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 90, no. 2, December 2019, pp. 271–300

### 2021–2022

Mary Sheehan, 'A Grassroots View of Spanish Influenza in Melbourne',

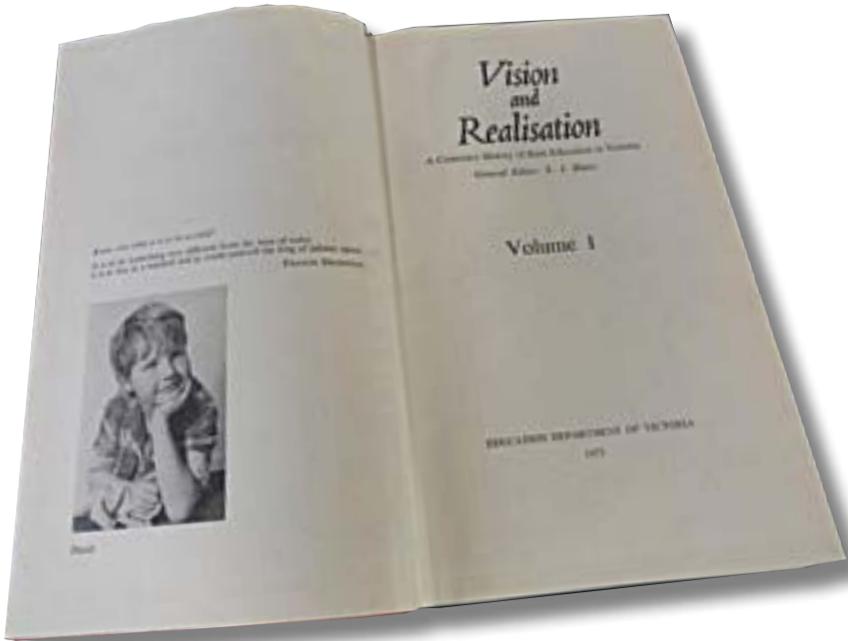
*Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 93, no. 2, December 2022, pp. 349–72

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# VICTORIAN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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The Education Act 1872 commemorative edition of the *Victorian Historical Journal*, marking 150 years of public education in Victoria, was supported by the Victorian Government.

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Front cover:

School sport, 1932, in the Strzelecki Ranges: see David Harris, 'Livingston: A One-Teacher School in the Gippsland Hills 1913–1938', pp. 159–76 (Courtesy Les Harris Collection)

Frontispiece:

Title page of Volume 1 of the 1973 three-volume centenary history of the Education Department, edited by L.J. Blake, *Vision and Realisation*. The verse quoted comes from English poet Francis Thompson (1859–1907): 'Know you what it is to be a child?' The child in the photograph is simply 'David'.



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## Editorial

How to educate our children? It is the human question. Is it a personal or communal responsibility? Do we teach them what to think, or how to think? What about the things they need to learn, from the first time they encounter fire, water, roads, animals, insects, other people, for their own safety and that of everyone around them? Whose job should it be to teach them to use the tools of civilisation? As soon as we begin exploring these issues, ancient philosophical battles reassert themselves, fought out among the concepts and realities of the power of rulers, the rules of self-defined groups, the rights of the individual, the common good, the betterment of the world.

Children are our future. What society in its clearest mind would not want to educate every child to reach its full potential? Yet our education system is in one sense a lottery, in another a marketplace. In 1872, amid controversy, parliamentarians in colonial Victoria legislated to mandate a basic education for all. If it was to be compulsory then it had to be offered locally and free of charge, paid for by the community as a whole—‘the state’. It had to be secular, too. While there was universal agreement about alphabet and numbers, and general agreement about the physical world, society quarrelled over faith, so religion could not be part of the compulsory curriculum.

How to deal with those who feared community in its broadest sense, who wanted their children to be educated only within their own group or to push past the others? The solution was to allow schools other than state schools to continue, conditional upon meeting standards and paying their own way. One problem was met; the inequality continued. Some non-state schools became rich. Some fell into poverty, especially as the compulsory school age extended into secondary education in the twentieth century. In the last 50 years the disproportion shifted again. Public money began trickling, then flowing, into non-state schools. The free state school system, vital, always under-funded, increasingly found itself at a disadvantage.

This special issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal* arises from a two-day conference organised by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria in October 2022 to mark the 150th anniversary of the 1872 Education Act. These papers must be read as reflections on some

questions arising out of the Act and its subsequent history. This is a timely approach, 50 years after the publication of the encyclopaedic centenary history, *Vision and Realisation*.

Six contributions, only, are missing. Dr Liz Rushen's 'Nicola Cooke, Port Phillip District's First Headmistress', appeared in *Provenance*, Public Record Office, Victoria, no. 8, 2013. Dr John Pardy spoke on 'Technical Education, a secular ideal for post-primary teaching'. Jillian Hiscock, RHSV Collection Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, pointed researchers to the Society's collections. Kara Krusche, the Education Department's Project Manager for the 150th Anniversary of Public Education, spoke on initiatives outlined on the 2022–23 website [www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria-media-kit](http://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria-media-kit). Dr Beth Marsden's paper was 'Not so Compulsory: The Schooling of Aboriginal Children under the 1872 Act'. She refers readers to her 2021 PhD thesis 'Histories of Aboriginal Education and Schooling in Victoria 1904–1968'. Dr Carole Hooper's 'Limitations to the Free Curriculum' was based on her paper in *History of Education Review*, vol. 45, no. 1, June 2016.

Two additional articles were accepted through the *Journal's* peer-review procedures and fit with the conference theme. Irene Hogan untangles the histories of Victoria's oldest continuing state schools. Russell Spencer presents a harrowing account of the so-called 'Industrial Schools' of the 1860s which failed to deal with the thousands of neglected children in the post gold-rush era.

In the concluding essay, Professor Adrian Jones asks us to take the long view of educational philosophy, from Ancient Greece to the present day. How do dictatorships and fundamentalists teach? How should democracies teach their young? What happens to the common good if common values fracture?

I thank the regular editors of this publication, Dr Judith Smart and Professor Richard Broome, for their advice and practical assistance. It has been more than twenty years since I last edited an issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal*. In the interim the publication has grown in size, complexity and sophistication. My crusade always was to ensure that this journal should speak clearly to everyone interested in history and respectful of good research. It still does.

Andrew Lemon  
Guest Editor

## Welcome

*Richard Broome, RHSV President*

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria was delighted to host a conference on 1–2 October 2022 to celebrate the sesquicentenary of the 1872 Education Act in Victoria. It was held on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung in Naarm (Melbourne).

This was one of the most significant conferences the RHSV has held in recent times. The 1872 Education Act was a particularly important piece of legislation, perhaps the most important passed by Victoria's colonial parliament. The significance of free, compulsory and secular education has resonated through the lives of generations of Victorians, as will become clearer through the articles in this volume.

The RHSV is indebted to the Victorian Department of Education, which is funding this special issue incorporating most of the papers from the conference as well as two other articles that had already been submitted to the journal on related topics. This special issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal* provides a permanent record of the conference, which over two days hosted 27 papers by educationalists, historians of education, and community historians. It was conceived of by a team comprising Andrew Lemon, Deborah Towns, Rosalie Triolo, Judith Smart and Rosemary Cameron (Executive Officer of the RHSV). Andrew Lemon, a former editor of the *VHJ* and also a former president of the RHSV, kindly agreed to be guest editor for this special issue.

I must warmly thank Professor Kwong Lee Dow for sponsoring this conference and opening it with the wise words recorded in this volume. Professor Dow was educated at Camberwell and Melbourne High Schools before completing an honours degree in chemistry at the University of Melbourne. He taught chemistry at Melbourne High. In 1966 he became a Senior Lecturer in Teaching Methods at the University of Melbourne, then Professor of Education in 1973 and Dean of Education in 1978. He was Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne between 1998 and 2004. Professor Dow's contributions to secondary education are seminal. They include terms as chair of the Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board, the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, the

Victorian Board of Studies, and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. As founding chair of the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, Professor Dow had oversight of developments that reformed the curriculum and assessment for Year 12 students by introducing a more inclusive and representative system while maintaining academic standards. In 1997 he chaired a Review of the Victorian Certificate of Education.

My own reflections on the importance of this conference are informed by reading a book to my own two children, Kate and Matthew, and now to my grandchildren, two boys Leo six and Evan eight. These young boys have been enthralled by Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life*, especially his account of his early life in Victoria and then Western Australia. They were dismayed at the disappearance of Albert's father on the Western Australian goldfields, then the separation from his mother as she went in search of the children's father only to vanish herself. When Albert and his grandmother travelled to the West to find his mother, she wanted little to do with Albert. Albert's poor treatment, then his thrashing by a cruel employer when aged about ten, shocked them. But overall, his account of rural life in the Western Australian wheatbelt engrossed them completely, being so very different from their own experience as boys living in suburban Melbourne 120 years later.

What astonished them most was the fact that Albert had never been to school! Even by the age of fourteen, he had still not experienced one day of schooling, a fact he often laments in this account of his early years. Fortunately, Albert became an autodidact with a little help from a man called Jack Lander who realised Albert could not even write his own name. Lander gave Albert his old schoolbooks and he started with a lettering book. Albert Facey recalled: 'I put in two hours every night before I went to bed' and, with the help of his employers, small wheat farmers, 'in three weeks I could write my name quite good ... I must have written it over a thousand times in the next week or so'.<sup>1</sup>

If Albert had stayed in Victoria, this autodidactic learning probably would not have happened, for the 1872 Act made schooling compulsory, and because of that it also had to be free. The fact that it was also secular was an artefact of the sectarian politics of the day. In his old age, Facey wrote a book for his family, which was both powerful and beautiful in its simplicity and humanity. Once discovered, it was commercially published in 1981 with sales now of over 800,000 copies. Such is the power of learning to read and write, skills denied in early life to Albert Facey, but made so widely accessible to his contemporaries and successors by the Act of 1872.

1 Albert Facey, *A Fortunate Life*, Melbourne, Penguin Books, 1981, p. 129.

## Opening the Conference

*Kwong Lee Dow*

President Richard Broome, keynote speaker Deborah Towns, all contributors and participants: thank you for the honour to open this conference that commemorates 150 years of state education in Victoria following the passing of the 1872 Act. Congratulations and thanks to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria for marking the occasion with such a full and varied two days, and with the intention of publishing its papers and proceedings. That is wonderful, and fitting.

At the 50th anniversary point in 1922, the Education Department of Victoria published *A History of State Education in Victoria*, with three authors: Edward Sweetman, Lecturer in History and Education at the Teachers' College; Charles R. Long, school inspector and editor of the *School Paper* and of the *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*; and John Smyth, who was both Principal of the Teachers' College and the first Professor of Education in the University of Melbourne.

While Victoria was the first state to enshrine the provision of 'free, compulsory and secular education', indeed the first place in the British Empire where these provisions were made law, the real centre of the Act lay in the shift of responsibility from the honorary Boards of Commissioners (the National and Denominational Boards of the 1850s, and the Common Schools Board from 1862) to the creation of a Department of Education, responsible to parliament through a Minister of the Crown—the Minister of Public Instruction—with a permanent head, originally the Secretary, and after 1901 the Director of Education.

The early challenges were the need for school buildings and accommodation, the need to bring children to school, and the need for teachers across the state with their needs for accommodation and housing, for qualifications and for enhanced competence.

Through the latter part of this first 50 years, I must acknowledge the towering presence and leadership of Frank Tate: prominent in the 1890s as inspector in the country Charlton district, from 1900 the Principal of the Teachers' College and by 1902 the founding Director of Education. His memory was carried down through the decades by school leaders I knew;

and indeed my mother clearly recalled, as student and school pianist at Shepparton High School in the mid-1920s. being patted on the head by Tate at a Speech Night with ‘keep up your music, Sylvia’.

The celebrations of the Act across 1972 and 1973 were grand, with the lasting highlight of the three volume publication *Vision and Realisation*, surely well known to many here today. Not only a history of 100 years, but a full description of the entire Education Department at 1972, with photos and mini-biographies of many education leaders, and useful individual histories of every state school—primary, high and technical schools—with records of teacher education, special schools provision and the vast array of support services and ancillary activities between the Education Department and other organisations.

This was the era of Minister Lindsay Thompson and Director-General Lawrie Shears and those around them and before them. Just as we thank Dick Selleck for his magnificent biography of Frank Tate, so too we thank Eleanor Peeler for her biography of Lawrie, and note that Lawrie’s portrait now hangs in the Secretary’s Conference Room at 2 Treasury Place.

I can’t resist mentioning at this point two other less well-known and perhaps less accessible biographies. One is of Alice Hoy, written as a Master of Education thesis by Julann Meabank. The other is of Christina Montgomery (first Principal of Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School and the antecedent Melbourne High School after the boys left for Forrest Hill in 1927): it is a chapter written by Gwyneth Dow and Leslie Scholes in *Not so Eminent Victorians*, the book edited by Dick Selleck and Martin Sullivan.

So here we now are, celebrating a third 50-year period. Some of us would have liked to see a bit more public recognition of today’s milestone. There’s still time, as the Act received Royal Assent on 19 December 1872 and the Department was created from the start of 1873. But the multitude of competing activities and pressures on current educational leaders, together with the culture of today—more critical, with high expectations and less effusive acknowledgment of achievements when compared with exposing deficiencies and demanding improvements—renders celebration of anniversaries more muted than in earlier flag-waving times.

Let me conclude with one observation: the antagonism and rancour between secular public schools and religious schools has largely abated, and has given way to areas of cooperation and collaboration, as my current appointment as ‘Independent Member’ of the Schools Policy and Funding Advisory Council enables me to witness.

To end on a personal note: I am one Victorian indebted to the opportunities made available by earlier leaders of the Education Department, with teaching bursaries to help my last years at school, an excellent education at Ashburton Primary and Camberwell and Melbourne High Schools, and five years on a secondary studentship through an honours degree in Chemistry and Diploma in Education. In acknowledging my personal gratitude I now declare this conference open.



### **Richard Selleck**

**This photograph (courtesy of Viv Kelly) was taken on 11 May 2003, the day of the launch of R.J.W. Selleck's masterly *The Shop: The University of Melbourne 1850–1939*. The book was well described by its publisher, Melbourne University Press, as 'a warm, wry narrative, gentle but persistent in its ironies, and marvellously attuned to the untidiness, drama and farce of the birth and progress of a self-consciously prestigious institution'.**

**VALE:****Emeritus Professor Richard Joseph Wheeler  
'Dick' Selleck****5 May 1934 – 2 October 2022***Rosalie Triolo***Editor's Note**

*Professor Dick Selleck was referred to by name and in reference notes at least 30 times in the course of the RHSV's two-day conference at the start of October 2022. News of his death, after a long period of ill-health, reached us the morning after the conference concluded. In the words of Dr Rosalie Triolo, 'How extraordinary that Dick should pass away the Sunday night of the second day of the conference—and not before it began—and after so many of us had mentioned him over those two days. The universe must have known how to time.' The following is an edited version of a eulogy delivered by Dr Triolo at Professor Selleck's funeral at Lilydale ten days later.*

**Dick Selleck**

Dick Selleck was one of Australia's and Britain's greatest thinkers, authors, speakers and educators in History of Education, and with reach well beyond Australia and Britain, academically and publicly.

He concluded his career as a Professorial Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne while also being Emeritus Professor in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Each was a position awarded on the basis of a career beyond comprehension of being equalled.

At Monash University, Dick's highest positions were Head, School of Graduate Studies (1994–95), and Professor and Chair of Education (1972–96). At the University of Melbourne, he was a Senior Lecturer

and Lecturer in Education (1962–72) and, prior to that, a member of the Victorian Education Department Curriculum and Research Branch (1958–61) after being a primary teacher in Department schools (1954–57). Dick's stunning *curriculum vitae* of contribution to education and wider society, through publications, presentations, teaching and relationships formed, defies simple summary. But his life reflects elements of the experience of Victoria's first Director of Education, Frank Tate, about whom Dick wrote so insightfully and beautifully.

When I once asked Dick, 'Why did you write about Tate?' he replied, simply, 'Because he seemed interesting.' Yet I observe another parallel because, as with Tate, Dick had risen up the ranks, from primary teacher to education historian as well as education leader of international acclaim, equipping himself with, and retaining throughout, big picture understandings and, subsequently, the empathy that informed his professional and personal selves.

Dick achieved three Australian Research Council grants and two Spencer Foundation grants. He was on editorial boards, if not sole editor, for eleven Australian, British and American journals (1966–81) and I believe he held senior editorial roles or undertook others and support roles regularly and unofficially well before and beyond 1981.

He had two other senior invited appointments to the University of Melbourne, and was an invited scholar on fourteen occasions to diverse Australian, American, British and Canadian universities and education institutions (1966–96). He received six literary and travelling research awards, 1962–95.

In addition to being elected a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences, Australia, Dick was a member of ten Australian, British, Canadian and New Zealand learned societies. He was President of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society (1978–79 and, I believe, a founding member), and Patron of the Australian National Museum of Education.

Finally, in addition to the major administrative appointments already noted, he held a further nine on different state college, education management and publishing boards in Victoria and Canberra.

I was blessed to have had Dick Selleck supervise me, voluntarily, in his retirement: I was his final doctoral student. To this day, I have not thrown out his ink-penned comments on my paper drafts, the very first of which I occasionally now read, thinking that I would excuse him if

he had decided to no longer supervise me. Such is the process. And I did my best afterwards to demonstrate that my gratitude was enduring, retaining contact through emails, birthday and Christmas cards, coffees and lunches, until observing that there were challenges in Dick's life, after which opportunities to interact and replies ceased. I have greatly enjoyed and appreciated the ongoing friendship with his wife, Viv, and will be ever grateful to her and family for 'loaning' Dick to me.

Blessed. As have been his family, personal friends and academic colleagues, the latter two often being the one. A colleague of Dr Marjorie Theobald recalled recently how Marjorie was borrowing a book of Dick's on British education in a British university library. She mentioned to the librarian that Dick was a colleague at Monash University in Australia. The librarian replied, 'So that's where he went'—implying that a scholar of such brilliance in writing about Britain must surely have been British-born.

A former associate professor at Monash University, Tony Taylor, remembered how Dick made him feel very welcome on arrival from England at the then Gippsland campus, and continued to be a first-rate colleague across the years. Tony recalled, 'I once asked Dick, "Was there ever a 'golden age' of Australian universities?" Dick apparently paused for a moment then replied, "September 1939"'. This was, of course, the eve of the Second World War but with some people still holding hope that war would not eventuate, given the tragedy of the last. The message in this tale is that where many respondents might have offered a predictable, flippant response, Dick gave a seriously thoughtful one.

In my own case, I once asked Dick in a display of my awe, 'How have you achieved such publication and presentation output, while supervising so many students to doctoral excellence, teaching history, in ways that former students recount in superlatives, decades later, and while administratively so busy in senior roles—even Acting Dean—yet you always seem calm?' Dick replied, calmly, that he was like a duck sitting on a pond, but paddling busily underneath. We laughed. But no duck and pond for me—here was a swan on a lake.

Dick was so humble as to gently often say he had not done much at all, and seem truly to believe it. If he was to hear my swan analogy, he would try to return us to the duck—but surely, surely, he must have known that he generated immense joy and wisdom in the lives of many others.

Sweet release for Dick Selleck, his loving family and many friends. He earned his peace. Many of us will be grateful to him for as long as we are capable of remembering, and his scholarship will stand as exemplary long after we, too, have passed away.

# **Celebrating with Three Rs: Responsibility, Realisation, Reflection**

## **150 years of Public Education in Victoria 1872–2022**

*Deborah Towns*

I acknowledge the First Nations people who are the custodians of the land we meet on, the Wurundjeri people, together with the Wathaurong people whose country I lived on when I attended North Shore and Corio Primary Schools, Norlane High School and Geelong Teachers' College, before moving to Melbourne. This address is dedicated to my parents Margaret and John Kyle who encouraged my learning and independence.

Honoured to be giving the keynote address for such a notable event, I recognise I am in the presence of a distinguished audience. The year 2022 is significant to me as it is 50 years since I began teaching in public schools. In 1972, I was a Prep teacher at Heidelberg Primary School. Happily for me, 1972 was the first year when women primary school teachers received equal pay, so today is an opportunity to be reminded of those thousands of women who had been denied fairness for more than a century. Teaching the 'three Rs' to five-year-olds was very different to the year before. On an extended studentship, I had been a La Trobe University student, had joined 100,000 other citizens sitting down in Bourke Street, and was involved in other anti-Vietnam war activism. I reflect now that for almost half of the existence of this 150-year-old system I have been engaged in it as a pupil, student teacher, teacher unionist, school council member, teachers' college and university lecturer, public service administrator, parent, grandparent and public historian.

Historical issues haunt, inform, explain and continue in schooling today. The government reintroduces educational strategies and programs as it creates the new. The Victorian government has just opened ten new secondary technical colleges, after closing over 100 in 1989. These new 'Tech Schools' are described as centres of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) excellence.

As educational historians we are challenged to consider 'the presence of the past'. One of the most renowned educational historians,

Dick Selleck, used the phrase in his keynote address, ‘The presence of the past: Melbourne High School in its centenary year’, delivered in 2005. By then neo-liberal economic strategies of our successive governments were well under way, and Selleck used this opportunity to caution how certain strategies had placed all schools in an education market. He explained how the opening of the co-educational Continuation School in 1905 (later becoming the separate Melbourne High and Mac.Robertson Girls’ High Schools) had challenged educational privilege, as this was Victoria’s first public high school. He wrote:

Melbourne High School lives today in very different times. The market, so singularly unsuccessful and ungenerous in the past, has regained the grip on Victorian education that was thrown off when the school was opened a century ago. The system must meet its responsibilities to students in every part of the state, whatever the market says.<sup>1</sup> [The 1872 Act] stood for a state system of schooling that aimed to provide children, even if they lived in remote districts, with rich educational experiences. For very many students Melbourne High School has provided those experiences. It will continue to provide them if it remembers that, had market values predominated, that small school would never have been built, and that MHS was itself built in defiance of such values.<sup>2</sup>

Recent publications set a challenge too, such as *Lessons From History* in which historians Carolyn Holbrook, Lyndon Megarrity and David Lowe tackle the biggest challenges that face Australia and the world, and show how the past provides context and knowledge that can guide us in the present and future.<sup>3</sup> This is what I think we are here for, at this conference.

### **Vision and Realisation**

Before 1872 there were already teachers working in schools all over the state. They included those who had attended the teachers’ training college at the Model School, Melbourne from 1854, while others taught in calico tents on the goldfields, such as Margaret Miller, head teacher at Campbell’s Creek National School from 1853.

For the 1972 centenary, that earlier history was included and celebrated in *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, a huge, illustrated three-volume history of the Department and a record of each public school. Its authors were

departmental officers. The general editor, Les Blake OBE, a former school inspector, and a Geelong Teachers' College lecturer, headed teams of researchers, historians, writers and typists, and he chaired advisory committees. A president and a Fellow of the RHSV, he went on to be Victoria's State Historian.

In the foreword, Minister Lindsay Thompson in celebratory language presented a picture of business as usual and steady progression, along with his renowned humorous anecdotes. Meanwhile, under his very windows in Treasury Place, teachers were conducting stop works in the Treasury Gardens, as they did elsewhere. Along with organisations and community leaders they were demanding urgent improvements to children's and teachers' conditions in state schools. The government's building and maintenance, teacher supply and classroom resources had not been keeping up with post-war economic growth or the learning and training needs of the baby boomer generation. The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, supported by the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria's 'professional' policies, urged tribunal reform, curriculum reform, control of entry to the profession, the abolition of inspection, improvement of conditions, and protection of teachers' rights.<sup>4</sup> In 1972 they threatened to disrupt Education Week in schools with its focus on centenary celebrations. Thompson dramatically cancelled Education Week. It was not reinstated until Minister Caroline Hogg did so, fourteen years later.

Paradoxically, as centenary celebrations were underway and *Vision and Realisation* was being published, schooling in Victoria was undergoing radical change with the reintroduction of direct state aid to non-government schools and with the increasing influence of the federal Education Department, established in 1966. Education was traditionally a state responsibility. Blake ensured this historical change of government policy was recognised: 'A century ago, George Higinbotham, James Wilberforce Stephen, Angus Mackay, Edward Cohen, Henry Wrixon, James Francis and others led Australia in their affirmation of belief in secular education and the rejection of State aid. Apparently, the wheel of history has now turned a complete circle.'<sup>5</sup>

Max Badcock, writing in the same publication, drew attention to three main problems in secondary schooling: staffing, buildings, and teacher unrest. With prescience, he observed staffing as a recurring problem—as it is again today. In 1972, it was gradually solved by

increasing local graduates, augmenting training programs and employing overseas teachers. By the late 1970s there was a teacher surplus. Badcock agreed with the unions about improving teaching qualifications. Building was dependent on state government funding, and he diplomatically explained that the state could not afford the full cost. ‘Entanglement’, he explained was the problem. ‘The financial resources required are of an order of magnitude not under the control of the Victorian State Government, and thus the problem is complicated by the entanglement of Commonwealth–State relations.’<sup>6</sup> And so it continues today.

But Badcock was baffled by teacher unrest, and quoted from Frank Tate’s speech at the opening of Melbourne High School in 1905:

Although it may appear the veriest truism, it cannot be too forcibly laid down that the object of the education system is to provide the best education for the children, and not to provide positions and promotions for teachers, inspectors, and departmental officers ... The question of questions to be asked is ‘How does this affect the educational well-being of John Smith junior, the small boy on the school benches?’<sup>7</sup>

However, the VSTA’s and the TTUV’s policies did include ‘educational wellbeing’.

Technical schools were ‘something of a maverick’: that was the turn of phrase of Betty Lawson, first woman principal of a co-educational tech.<sup>8</sup> Their future was often shaky. In 1972 Victoria was the only Australian state retaining secondary technical schools. By the 1980s strong advocates of a fully comprehensive school, including Joan Kirner and Jean Blackburn, also advocated closing techs. Perhaps they could have respected the advice of James Docherty, the *Vision and Realisation* technical chapter’s author, an inspector and educational historian:

To staff these comprehensive schools with the permanent presence of men and women who have had the benefit of industrial experience it should be realised that it would not be possible to secure enough personnel with this type of background to staff all secondary schools. It is doubtful too whether a comprehensive system would attract such people because there would almost certainly be a different order of values and a consequent lack of opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

Technical schooling requires expensive, regularly updated resources. In 2008, Joan Kirner agreed that closing the techs was an economic rather than an educational decision and that there was insufficient government funding for the comprehensive schools planned for in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

In 2002, Minister Lynne Kosky, upon the advice of the Kirby Review of Post-Compulsory Schooling, introduced the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which continues today. She conceded, ‘It was probably fair to say that we lost something when technical schools were closed previously.’<sup>11</sup>

Warwick Eunson wrote the chapter, ‘Education and Supply of Teachers.’ Fifty years later, as with those of *Vision and Realisation’s* other expert authors, his findings and advice retain relevance.

Until those responsible for the education of teachers receive evidence based upon objective research, they will be continually exposed to the ebb and flow of opinion. In the 1970s it will be difficult enough to plot a course; to enter the 1980s with many decisions unresolved will be dangerous. What eventuates in teacher education in the 1970s will be decisive; the failures and the inspiration of the first century will doubtless be repeated. The paths we should follow are as well defined as can be expected. Courage and decision are needed now.<sup>12</sup>

‘Teacher wastage’ concerned him, and it continues as an expensive and troubling matter today.

### **Other Histories: Equity**

In 1872 women were already half of the teaching service; today they are over 70 per cent as teachers and public servants in the Department of Education and Training.

After 1872 the state’s map was increasingly dotted with schools of various size and condition. Keen parents wanted their children taught, and the government fulfilled its responsibility to ‘free, secular, and compulsory’ education. Male teachers often gained a part-time work mistress, as needlework was compulsory for girls. The fortitude of the male inspectors travelling around rural areas was lauded, but there were women teachers living and working in the bush all the time.

Women were denied access to head teachers’ positions in all but the smallest primary and girls’ secondary schools until 1969. From the 1890s

married women could only be ‘temporary’, and this continued until 1956. As historian Marjorie Theobald found, the Department constructed a male elite: ‘For the majority of young women who entered teaching in the first half of the twentieth century, the Department had installed a revolving door.’<sup>13</sup>

It was the predominantly male leadership that shaped public schooling and influenced Victoria’s community. Frank Tate was the first Director (1902–28) and his organisation of the public system remained much in place until the 1970s. The *School Paper* (first issued in 1895) read by generations of children, and the *Education Gazette and Teachers’ Aid* (from 1900) which informed teachers for over a century, were pioneered by Charles Long. Naturalist and teacher John Albert Leach travelled around Victoria, inspiring children and the community to respect the environment and the habitats of local flora and fauna. His *An Australian Bird Book* (1911) is updated and still in print today. He and Jessie McMichael, a teacher at Hopetoun, started the Gould League (1909) and it continues as a national environmental association.

The gendered system created few influential positions for women. For decades needlework, compulsory for all girls, was joined in 1899 by cookery for older girls if they lived close to a cookery centre, and from 1905 expanded to all high schools and domestic arts colleges. Annie Fawcett Storey, Directress of Cookery, opened the first cookery centre. Women headed these centres, as men did in the Sloyd woodwork centres. Eventually from 1906 teachers were trained at the College of Domestic Economy (rehoused and renamed in 1927 as the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy, closed in 1979) and Larnook Domestic Arts Teachers’ College in Kooyong Road, Armadale (1952–78).<sup>14</sup> Both had women principals. Jean Pollock at Larnook was the first woman head of a residential teachers’ college in Australia.

Kindergarten was considered an essential part of children’s learning from the early twentieth century, becoming another women’s domain. Though the government decided kindergarten was too costly to be universal, women studied infant method at teachers’ college and hundreds of them specialised in infant teaching in primary schools. Emmeline Pye, appointed Mistress of Infant Method in Melbourne Teachers’ College, lectured from 1902 to 1918 and established Victoria’s first state-funded kindergarten in 1907. I will return to this shortly.

May Cox, as the pioneering Supervisor of Swimming and Lifesaving (from 1910 to 1938), carved out an influential career and was responsible for teaching thousands of students and teachers to swim and qualify in lifesaving. Many lives must have been saved. A tenacious networker, she was executive secretary to the Victorian State Schools' Patriotic League during the First World War, when government schools throughout Australia were directed to work for the war effort.

Certain women were publicly critical of the dominant male leadership. Clara Weeks was a celebrated Infant Mistress of a large elementary school, and a prominent suffragist and unionist. She and her sisters were leaders of the Victorian Lady Teachers' Association that demanded equity for women. In 1901 she helped establish the Equal Pay Network with Vida Goldstein. In 1903 Goldstein campaigned for a seat in federal parliament with the slogan 'Why women teachers should vote for Vida Goldstein.' Later, Florence Johnson, president of the Victorian Women Teachers' Association, headed one of the largest unions with almost 1000 members. In 1919 she was appointed the Secretary of the Women's Division, a full-time paid union organiser position in the Victorian State Service Federation (VSSF), the first woman to hold such a position in Australia. She pioneered again as one of the first women to stand for state parliament in 1925. For a few years, women teachers joined the VSSF rather than the male-dominated teachers' union, as they believed the men were not supportive of equal pay.

These women were sharp-witted and knowledgeable at deputations. Melvina Ingram from Geelong was unsympathetic when Tate lamented falling numbers of male teachers. She suggested he could hand over primary schools to women, and men could work in techs and high schools. Later Johnson was banned from deputations after saying things such as 'if all teachers were paid better, teaching would be more attractive!' Tate and the Minister of Education were challenged by her knowledge and repartee but, though entertained, they could ignore the claims, because governments relied upon women's cheap labour to expand the compulsory education system.

Was an equity opportunity lost in the late 1960s when boys first got to do cookery? Unlike the girls who had studied compulsory home management for decades, boys were not required to study it. In 1963, my unwieldy broom-wrangling at school led my domestic arts teacher to say that I would not be a good housewife! From 1905 into the 1960s, girls in

secondary schools spent half a day a week studying home management. Alongside learning geography, science, French and English we were being trained to be housewives, faced with a future of double shifts and double lives. Helen McCarthy in *Double Lives: a History of Working Motherhood* observes, ‘For much of the nineteenth and twentieth century women’s worlds were shaped by a labour market founded on sexual difference, a welfare state which institutionalised the dependency of wives, and a wider culture which prized devoted mothering and housewifery as the apotheosis of femininity’.<sup>15</sup>

Respecting and feeling responsible for home management, and learning how to do it, would surely help with one of the foremost issues discussed in regard to women’s work inequity. Working part time or full time, women continue to do the bulk of the housework and childcare—the double shift.<sup>16</sup>

### **A History of Mothers’ Clubs**

Mothers’ Clubs were first established in schools in 1919, and from 1925 the Victorian Federation of Mothers’ Clubs (VFMC) led by Florence Johnson and Ida Body, organised them into a local and state-wide lobbying organisation. During the 1930s and the Second World War, they objected to the government’s cutbacks to teachers’ salaries, to school maintenance and to learning resources. Minnie McNaughton, a VFMC president, a former teacher (and Florence Johnson’s sister), gained a high public profile as she consistently drew attention to government withdrawal of education funding. It cut teachers’ salaries, and no secondary teachers were trained for almost 20 years. Mothers’ Clubs fed struggling families and clothed children so they could attend school. They voluntarily ran school canteens, one of the many ways these women raised funds for schooling needs. State schools were dependent on parental support for material resources. Honing her political skills, Joan Kirner, a former teacher, was an activist Mothers’ Club president in the 1960s, in time becoming Victoria’s first (and so far, only) woman Premier. ‘From Mum to Minister’ is the title of papers she deposited in the State Library Victoria. The VFMC continues today as Parents Victoria. My longer paper on the evolution of Mothers’ Clubs appears elsewhere in this journal.

## Beyond the Second World War

By the 1950s, after years of neglect during the Depression and the war, schools were not providing adequately for the student baby boomers. Problems kept growing as the burgeoning economy now required additional educated and trained workers.

By the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, the Tate system was showing cracks, especially with post-primary schooling. Recent histories have drawn attention to these changes including Bill Hannan's book *The Best of Times: The Story of the Great Secondary Schooling Expansion*,<sup>17</sup> Craig Campbell's and Helen Proctor's *A History of Australian Schooling*,<sup>18</sup> and John Parry's and Lesley Preston's article, 'The great unravelling: restructuring and reorganising education and schooling in Victoria, 1980–1992'. And, if I may add here, my co-authored book, with John Andrews, *A Secondary Education For All? A History of State Secondary Schooling in Victoria* provides further insights to these developments.<sup>19</sup> Our royalties directly go to State Schools Relief—an organisation started by teachers during the Depression, supported by Mothers' Clubs, and one that unfortunately continues to be needed to support children to attend schools, with uniforms, computers and essentials that give them access and the resources required to gain their democratic right to education.

## New National Education Ministry, and the Return of Funding to Non-government Schools

The radical change to the educational milieu from the mid-1960s was the development of the national education system, beginning with indirect support when science centres were provided to all secondary schools. Education had traditionally been a state responsibility: the first Commonwealth Minister of Education was appointed as late as 1966. From the early 1970s, direct government funding of non-government schools and the ever-expanding and increasingly influential federal Education Department saw changes to curriculum development and teacher training. This altered the educational, administrative and funding environment for Australian schooling and—repeating Badcock's wonderful word—the entanglement continues.

The early 1970s saw the Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) draw attention to the educational needs of a wide range of groups, including First Nations Australians. Recognition for formally trained

Aboriginal teachers gained momentum. I was teaching in Keon Park Technical School at that time, when teachers and students alike felt special when new furniture and new textbooks arrived—at last sufficient for every student.

These developments changed my work in other ways as the personal became political. ‘Girls’ were one of the groups targeted by the CSC. The CSC’s report ‘Girls, Schools and Society’ provided recommendations to improve girls’ schooling outcomes. As Minister Thompson stated at the time, ‘Mrs Deborah Towns was appointed as the coordinator for the elimination of sexism in schools ... and I stress that she will be concerned with the removal of the last vestiges of sexism in schools.’<sup>20</sup> All states were funded to establish such jobs. So in 1977 I moved from the coalface, from Keon Park Technical School’s classrooms and my strike activities, onto the third floor of the Department’s luxurious head office in No. 2 Treasury Place. There were tea-ladies and typing pools and a feeling of going into the past. I was on a mission, so I did not spend much time in there other than making demands for a ‘non-sexist’ policy, which was eventually circulated by the then Minister, Alan Hunt, to all schools in 1980 as the ‘Equal Opportunity and Elimination of Sexism in Schools Policy’. Others were employed, and the Equal Opportunity Unit was established. Being appointed Manager made me the only woman manager on the third floor, and variously called a ‘femocrat’ and an ‘equal opportunist’. In the 1980s we gained government funding and commissions to run girls’ maths and science projects and encourage girls into trades, like today’s ‘new’ programs. Past projects did not achieve their goals and they cost millions—but did anyone look at their history before spending millions more?

There were equal opportunity resource centres in every region. In 1984 we produced the ‘Sexual Harassment Out in the Open Kit’, sent to all schools with a memorandum from the Director-General, addressed to each school community, to act upon the recommendations. As state women’s advisers in education, we met annually under the auspices of the Conference of Directors-General. We developed the first girls’ national policy, *Girls and Tomorrow*, in 1984.

## And Around We Go: ‘Innovations’ have Histories

*The Age* recently reported that despite a decade of programs to encourage girls into STEM, there has been no change: but, as shown above, projects including maths and trades for girls began decades ago. These programs have had fits and starts as funding came and went. For over 40 years, numbers have hardly shifted for women in the trades, other than ladies’ hairdressing. They were 0.07 per cent in 1980 and 2 per cent today. Research shows that girls and boys form attitudes about who can do particular jobs, or science, maths or trades, when they are in kindergarten. Personal messages children receive about themselves through the formal and hidden curricula of schooling matter. As educational historian Jane Martin recently concluded:

Achievement in public examinations is not the only index by which we ought to be measuring the quality of educational life. Above all, personal accounts show how much bullying, friendship, peer pressure and the messages children receive about themselves through the formal and hidden curricula of schooling matter too. We need to face up to certain things both in education and society as a whole. We need all educational establishments to be gender-sensitive spaces in which everyone can be seen learning together as equals, with respect and empathy. We need a cultural context where learners and teachers look beyond common-sense understandings such that they can identify that the history they are learning is a story, for example, and where all pupils and students can see their past reflected in the curriculum. We need to incorporate perspectives of class, gender and ‘race’ into what counts as school knowledge and to help break down the traditional vocational-academic divide. We need a vision of gender democratisation that has commitment from everyone. To challenge not only everyday sexism, misogyny, homophobia and gender stereotypes but also a discourse of cisnormativity. Cultural ideas like the definition of being a ‘real’ man and ‘true’ masculinity can be so destructive with boys themselves arguably the first victims. We need to believe in political power as the ability to be effective, to make a difference and to educate young people for civic participation to address the forces of gendered power that have shaped our past and present, so the different generations don’t face the same world tomorrow as they did yesterday.<sup>21</sup>

## Kindergartens

Australia's first kindergartens were supported by community leaders, notably first-wave feminists, but they remained marginal to mainstream educational discourse and administration. The earliest kindergarten leaders appeared to prefer the independence this gave them, and it created one of the few professional areas where women have always led. For decades it was largely dependent upon volunteers.

The kindergarten activist Ada A'Beckett became foundation president of Victoria's Free Kindergarten Union in 1908. In 1939 the government funded a new national organisation for children, continuing today as Early Childhood Australia. A'Beckett influenced the establishment of Lady Gowrie Child Centres in every state, the only childhood centres for many years to receive Commonwealth funding. Community-run kindergartens increased in number, and there were kindergartens in independent and Catholic schools.

In the 1970s, pressure from feminists and other lobbyists, together with the recognition of the economic importance of women's work, led the government to fund long-day childcare centres ahead of kindergartens that had been waiting much longer. Over the next decades, shifts in educational debate, policy and funding continued. Finally in 2022, more than a century after the early education leaders began their agitation, the vision of universal child-centred education for the youngest children was fulfilled, with government funded three- and four-year-old kindergarten in Victoria. At last there was recognition of the learning needs of young children, just as leading educationists, including Frank Tate, had recognised over a century ago, and for the first time governments were prepared to invest in their universal funding.

## A New Government: A New Enquiry into Teacher Education

In late 2022, the new Australian federal government's Education Minister, Jason Clare, made an urgent response to the shortage of teachers and announced a review of teacher education. In the previous 50 years there have been over 100 federal and state reviews of teacher education. So yes, today we are facing a teacher shortage yet again, just as Max Badcock predicted. This time it is a national and international problem, with international competition for teachers. With so many previous reviews and few of their recommendations ever implemented, I question the need for a review at all.

Why are teachers and teacher education constant scapegoats? There seem to be endless governments and community commentators in pursuit of the good teacher and the quality teacher. Many leading educationists have tackled this question. Lawrie Shears, a former Director-General of Education and an innovative educational leader in Victoria, has stated, ‘there never has been a definition of what is a good teacher.’<sup>22</sup> Social scientist Raewyn Connell remarked:

There is no universal pure form of teaching; and that is another reason why the formulae of ‘best practice’ and the instructional fads that periodically sweep the education scene are always mistaken. Ironically teaching seems to be a peculiarly unteachable form of work. There is a cloud of perpetual discontent around initial Teacher Education.<sup>23</sup>

Educationist Diane May analysed over 100 government reviews of teacher education in Australia since the 1970s, and found that few recommendations were implemented.

We have to engage with the teacher standards agenda, the teacher evaluation agenda and teacher evaluation research to counter the anecdotally informed ‘teacher education is failing us’ headlines and the naïve view of teacher quality which assumes a linear relationship between policy and educational outcome without accounting for school culture, resources and communities.<sup>24</sup>

The continuing emphasis by governments on the need for quality teachers must be backed up by quality support in the form of focused funding to support teachers in the classroom. Governments shirk their democratic responsibility by being unsupportive and denigrating their own teachers.

Over the previous century and a half there have been many millions of successful teaching moments and learning taking place despite the perceived and politicised talk of teaching and learning ‘problems’. One of mine was in a Year 9 class of boys at Keon Park Tech when they called out, ‘Please stop talking Miss, we want to do our work!’

Everyday classroom successes continue, but what always changes are the political and funding environments. Providing educational opportunity and equity should be a whole of government responsibility not just the responsibility of the Minister of Education. ‘Education is everything,’ a recently retired dean of an Education Faculty told me.

## Conclusion

While preparing for this address I spoke with principals of primary and secondary schools, classroom teachers, senior public servants, students, unionists, parents, a retired dean of education and community leaders. I heard journalist Laura Tingle address the issue of teachers and their work in a recent ABC's 7.30 program. Other media at the time interviewed Meredith Peace, the Australian Education Union's Victorian President. This all confirmed that teachers are spending only about 40 per cent of their time actually teaching. It is compulsory for teachers to provide data on compliance, testing and to perform other copious administration tasks that take up time and are unrelated to their students' learning. I agree with principals and teachers who cannot understand why it is useful to their pupils to be compared with another child in Queensland or Japan through PISA and NAPLAN.<sup>25</sup> Dare I call this data collection marketing tools, rather than learning tools? Teachers know how their students are performing.

The Productivity Commission's review of national school reform won't fix our system according to Chris Bonner, co-author of *Waiting for Gonski: How Australia Failed its Schools*. The Commission focused on what goes on in the classroom and inside the school gate. Bonner applied his oft-used motor vehicle metaphor: 'Everyone had their heads under the bonnet, while ignoring the design construction, history and preferred operation of the system.'<sup>26</sup> He argued that the current education system is not delivering for the students or the nation. Australia, he found, has one of the most segregated and hierarchical school systems in the OECD world and very expensive to support. It duplicates the provision of schools. Student outcomes seem to be in irreversible decline and even 'over resourced schools' perform no better.<sup>27</sup> The NAPLAN results tend to match the socioeconomic status of the students. Bonner suggests that we need a conversation about how our school system can be better structured to support all our students and schools.

Earlier in this address I quoted Max Badcock from his *Vision and Realisation* chapter, when he repeated Frank Tate's question from 1905 at the opening of Melbourne High School. He considered it in relation to the VSTA's professional demands: 'How does this affect the educational wellbeing of John Smith Junior, the small boy on the school benches?' It remains a relevant question about how education is provided today. It is the democratic responsibility of Australia's national and state

governments to provide education to every student by ensuring access and the resources required. Dick Selleck reminds us that the government must meet these responsibilities ‘whatever the market says’.<sup>28</sup>

I suggest we ask Tate’s question today in regard to NAPLAN, PISA and compliance and the dubious other ‘busy’ matters that teachers and school bureaucrats attend to, rather than teach. Governments must ensure that all young people have the opportunity to learn—and this time we need to include the diversity of students and their access to the ubiquitous school benches ... not only that small boy, ‘John Smith Junior’.

## Notes

- 1 Selleck is referring to the Victorian government’s payments by results scheme operating from 1863 until abolished in 1906.
- 2 R.J.W. Selleck, ‘The Presence of the Past: Melbourne High School’, *The History of Education Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2006, pp. 11–12.
- 3 Carolyn Holbrook, Lyndon McGarrity, David Lowe (eds), *Lessons from History: Leading Historians Tackle Australia’s Greatest Challenges*, Sydney, New South Publishing, 2022.
- 4 Jan Bassett, ‘*Matters of Conscience: A History of the VSTA*’, Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, Melbourne, Penfolk Publishing, 1995, p. 105.
- 5 L.J. Blake (ed.), Book Three, ‘Free, Secular and Compulsory’, in *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol. 1, Melbourne, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, p. 235.
- 6 Max Badcock, Book Five, ‘The Secondary Division’, in Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation*, Vol.1, p. 590.
- 7 Badcock, in Blake (ed.), p. 590.
- 8 Betty Lawson, ‘Rise and Demise of the Technical Division: a Look at Technical Division During the Years 1963–1983’, unpublished manuscript, 1987, p. 1. The original is with her personal papers, property of the Stevenson family, and quoted in Deborah Towns, ‘“Our own sphere ...”: Women Teachers and the Victorian Education Department 1880s–1980s’, PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 2010, p. 232.
- 9 James Docherty, Book Six, ‘Technical Division’, in Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation*, Vol.1, p. 774.
- 10 Joan Kirner, interview with Deborah Towns, in Towns, p. 244.
- 11 John Pardy, ‘Why Tech Schools Won’t Seem to Go Away’, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/why-tech-schools-wont-seem-to-go-away-33839>.
- 12 Warwick Eunson, Book Seven, in Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation*, Vol.1, p. 979.
- 13 Marjorie Theobald, ‘The Administration of Gender: The Case of Victoria’s Lady Teachers, 1850–1900’, in *Knowing Women: Origins of Women’s Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 172.
- 14 The Heritage-registered 1927 building in Russell Street, Melbourne, was taken over by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology as Building 13.
- 15 Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood*, London, Bloomsbury, 2020, p. 390.

- 16 Elisabeth Hill, 'Is the budget good for women? The paid parental leave change takes us backwards and childcare costs were ignored', *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/is-the-budget-good-for-women-the-paid-parental-leave-change-takes-us-backwards-and-childcare-costs-were-ignored-179766>.
- 17 Bill Hannan, *The Best of Times: The Story of the Great Secondary Schooling Expansion*, Melbourne, Lexis, 2009.
- 18 Craig Campbell and Helen Proctor, *A History of Australian Schooling*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2014.
- 19 John Andrews and Deborah Towns, 'A Secondary Education For All'? *A History of State Secondary Schooling in Victoria*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2017.
- 20 *Victoria Parliamentary Debates (VPD)*, Legislative Assembly, 20 October 1977: vol. 334, p. 10598,
- 21 Jane Martin, *Gender and Education in England Since 1770: A Social and Cultural History*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, p. 284.
- 22 Eleanor Peeler, *Footprints of a Twentieth Century Educator: Lawrie Shears*, Melbourne, Hybrid Publishers, 2014, p. 285.
- 23 Raewyn Connell, 'The Work of Teaching', in *History of Education Review*, vol. 38, no.2, 2009, p. 14.
- 24 Diane Mayer, 'Forty Years of Teacher Education in Australia, 1974–2014', in *Journal of Education and Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2014, p. 471.
- 25 PISA = Programme for International Student Assessment. NAPLAN = National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy.
- 26 Chris Bonnor, 'We could not have built a less fair school system if we tried', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 September 2022.
- 27 Bonnor.
- 28 Selleck, 'The Presence of the Past'.

# School Nomenclature in Victoria: A Glossary

*Andrew Lemon*

## **Academical Institution**

Fancy name for some colonial schools, such as the Port Phillip Academical Institution, Melbourne 1844–46.

## **Academy**

A school, usually secondary. The name was inspired in colonial Australia by the Edinburgh Academy, Scotland (founded 1824), adopted for Melbourne Academy (founded 1851, supported by the Free Church of Scotland) which became Scotch College (by 1855).

## **Catholic School**

In Australia, any school run by the Roman Catholic Church.

## **Central School**

Certain designated state schools in Victoria which, chiefly from the 1920s, provided extension schooling for children over the age of 14 to attain their Merit Certificate with the chance to proceed at Year 9 or 10 to private secondary schools or to the state Melbourne High School (boys) or Mac.Robertson Girls' High School. With the proliferation of state high schools in the 1960s, most Central Schools reverted to primary schools, but some such as Malvern Central School retained their name for the sake of continuity. A few state schools in the centre of a township or locality had 'Central' in their name.

## **College**

1. An educational institution implying collegiality, usually at secondary or university level. Until the 1990s, in Victoria the label generally applied only to non-government secondary schools.

2. Name applied to many Victorian state secondary schools progressively from the late 1980s to replace ‘High School’ with ‘Secondary College’.
3. In the USA, ‘College’ is applied to basic post-secondary education.

### **Common School**

Primary and upper-primary schools operating between 1862 and 1872, both religiously affiliated ‘denominational’ or ‘national’, under the auspices of and partly funded by a government Board of Education. These included existing schools established by or funded by the previous, separate Denominational and National Schools Boards. Most Common Schools transitioned to state schools after the 1872 Education Act.

### **Continuation School**

Sometimes called Victoria’s first state secondary school, founded 1905, but evolving from the previous ‘National Model School’, Spring Street, Melbourne, opened in September 1854. The Continuation School became Melbourne High School in 1912. Its original stated purposes were ‘to provide the means whereby boys and girls intending to take up the work of teachers ... may receive an initial education and a preliminary professional training’ and to give winners of state school scholarships ‘the opportunity to continue their education in an establishment controlled by the Education Department’. (Frank Tate, April 1905.) Some early regional high schools after the 1910 Education Act were referred to as continuation schools.

### **Denominational School**

A primary level school established or controlled by a religious denomination, chiefly in the period 1848–1862 when overseen and partly funded by a government-appointed Denominational Schools Board. Most but not all became Common Schools from 1862.

### **Diocesan School**

A school, usually secondary, conducted as part of a Diocese (under the oversight of a bishop) of either the Anglican or Catholic Church.

## **Domestic Arts School**

Also School of Domestic Arts, emerging in the late nineteenth century to teach domestic skills, exclusively or chiefly to girls. A state-funded College of Domestic Economy (later the Emily McPherson) opened in Melbourne in 1906. The first Schools of Domestic Arts as state continuation or high school for girls were opened in Fitzroy and Collingwood in 1915, Bendigo following in 1916.

## **Elementary School**

Generally a synonym for primary school.

## **Government School**

Unofficial term mainly used to distinguish state-run schools from others.

## **Grammar School**

1. In England, a school originally intended to teach Latin, and later Ancient Greek grammar and modern European languages. Later applied to superior standard secondary schools.
2. In Australia, applied almost entirely to non-government secondary schools, emulating older British Public Schools, and in many cases affiliated with the Anglican Church in Australia.

## **High School**

1. Any post-primary school. In Victoria this traditionally covers Years 7 to 12 (until the 1970s designated First Form to Sixth Form, following British practice).
2. The usual name given to Victorian state secondary schools from the time of their establishment after the 1905 Education Act. Most charged moderate fees, except to free scholarship holders, until state secondary education became free after the Second World War. Many state high schools changed their name to College or Secondary College from the late 1980s, but some retained their traditional name, e.g. Balwyn, Eltham, Kew, Melbourne, University High Schools.
3. Privately owned or operated secondary schools in Victoria before the creation of state high schools after 1905. The original University High School and Kew High School, for example, were both private schools, not directly associated with their later state counterparts.

## Higher Elementary School

State secondary schools for children up to Year 10 or Year 11, established after the passing of the 1910 Education Law Amendment Act along with district high schools. Some state primary schools were extended into higher elementary schools or district high schools. Most 'Higher Elementary Schools' became state high schools in the 1950s.

## Independent School

Technically a not-for-profit and non-government school at any level, not under the control of a private owner. In practice most non-government schools identify as 'independent schools' and now receive both state and federal government funding.

## Industrial School

Established in Melbourne and other centres under the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864, schools and boarding institution for those judged by the courts to be neglected children. Abolished by 1887, although Reformatory Schools for juvenile offenders continued (renamed Juvenile Schools 1954). See article by Russell Spencer in this issue.

## Junior Technical School

Established soon after the Education Law Amendment Act 1910, these offered practical vocational education for three years to post-primary children, and night classes for young workers who had left school as a preliminary to or in connection with a trade apprenticeship. After the Second World War and the extension of the curriculum, Junior Techs became Technical Schools.

## K-12 (or P-12)

Schools on one campus or under one administration that provide education from Kindergarten (K) or Prep level (P) to Year 12.

## Kindergarten

From the German (children's garden), pre-school education available to children under the age for compulsory schooling.

## **Matriculation**

Formal level of eligibility to enter a university. In Victoria until 1969, achieving the Matriculation Certificate designated successful completion of secondary education at Year 12 Level, after passing Leaving (Year 11) and Intermediate (Year 10). Replaced in 1970 by the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and in 1987 by the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and other qualifications.

## **Model School**

Established 1854–55 in Spring Street, Melbourne by the Board of Education (see Common Schools) essentially as a primary school and teachers' training college, it was also termed Central Common School (1862–72) and State School No. 391. Teacher education moved to new quarters in Grattan Street, Carlton in 1889. The Model School closed in 1904 to become the Continuation School.

## **National School**

Any primary school established under the auspices of and partly funded by the Board of National Education for the Colony of Victoria (National Schools Board, 1852–61) or its predecessor the NSW Board of National Education (established 1848). Run by committees of 'local patrons' which needed to represent more than one religious denomination. Most National Schools continued as Common Schools from 1862.

## **Non-Government School**

Any school not operated by the state.

## **Parish School**

Occasional label usually for primary schools operated by the Catholic and (less commonly) the Anglican Church.

## **Preparatory School**

A borrowing from the extensive network (often known as Prep Schools) in Britain preparing children of primary school age for secondary schooling, most often at independent or traditional Public Schools. Never in wide use in Australia.

## Primary School

1. Any school teaching children from Preparatory (Prep) or Grade 1 through to Year 6.
2. Formal name for state primary schools, replacing the term State School.

## Private School

Technically a proprietary school (see below). In practice in Victoria, any fee-charging independent school, most of which also now receive government funds. In current practice, any non-government school.

## Proprietary School

Archaic term, meaning a school owned and operated by an individual or a company. Many non-government primary and secondary schools in Victoria in colonial times and well into the twentieth century were privately owned, the proprietor most often the school principal.

## Public School

An expression that historically and practically gives rise to much confusion.

1. Common usage in parts of Australia, especially in New South Wales: a state school. In Victoria the term 'state school' or state primary school remains more strongly in current use.
2. In England and Wales: a fee-charging school (originally mainly for boys, later for girls and increasingly co-educational), termed 'Public Schools' because they were technically open to all who could meet the fees. The oldest and most prestigious of these have been culturally dominant in British life.
3. In Australia, a self-selecting group of schools with colonial origins that modelled themselves on the pattern of British Public Schools, originally defining themselves as run by trustees or school councils, not by a headmaster alone, and not privately owned. This use of the term Public School progressively fell out of favour with the expansion of state public secondary education, and a recoil from accusations of exclusivity.
4. The term Great (or Greater) Public School persists in Sydney as 'The Athletic Association of the Great Public Schools of NSW' established

1892. In Victoria, the ‘Associated Public Schools of Victoria’ persists essentially as the name for inter-school sporting competitions. Its origins were in the 1870s, formalised as the APS in 1905: originally Geelong Grammar, Melbourne Grammar, St Patrick’s College (later Xavier), Scotch College and Wesley College; from 1909 Geelong College; and from 1958 Brighton Grammar, Carey Grammar, Caulfield Grammar, Haileybury College and St Kevin’s College.

### **Secondary College**

Rebadged name for most Victorian state high schools since the late 1980s.

### **State School**

1. The formal name for all Victorian government primary schools from the time of the passing of the 1872 Education Act, and each allocated its own number. Progressively in the 25 years from 1964, most state schools were renamed Primary Schools. Head Teachers became Principals, and School Committees became School Councils with more autonomy.
2. Applied more generally to all schools, including secondary schools, administered by the Education Department in Victoria since 1872.

### **Technical School**

Secondary schools that specialised in technical and practical education. See also Junior Technical School, above. Some were associated with tertiary technical institutions. After closure of most stand-alone secondary technical schools in the 1980s, in 2020 the Victorian government established new iterations of the ‘Tech School’ with ten specialist facilities on tertiary campuses offering high-tech equipment and specialist subjects, in principle available to students from all secondary schools.



# From National Schools to State Schools in Victoria

*Irene Hogan*

## **Abstract**

*The Education Department of Victoria was established after the passing of the Education Act 1872; however, some of our state schools had their origins as early as 1850. Government-funded schools began in the Port Phillip District at this time under the NSW National School Board, followed from 1852 by a Victorian National School Board, which operated alongside a Denominational School Board that part-funded schools initiated by religious denominations. The two boards were effectively merged into a single Board of Education consequent upon the Common Schools Act of 1862; schools under its aegis, including existing National Schools, became known as Common Schools. After the creation of the Victorian Education Department in 1872, many of the schools that began as National Schools became state schools under the Department. Some of these schools are still in existence in 2023. This article traces the evolution of those schools up to their incorporation in the Education Department.*

## **Origins**

Wandering down the inner residential streets of the Victorian town of Bacchus Marsh, along the street known as ‘Lerderberg’, named for the river that winds around in the distance behind it, the visitor will pass a large primary school, the grounds filled with modern schoolrooms designed to reflect and complement the old schoolhouse building next to them. This building, with its tall, pitched roof and nineteenth-century bricklaying style, bears on its façade the school’s name and number, Bacchus Marsh Primary School No. 28, and the date 1865. This causes people to assume that the school was the 28th state school established in Victoria, and that it was established in 1865. However, the Victorian Education Department was not established until 1872, seven years after the date listed on the building. Similarly, in other towns and suburbs of Victoria visitors will see state primary schools with a low school number

and historic school buildings that display beginning dates from the mid-nineteenth century. So, just how old are these schools, and when and how did they start?

The establishment of the Education Department of Victoria was the culmination of government policy, underpinned by community pressure, to provide opportunities for the schooling of all children within the colony. This movement had begun some decades earlier, back in the 1840s.

The predecessor of the Education Department was the Board of Education (1862–72), under which the schools were known as ‘Common Schools’. It was this board that introduced the school numbering system that has remained in place up to the present day. The Bacchus Marsh school was given the number 28, and the new building for the school was erected in 1865—the date still shown on the old schoolhouse. However, when the board itself was established and the numbering system begun, there were already 701 schools in existence; these now became the responsibility of the new board.<sup>1</sup>



**The Bacchus Marsh National School was numbered 28 in the Common School era. A new building was erected in 1865—the date still shown on the extant schoolhouse** (Source: *Back to Bacchus Marsh October 23 to 28 1930*, p. 19. State Library Victoria)

Prior to this time, two separate government boards provided funding support to schools in the colony. These were the Board of National Education (commonly known as the ‘National School Board’)

and the Board of Denominational Education (commonly known as the 'Denominational School Board'). This second board supported church parish schools, while the National School Board was established to provide support to community schools that were not connected to any parish. This marks the beginning of the movement within the community that led ultimately to the foundation of the Education Department.<sup>2</sup> There is thus a direct link between the National Schools Board and the Education Department of the present day. The schools established under the Board of National Education that remained open and continued into the 1870s became State Schools under the Victorian Education Department from the start of 1873.

### **NSW National School Board**

The New South Wales (NSW) government established a National School Board in 1848. Victoria was then still part of the colony of NSW and was known as the Port Phillip District (PPD). Schooling for the children of the general community was not a new idea; many settlements were already providing schools for local children at that time. Some were private schools, but others were schools funded by residents of the area in order to help develop their newly established communities.

While many schools were provided by local church parishes, their availability was limited by the religious make-up of different settlements, and, in any case, their denominational character meant they were not regarded as accessible to all members of the community. While some larger towns might have been over-provided with schools of different denominations, other more sparsely populated areas might not have been covered at all. It was to remedy this uneven spread of schools that the government introduced National Schools.

As early as 1836 NSW Governor Sir Richard Bourke had proposed the implementation of a school system similar to the National School System in his native Ireland, but the proposal was not taken up until 1846 under Governor Sir Charles FitzRoy. The first General Education Board was created on 4 January 1848 to oversee the National Schools of NSW. The aim of this board was to provide an opportunity for schooling for all children in the colony. This became commonly known as the Board of National Education, or the National School Board.<sup>3</sup>

The National School system in Ireland had been developed for the purpose of providing education that was non-sectarian. The system

provided funding and administrative guidelines for community schools with no specific denominational affiliation. However, these schools could provide regular religious teaching offered by local religious people and open to all denominations.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this was to avoid sectarian rivalry, which had been a common problem in Ireland.

The system was adopted in NSW because it meant that, in communities with a limited number of church schools, those children excluded from such schools would not miss out on the opportunity for an education. The NSW board also developed a consistent and quality curriculum with a set standard of books that came from the Irish National School system, and it ensured that the teachers were well trained.<sup>5</sup>

The system was not the fully fledged state-provided, -funded, and -administered scheme we know today, but it does mark the beginning of the government school structure that eventually resulted in the establishment of Victoria's Education Department. While the community had to contribute towards the school building and the pupils had to pay fees for the teachers, the National School Board provided funding to support both the building of the schools and the payment of teachers.

### **Denominational School Board**

On 5 January 1848, the day after it had appointed the General Education Board (or National School Board), the NSW government established a Denominational School Board. Very shortly after this, on 11 February 1848, a Denominational School Board was also appointed for the Port Phillip District of NSW. The purpose of the denominational boards was to provide partial government monetary support to schools established by church parishes. This was because funding and the quality of the curriculum and teaching had been dependent on the wealth of local community members, and some schools in poorer communities had suffered accordingly. Under the new system the government required certain regulations to be met, but the schools remained under the control of their parish churches.<sup>6</sup>

### **The First National Schools in Victoria**

The first National schools in Victoria were initiated by a district tour by an agent of the National School Board of NSW, George Rusden, who had been appointed to help promote the establishment of National Schools in rural areas.

Rusden left Sydney in July 1849 to visit the Port Phillip District. A number of schools there had already expressed interest to the NSW National School Board, and Rusden was to visit these communities as well as promoting the National School Board in other communities. He travelled down through Wangaratta, on to Melbourne, then down to Geelong and out west as far as Portland. During his visit he connected with 25 communities.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the communities Rusden visited already had local community schools running, funded by local residents. They were keen to have their schools registered with the National School Board and gain the extra funding. The National School Board did not establish schools on its own initiative; its main purpose was both to encourage and provide financial support to communities that already had schools running, and to encourage other communities to develop new schools. These schools could then receive significant funding from the National School Board. Rusden worked with the communities to help provide information and advice about what was needed to achieve this.<sup>8</sup>

George Rusden returned to NSW in early 1850. His visits resulted in the establishment of a number of National Schools in the Port Phillip District. Initially these were managed under the NSW National School Board. The National School Board report of 1850 listed the schools that 'have been applied for to be established'; about eleven were located in the Port Phillip District and six of them were listed as successfully in operation by the end of 1850. These were the first National Schools established in the area that became Victoria less than two years later.<sup>9</sup>

### **The National School Board of Victoria (1852–62)**

After the official separation of Victoria from NSW on 1 July 1851, the ensuing administrative transition period saw the National Schools established in the Port Phillip District managed by the Victorian Denominational School Board while the colony established its own National School Board. The Denominational School Board's report of 1851 listed fourteen National Schools within the district of Victoria; however, this number included schools that had applied for but not yet been granted the funding to be established. Of the fourteen schools listed, only seven were actually running at the time.<sup>10</sup> This report included a suggestion by W.C. Wills, the chairman of the National Education Office

of Sydney, that a Board of National Education should be incorporated in Victoria, ‘similar to the Sydney Board’.<sup>11</sup>

Over the following year there was protracted disagreement within the new Victorian government about the need for a new Victorian National School Board as opposed to National Schools remaining the responsibility of the Denominational School Board. The conflict centred on three issues: the question of whether religion should be a major part of the National Schools’ educational program; the quality of the curriculum provided; and the allegedly poor standard of maintenance of the schools under the Denominational School Board.

Finally, by early 1852, the Victorian National School Board was established. Its first report, in 1852, listed nine schools ‘in existence’ (Figure 2) and also specified 22 more ‘places where schools have been applied for’. Many of these would have been in the goldfields.<sup>12</sup>

School	Establishment Date as a National School	School in 2023
Bacchus Marsh	1 May 1850	Bacchus Marsh PS No. 28
Pascoe Vale	29 July 1850	Essendon PS No. 483
Wangaratta	2 August 1850	Wangaratta PS No. 643
Yuroke	26 August 1850	Somerton PS No. 548 (from 1863)
Colac	1 September 1850	Closed in 1851 and reopened in September 1852. Still open today
Warrnambool	9 December 1850	Closed in 1873. New school built nearby
Benalla	1 July 1851 (Teacher had begun but was not yet formally appointed)	Merged with other schools to form Benalla P-12 College (No. 8915), in 2012
Grange	12 June 1852	Gray St (Hamilton) PS No. 295
Wannon River	1852	Cavendish PS No. 116

**Figure 2: Victoria’s National Schools in 1852** (Source: National Schools listed in *Victoria National Education Board, First Report, For the Year 1852*, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, 1853, pp. 16–17)

## The Victorian Board of Education (1862–72)

During the 1850s in Victoria there was considerable dissatisfaction regarding the differential treatment of the two school boards. The church schools gained funding from the government but did not have to follow as many regulations as the National Schools. Their teachers did not require as many skills, and the curriculum they taught was not the same.

As early as 1851, Hugh Culling Eardley Childers was commissioned by Lieutenant-Governor Charles Joseph La Trobe to inspect the denominational schools of Victoria. He found a marked difference between well-funded schools in the cities and schools in rural districts. The rural schools often had inferior buildings and school grounds. Attendance was poor owing to the need for rural children to work, or uneducated parents not being aware of the benefits of education. Many teachers were poorly trained, or even untrained. He considered that the teachers tended to be used as nannies so the mothers of the children could undertake paid work.<sup>13</sup>

Victoria's gold rush, which began at the same time, impacted both denominational and National schools. The new colony's population was increasingly mobile, and people with low incomes depended on their children working rather than attending school. There were also social problems, with marriages breaking up, high rates of desertion, and families concentrating on gold digging rather than the long-term needs of the children. Quality buildings and qualified teachers were lacking in the newly populated areas.

Childers recommended creating an Education Board that combined the Denominational Schools and National Schools. This advice was presented to parliament in 1851 but was not accepted.<sup>14</sup> In November 1854 Henry Miller introduced a bill to bring the church schools under more direct supervision of the government, but it was later dropped and again a proposal to amalgamate the two boards was discussed.

In 1862 the decision was finally made to amalgamate the two boards, and the Common Schools Act was passed. This would create the Board of Education, under which all schools were renamed 'Common Schools', and so it became unofficially known as the 'Common School Board'.<sup>15</sup> This new board abolished funding to parish schools unless they complied with the requirements of the Board of Education, but they could still remain part of their parish and be run as 'religious' schools. Most former Denominational Board schools complied and thus came under the jurisdiction of the new board.<sup>16</sup>

## The School Numbering System

The school numbering system was established under the Board of Education in June 1863. These numbers are still in place today.

The Common School Board report of 1864 includes several lists dating from 1863, and each list gives a different number to each school. However, on p. 88 of the report there is a list titled 'Return Of Schools In Operation On The 30th June, 1863', and this list has school numbers that seem to have remained in place. All schools in existence in that year were numbered in approximate alphabetical order, not in order of their date of establishment. The total number of schools was 701. Of those in this list only 162 had been National Schools.<sup>17</sup>

This list of school numbers was established by former National School Board secretary, Benjamin Kane, in 1863. He had combined his own list of National Schools with the list of schools established under the earlier Denominational School Board. Under each alphabetical letter is included, initially, the list of National Schools and then the lists of parish schools (each from the different denominations listed separately) and some independent schools. The schools were listed by their community name, not the church name; hence one community, for example Bacchus Marsh, has several schools listed under the same name but with different numbers. The first school listed under the community names in the list is the original National School.<sup>18</sup> A number of the schools on the list were later amalgamated or closed; however, the numbering in the list did not change. There was an error made at one point when one number was missed—and so, although 700 schools are on the 1863 list, the final number listed is 701.

Regardless of these errors and inconsistencies, this school number list, from 1 to 701, remained in place for the Common Schools, which became State Schools under the Victorian Education Department. As this list was established in June 1863, all schools with a number lower than 702 were established before that date. Any schools established after this date have been given the next numerical number, which results in those later schools being listed in order of their establishment date. This numbering system is still in existence today.

## The Victorian Department of Education

Over the next decade frustration grew apace within many Victorian communities, owing to the Common School Board's failure to establish adequate schooling for their children. Problems derived from the continuing isolation of rural centres as well as the need for people with lower incomes to send their children to work rather than school. The quality of the schoolhouses and the teaching were ongoing problems.

Pressure mounted to increase government involvement in and commitment to providing schooling for all children. In 1867 a bill was proposed providing for the government to administer and fully fund schools throughout the colony, as well as guarantee the quality of the school buildings.<sup>19</sup> The government would also ensure proper training for the teachers, and the teachers would become part of the public service. Further, in order to prevent the development of religious conflict, a growing number of educators and parliamentarians expressed opposition to the provision of any formal religious education in the schools.

A major ongoing problem that supporters of universal government-funded education faced was that many parents did not send their children to school because they themselves had not attended school and did not deem it necessary. Many believed the children could more usefully be employed to supplement meagre family incomes. The government therefore introduced the requirement for compulsory attendance for all children and stipulated that parents would be fined if the children did not attend. In order to enforce this, they had to make the schools free.

These three principles—compulsory, free and secular—were incorporated in the Act finally passed by the Victorian parliament in 1872, and the Education Department was established to administer the new system. It would, however, take several years for compulsory schooling to be successfully enforced and for the community to get used to it.<sup>20</sup>

Upon the establishment of the Department, all Common Schools had to become state schools if they wished to continue to receive government funding. They were no longer to be run by their parishes or to teach religion. Most schools complied with this, the notable exception being those in the Catholic school system, which chose to remain outside the Education Department and thus received no further government funding until partial federal funding was introduced in the 1960s.

Among the schools that automatically became state schools at the beginning of 1873, many had previously been Common Schools and, before that, National or denominational schools.

## The Establishment of National Schools in Victoria

As discussed above, the first National Schools in Victoria were established under the NSW National School Board in the days of the Port Phillip District, but it took two years from the establishment of the NSW National School Board for any National Schools to be established in PPD. The major cause of delay was the slow communication channels between Sydney and Melbourne via road or ship and the embryonic state of many PPD centres of settlement; Melbourne itself had begun only in 1835, and many communities such as Bacchus Marsh were barely ten years old.

National Schools were to be established and run by the individual communities but had to follow the guidelines and requirements of the National School Board. The community would establish a board of 'local patrons,' made up of local community members to administer the school. The National School Board took responsibility for two thirds of the funding toward the erection of approved schoolhouses and it provided equipment, books and materials for pupils. The board appointed teachers but would accept recommendations from the school's local patrons. After establishing teachers' suitability and qualifications, the board would partially fund their wages, the school fees paying the rest. The National School Board supervised teachers' work, sending out inspectors on a regular basis. Attendance at the schools was voluntary but fees had to be paid by the pupils to supplement the teachers' wages. The purpose of this was to encourage parents to continue to send their children to school, as the board felt they might not do so if there were no costs involved.<sup>21</sup>

## Funding Requirements for Official Establishment

In the National School Board reports the term 'establishment' is used to determine the date that a school had met the requirements of the National School Board and was given funding, and was therefore 'established' as a National School. The NSW government's *By-Laws of National School Board* in 1849 outlined the requirements needed to establish a National School:

- The NSB would contribute to the establishment of a school building and the fitting up of the building. (I.1, I.8) a school which has already been established can apply to become a National School (I.2).

- The NSB would provide the books for instruction. These books were to come from the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland. The school was not to use any other books (I.9).
- Teachers were to be appointed by the NSB (III.1), (although they could be recommended by the school's board of Patrons (III.2)).
- 'no use shall be made of their Schoolhouses tending to contention—such as the holding of political meetings ... and that they shall not at any time be converted into places of Public Worship' (V.3).<sup>22</sup>

Three requirements that had to be met did cause a few problems and delays for the early schools. These involved the building, the teacher and the books. A further requirement became an issue, even though it was not listed in the above conditions of establishment, and that was that the recommended minimum number of pupils was 30.

The biggest problems seemed to concern the adequacy of the building and its exclusive use as a school. Many of the communities were new and small, especially in the rural districts. They often had few buildings, and many locals wanted to use one of the local community buildings both as a school and as a church that could be used by any congregation. Because the National School Board insisted on the separation of the school from religious denominations, the exclusion of church services from the National School building was not negotiable. This issue often became a problem given the money and time a small community would have to invest in the construction of another building.

The National School Board also stipulated that only the books from the National School system of Ireland be used in order to ensure a consistent and approved curriculum for all the schools. Unfortunately, this caused delays as the books had to be acquired from Ireland then distributed, and this often took a long time.

Teachers were appointed by the board but could be recommended by the local patrons of the school so long as the board was assured that they were well qualified. This at times also caused some delays, although it does not seem to have been as big a problem as the building and books.

The number of students was most likely related to the costs involved. The requirement for 30 pupils within small rural communities in the PPD did cause problems. Ultimately the board managed to bypass this, presumably because it was not stipulated in the official regulations. If the

school could provide an assurance that the number would be reached within a short time, then smaller numbers might initially be accepted.

### The Earliest National Schools in Victoria

The first National Schools were established in Victoria in 1850 under the NSW National School Board after George Rusden visited the Port Phillip District in 1849. The NSW National School Board Report of 1851 listed the schools ‘at present in operation’ in NSW. Within this list, six of them located in the Port Phillip District were operating successfully by the end of 1850 (Figure 3).<sup>23</sup>

	<b>School Number (given after 1863)</b>	<b>Date officially established by National School Board</b>	<b>Still open in 2022 as primary school of the Victorian Education Department</b>
Bacchus Marsh	28	13 May 1850	Yes
Pascoe Vale (Essendon)	483	29 July 1850	Yes
Wangaratta	643	22 August 1850	Yes
Yuroke (Somerton)	548	26 August 1850	Closed 1956
Colac	117	1 September 1850	Yes
Warrnambool	646	1 January 1851	Closed 1873, re- placed by School No. 1743

**Figure 3: The earliest National Schools in the Port Phillip District (later Victoria)** (Source: NSW National Education Board, Third Report, Sydney, New South Wales Parliament, 21st October 1851, Appendix I, p. 41)

### Wangaratta School No. 643

Among the first communities Rusden visited on his overland trip to the Port Phillip District was Wangaratta where the people were keen to establish a National School. As early as January 1850 the town had appointed Henry Howard as teacher. His appointment had been approved by the National School Board in April, but he was not, at that stage, paid

by the board because he was teaching in a temporary school building and had not yet acquired the National School books.

By April 1850 a new schoolhouse had been built, and by 8 June it was fitted with furniture. The previous schoolhouse was then renovated and converted to a church. This hints at the possibility that this building had been used as a church while it was still also being used as a school, which would explain why the National School Board had not approved the school earlier. But the required National Education books for teaching had still not arrived, and this became a further cause of delay. Henry Howard wrote to the National School Board in desperation asking if the new schoolhouse could be occupied as a National School since it had now been completed. He explained that it could take up to two months to get the books from Melbourne to Wangaratta. The books did not leave Sydney until 5 July. The school was at last officially opened by the board of school patrons in August. The National School Board acknowledged the first payment to Henry Howard as beginning on 22 August 1850.<sup>24</sup>

The Wangaratta National School is today the Wangaratta Primary School No. 643, or the ‘Chisholm Street School’ as it is commonly called in Wangaratta.

### **Pascoeale School (Essendon No. 483)**

The school at Essendon, which was known as Pascoeale when it was established, was the first National School to be established within the Melbourne district. Pascoeale had applied to the National School Board in NSW to establish a school even before Rusden’s visit.<sup>25</sup> Rusden visited the community in September 1849. By late May 1850, however, they had still not recommended a teacher and the school building was just commencing. In late June the local patrons reported that the schoolhouse should be finished in a month and requested a double set of books in anticipation.<sup>26</sup>

The teacher, Mr J.C. Cockrane, was officially approved by the National School Board on 6 August 1850, even though the school was officially recorded as being established on 29 July 1850,<sup>27</sup> the date when the teacher’s payments began. Most likely Mr Cockrane had been teaching earlier and his payments were backdated. By 11 September 1850, the school had ‘now upwards of fifty children.’<sup>28</sup>

In 1852 there were 203 pupils registered and an average of 116 attending each day; however, by the mid-1850s the numbers had dropped

considerably, and in 1857 the school was closed. This was most likely a result of both the opening of the goldfields in Bendigo, and the removal of the centre of the town from Pascoe Vale Road to Mt Alexander Road. Also, the school was initially built on the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek and near the Five Mile Creek, a swampy area where flooding had caused considerable damage to the school buildings. The local patrons applied to the National School Board to allow the school to be reopened in a new location. The new site was approved by the National School Board in December 1861, although the school was not moved until 1862–63, after the establishment of the Board of Education. The new school building was located in Raleigh Street and is still there today.<sup>29</sup>

In 1863, under the Common Schools Board, the school was given the number 483, and changed its name to the Essendon Common School. It later became known as the Essendon Primary School No. 483 and is still running today.

### **Colac School No. 117**

Rusden visited the Colac district in late 1849. There was a community school in the town at the time with about 25 students. The teacher, Mr Farquhar Morrison, was renting a small cottage and using it for the school until ‘the Magistrate’ said they could also use the local police office.<sup>30</sup>

After Rusden’s visit a local patrons’ group was founded, and letters were sent to the NSW National School Board requesting the school’s establishment as a National School. They said they would construct a new brick building for the school and that they already had a teacher, Mr Morrison. They hoped the National School Board would start paying him immediately, but the board informed them that this could not occur until the school building was complete and the school had opened. When the schoolhouse was finally finished and had passed inspection by the local builder and been certified, a notice was sent to the National School Board. The board acknowledged it, sent books and began to pay the teacher. The school opened officially on 1 September 1850, and the numbers of pupils soon increased. The reasons for this were pointed out by the local patrons: once the National School Board paid the teacher the school fees fell and more people could therefore afford to send their children to the school.<sup>31</sup>

The school closed briefly in 1851 but was reopened in September 1852 and is still operating today as Colac Primary School No. 117.

### **Warrnambool School No. 646**

A community-run school had opened in Warrnambool on 22 May 1849, before Rusden's visit to the district in December of that year. The community applied for this school to be transferred to the National School Board.<sup>32</sup> However, when the school was built there were no churches in the community, so the building was being used as both a school and a place of worship. This was against the board's regulations, and what to do about it became a bone of contention in Warrnambool. The board of local patrons split into two groups, one wanting to erect a new building for the school, the other wanting to abandon the use of the building as a place of worship.

In May 1850 the local patrons actually managed to get the approval of the National School Board to run church services at the school temporarily,<sup>33</sup> but they then ran into further problems concerning the amount of pay they were asking for the teacher, which was more than the National School Board would approve. As had also occurred elsewhere, further delays were caused by the slow arrival of the necessary approved National Education books for teaching.

By 9 December 1850, the school was claiming to be open as a National School even though it was still awaiting the arrival of the approved books.<sup>34</sup> In the Denominational School Board report of 1851, Warrnambool National School is listed with an opening date of 1 January 1851.<sup>35</sup> The discrepancy between the two dates may be due to a break over the Christmas period. The later date still preceded the arrival of the books, which were only sent from Sydney in late January or early February.<sup>36</sup>

The Warrnambool National School No. 646 was built in a swampy area, and the building soon fell into disrepair. In 1873 the newly formed Education Department recommended the school be closed and a new state school built, which was then given a new number.<sup>37</sup> This new school became the Warrnambool Primary School No. 1743 and is still running today.

### **Yuroke School (Somerton No. 548)**

The school at Yuroke was also already in existence as a community school before it became a National School.<sup>38</sup> Like Warrnambool School it did not meet all the requirements for acceptance by the National School Board until a later date. A letter from the local patrons to the National School

Board, dated 25 November 1850, says: ‘The schoolroom and classrooms have been occupied from the 26th August [1850].’<sup>39</sup>

A letter from the National School Board to the local patrons stated that the board’s aim was to help foster the building of new schoolhouses rather than use old buildings, but it would support a local patrons board that had made a start in raising money for a new building and would accept the use of an old building as the National School on a temporary basis: ‘The Board may deem it expedient to recognise the school already established, until the new school house shall have been completed.’<sup>40</sup> The school changed its name to the Somerton National School in 1854. It closed in 1956.<sup>41</sup>

### **Bacchus Marsh School No. 28**

The Bacchus Marsh National School was established on 13 May 1850. This was the date of the first payment of the appointed teacher, Mr Henry Ball.<sup>42</sup> He had begun teaching some time before a new building for the school had actually been completed, in contrast to the situation in Wangaratta.

A community school had previously been operating in Bacchus Marsh, and in October 1849 the secretary to the board of local patrons, Charles Griffith, sent a letter to the National School Board requesting that a National School be established in the building that was already being used as a school.

In contrast to its response to similar requests from some other communities, the National School Board replied on 8 November that they would ‘not object to the Local Patrons hiring temporary premises,



**Figure 4: Bacchus Marsh School No. 28 as it is today**

(Photo: Irene Hogan, July 2018)

wherein to start the school at once'.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps this was because the temporary building in Bacchus Marsh was not being used for church services. By 1856 a new building had been erected nearby—a temporary building from prefabricated iron. Other new schools responded in similar vein, and this became a common solution to acquiring new buildings during the gold-rush era.

In July 1850 the problem of student numbers arose. The secretary of the National School Board mentioned in a letter—as if such a prerequisite were already known—that the board required that the school have 30 pupils. The local patrons' secretary, Mr Griffith, replied quite forcefully that such a requirement had not been communicated to the patrons earlier: 'no such condition was mentioned in your Secretary's letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1849'.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, there is no mention of the minimum number of pupils required in the letter Griffith refers to, nor in the initial *By-Laws of National Education Board*, issued by the NSW government in 1849. The only reference to numbers stipulates that 'the Local Patrons ... will be required to state the number of children expected to attend the School'.<sup>45</sup>

Appendix D of the general instructions given to the agents does include a recommendation that: 'As a general rule, the Board considers that 30 children should be the minimum number to justify them in granting aid for the establishment of a School'. However, given that this was not actually listed in the *By-Laws* of 1849, it would seem to indicate there was some possibility of working around it.

Henry Ball had already been teaching the pupils since 13 May and was being paid by the local community. The local patrons were keen to get the National School Board's approval and funding so that he could be back paid by the board. In his letter to the National School Board, Griffith thus also indicated that the pupil numbers were close to 30, and more were expected. Under these circumstances, the board acquiesced on condition, they stated, that 30 students would be attending by the end of the year. By the time of the Denominational School Board report on National Schools in 1851 the pupil numbers recorded had reached 32.<sup>46</sup>

As we have seen, another complication some communities had in establishing National Schools was in acquiring the required books. This problem had arisen at Wangaratta and now also occurred in the case of Bacchus Marsh. In his letter regarding the pupil numbers, Griffith also requested a list of required books, as did the teacher, Henry Ball, whose letter requesting books was dated some time after the establishment

date of the school. It appears that the National School Board showed no concern about the requirement of books in the case of the Bacchus Marsh school. There is no indication from the correspondence that Henry Ball already had some of the books, but perhaps the school did have a small number and was requesting more.

In this way the school at Bacchus Marsh was allowed to run as a National School in a temporary building and seemingly without at least a full requisite number of books. The payment for the teacher was backdated to when he was appointed by the local patrons and had begun to teach in the temporary schoolhouse. The date he began there, and the date to which his pay was backdated, was the official date quoted in the National School Board reports as the opening date of the Bacchus Marsh National School—13 May 1850. This is the earliest date for the formal establishment of a National School in Victoria.<sup>47</sup>

The Bacchus Marsh National School was located in the area now known as the Avenue of Honour, on the east of Bacchus Marsh near the Lerderderg River. It became a Common School in 1864, amalgamating with a number of other schools in the district. The school moved into the town, and a new building was erected along Lerderderg Street. This building is still located in the school grounds and is dated 1865. The school was given the number 28 by the Common School Board. In 1872 it became the Bacchus Marsh State School No. 28. The Bacchus Marsh Primary School is still open today.

## Conclusion

When the Education Department of Victoria was established in late 1872, there were already many schools in existence that automatically became State Schools. These schools had begun as far back as 1850. They had been established by government boards that preceded the Education Department. The Board of Education, which called its schools ‘Common Schools’, dated from 1862 to 1872 and was preceded by the Board of National Education and the Denominational School Board. The Board of National Education was the first board to establish schools under government regulations. The schools known as National Schools first began in Victoria in 1850 under the Board of National Education of NSW, when Victoria was the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. The number of National Schools was small, but four of the schools that began in those early days are still successfully running as ‘Primary Schools’ today under the Victorian Education Department.

## Notes

- 1 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol. 1, Melbourne, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, pp. 91, 95, 96.
- 2 Blake (ed.), pp. 91, 243; Edward Sweetman, Charles R. Long and John Smyth, *A History of the Education Department of Victoria*, Melbourne, Education Department and Critchley Parker, 1922, introduction, pp. iii, 65.
- 3 *Argus*, 4 October 1849 refers to the 'National School Board', as cited in Sweetman, pp. 38–9, 42–3.
- 4 Sweetman, p. 38; Blake (ed.), pp. 4–5.
- 5 *NSW National Education Board Second Report*, Sydney, New South Wales Parliament, 19 July 1850, Appendix D, 23rd June 1849, item 3, item 7, p. 14.
- 6 NSW, *Report from Denominational School Board Port Phillip*, NSW Parliament, 15 June 1849, p. 4, Rules and Regulations, General Regulations.
- 7 Blake (ed.), pp. 18–20.
- 8 Sweetman, pp. 42–3.
- 9 *NSW National Education Board Second Report*, Appendix F and Appendix G, pp. 17, 18.
- 10 *Report of the Denominational School Board in the Supervision of the National Schools*, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, 1851, Appendix A, pp. 4–5.
- 11 *Report of the Denominational School Board in the Supervision of the National Schools*, Appendix A, p. 1.
- 12 *Victoria National Education Board, First Report, For the Year 1852*, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, 1853, pp. 17, 22.
- 13 Sweetman, pp. 46–8.
- 14 Sweetman, pp. 45–53.
- 15 Sweetman, pp. 38, 53, 58. The Act was officially known as *An Act for the Better Maintenance and Establishment of Common Schools in Victoria 1862*.
- 16 Blake (ed.), pp. 83–6, 93. Commissioners of the new Board were appointed in August 1862.
- 17 Second report of the Board of Education for the year 1863 pursuant to Act of Parliament 25 Victoria, Parliament of Victoria, No. 149, *Victorian Board of Education Report*, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, 1864, No. 26, pp. 51–103.
- 18 Blake (ed.), p.88.
- 19 Sweetman, p. 63.
- 20 Sweetman, pp. 61–4.
- 21 *NSW National Education Board Second Report*, Appendix E, Circular No. 1, 1850, pp. 14–15.
- 22 *By-Laws of National Education Board*, Sydney, New South Wales Parliament, 1849, p. 1.
- 23 *Report of the Denominational School Board in the Supervision of the National Schools*, Melbourne, Parliament of Victoria, 1851, Appendix B, p. 5.
- 24 NSW National School Board to the Local Patrons of the Wangaratta National School, 19 February 1850–23 August 1850, VPRS 65/P0, unit 1, pp. 193–217, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).
- 25 Adrian Jones, *Follow the Gleam: A History of Essendon Primary School 1850–2000*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2000, p. xxiv.
- 26 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P, Unit 1, p. 147, PROV.
- 27 *Report of the Denominational School Board in the Supervision of the National Schools*, Appendix B, p. 5.
- 28 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 151, 161, PROV.
- 29 Jones, pp. 13, 24–7.

- 30 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P, Unit 1, p. C.90, PROV.
- 31 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 80–99, PROV.
- 32 Richard Osburne, *The History of Warrnambool, Capital of the Western Ports of Victoria, from 1847 up to the End of 1886*, Melbourne, The Chronicle Printing and Publishing Company Limited, 1887, p. 49.
- 33 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 329–333, PROV.
- 34 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 381–2, PROV.
- 35 *Report of the Denominational School Board in the Supervision of the National Schools*, Appendix B, p. 5.
- 36 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. W. 302–85, PROV.
- 37 *Warrnambool Primary School 1743: 100 + 25 years*, Warrnambool, Warrnambool Primary School, 2001, p. 33.
- 38 A.G. Austin, *George William Rusden and National Education in Australia 1849–1862*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1958, p. 48.
- 39 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, p. Y. 413, PROV.
- 40 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, p. 394, point 4, PROV.
- 41 Blake (ed.), pp. 41–2.
- 42 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, p. 17, PROV.
- 43 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 7–8, PROV.
- 44 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 18–21, PROV.
- 45 *By-Laws of National Education Board*, Sydney, New South Wales Parliament, 1849, item No. I.2.
- 46 *Report of the Denominational School Board in the Supervision of the National Schools*, Appendix B, p. 5.
- 47 NSW National School Board, Correspondence, 1849–1851, VPRS 65/P0, Unit 1, pp. 4–27, PROV.

# Industrial Schools in Victoria 1864–1872

*Russell Spencer*

## **Abstract**

*This article argues that, contrary to existing scholarship, industrial schools created by the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864 in Victoria did not follow the British model. Instead of being privately run and not taking young children, as in Britain, the Victorian schools were state run (with a few pragmatic exceptions) and accepted young children. This difference meant the industrial schools quickly became overcrowded—a problem compounded by inadequacies such as unsuitable buildings, lack of resources, poorly trained employees and above all poor management. Together, these factors resulted in the virtual demise of industrial schools after a royal commission in 1872. Subsequently, for many years, they were used merely as receiving depots for a new boarding-out system.*

## **Introduction**

This article focuses on the two largest industrial schools—Melbourne and Sunbury—and the roles of two officials who made decisions about their management. It does not examine industrial schools from an early childhood welfare perspective, as previous scholars have done, but analyses them on the basis of their essential structure, management and lack of longevity.

Previously, historians writing about Victoria's state-run industrial schools have focused on their role in providing social relief for families and destitute children. Donella Jaggs recounted the history of the Melbourne Orphan Asylum from the early years of Victoria's settlement until the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> This institution more closely followed the British model and was, in addition to three privately owned industrial schools, provided with financial support by the government. In 2002 Christina Twomey, as part of her research into the agency of deserted women in the gold-rush era, examined the pressure applied by magistrates and police on the government to introduce industrial schools.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Offer has argued

that police intervened both positively and negatively to commit children to industrial schools and sometimes helped parents to retrieve them.<sup>3</sup> In 2013 Nell Musgrove wrote that poor families were often provided with relief by the industrial schools, but that the tide quickly turned against them because of the serious deleterious impact on the children held in these institutions. The role of industrial schools in providing social welfare as Musgrove and others describe is important, and their analysis assists in understanding decisions taken by the government and others to set the schools up and ultimately to disband them.

Notwithstanding, none of these historians have fully explored the manner in which industrial schools were created, nor the management issues leading to their demise. Jaggs suggested that the unanticipated number of children being sent to industrial schools overwhelmed the government's capacity to manage them.<sup>4</sup> This was true, but the government's decision to set up the schools in the way that it did, was the underlying cause for the large influx of children. This decision was made despite warnings from some political opponents that the schools would be overwhelmed by the inflow of children under the model proposed.

Industrial schools existed in the other Australian colonies but, apart from Tasmania, these were established later. The paucity of published research on their history makes comparative analysis for this article impractical without further extensive archival research. Other scholars have discussed the functioning of industrial schools in England, Ireland, Scotland and Jamaica, revealing the extensive nature of this idea and providing a basis for comparison. For example, English local historian Gillian Gear, writing in 1999, furnished a comprehensive history of these schools in England.<sup>5</sup> Gear argues that English industrial schools were better than the alternatives of, for example, destitution, prison or whipping. Some 270 schools were opened in Britain between 1857 and 1933.<sup>6</sup> Criminal justice historian Christine Kelly, in examining the successful Scottish voluntary day schools, laments their loss by absorption into British industrial schools.<sup>7</sup> Irish social historian Sarah-Anne Buckley has examined the Irish industrial school system.<sup>8</sup> These schools began in 1869, five years later than Victoria, and continued for around a hundred years but were beset by problems of child abuse.

Social historian Shani Roper has focused on another part of the British Empire, exploring the progress of industrial schools in Jamaica. The colonial government there attempted to effect societal changes

through education leading eventually, as in other countries, to the creation of a ‘child welfare policy in Jamaica.’<sup>9</sup> But the schools were created using British laws without adjustment for local conditions.<sup>10</sup> Industrial schools in these parts of the British Empire, for all their problems, continued for many years, in stark contrast to those in Victoria. My aim in this article is to explain the difference in longevity between Victoria and schools in these other parts of the British Empire by showing how the design and administration of Victoria’s state-run industrial schools contributed to their particularly rapid demise.

Previous historians have accepted that the Victorian government adopted the British model for industrial schools. Leading social welfare historian Shurlee Swain has written that the neglected children’s legislation was ‘modelled on the Industrial Schools Act 1857 [UK].’<sup>11</sup> Christina Twomey wrote that those who wanted to prevent criminality among colonial children looked to the English legislation ‘as a potential solution to their own social problems.’<sup>12</sup> This assumption was reinforced by Elizabeth Offer, who wrote that the *Neglected and Criminal Children’s Act 1864* ‘was influenced by and based on similar legislation enacted in Britain.’<sup>13</sup> I will argue that, although Victoria’s legislators adopted a similar nomenclature, the industrial schools they established followed a very different model that led to the problems described below. The differences were twofold and of such significance that they amounted to a different model, not the same or even similar to the model adopted in Britain.

The first key difference was that British schools were all in private hands and, with some exceptions, were generally small, averaging just 100 children.<sup>14</sup> The British government, through a commission, monitored the schools and certified them prior to paying a subsidy. British schools, being private, were administered by committees, which were responsible for providing premises, making the rules, and managing the schools. The commissioners for British industrial schools expressed the view that a ‘lack of personal care and interest’ would attach to government-run schools. Although this was raised as a potential problem in the Victorian parliamentary debates over its bill, the view was rejected in the Victorian Act of 1864.<sup>15</sup> The critics were disregarded by the government of the day as conservative nay-sayers opposed on principle to increasing the powers and expenditure of government. Unlike the English industrial schools, the majority of Victoria’s industrial schools were thus government institutions (with a few exceptions), operated under a common set of

rules and managed centrally from Melbourne by government employees. Certain conditions followed from this decision to adopt state ownership and control.

The second crucial difference was that British industrial schools could choose who they would accept as students; there, for example, only girls, or disabled children, or children with only one parent might be accepted.<sup>16</sup> Also, they took only older children, aged over seven and under fourteen.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Victorian industrial schools under the Act of 1864 could not choose their residents, and were obliged to accept children up to the age of fifteen. Therein lay many problems. The two largest establishments, at Princes Bridge Melbourne and Sunbury, had a combined population of around 1,300 children within a year, that is by the end of 1865.<sup>18</sup> The large numbers in these two industrial schools made the frequent health epidemics of that era much harder to control than in smaller institutions.

The main similarities between the two sets of legislation were, first, the definition of a 'neglected child', and, second, the 'penal' nature of both systems. Notwithstanding these similarities, the differences between British private and Victoria's state-run industrial schools were substantial, making them essentially different institutional models. This was the major cause of the problems occurring in Victoria.

### **The Establishment of Government Industrial Schools in Victoria**

There was no discussion in the parliamentary debate over Victoria's bill as to why a minimum age for admission to the schools was not adopted, and this remains a puzzle for historians and is not resolved in this article. This omission was contrary to clause II of Britain's *Industrial Schools Act 1857*, which stipulated a minimum age of over seven. While there was clearly a need to accommodate children under age seven in the colony, the establishment of additional orphan asylums would have been a better solution. The effect of this decision was that, four months after the first industrial school at Princes Bridge was opened, it was severely overcrowded. This school was inadequate in every sense, and the situation was aggravated by the fact that Sunbury was not yet open. Disregard by the staff of the government's own rules for caring for sick children dramatically amplified the volume of child illness. Victoria's state-run industrial schools very quickly became a child health tragedy, and their

early demise in favour of the boarding-out system was an improvement if not a perfect solution.

Parliamentary debates on the bill to introduce industrial schools largely revolved around the type of industrial school model to be adopted. The James McCulloch government argued that the problem of child criminality and destitution was community wide, and therefore the whole community should pay for a solution and the system should be state run. McCulloch was being pushed to the left by factional politics of the day and was also becoming a protectionist in the emerging free trade–protection battle. State control and financial responsibility for industrial schools did not offend him.<sup>19</sup> His government also believed that, unlike Britain, it could not secure adequate charitable donations to set up and maintain private industrial and reform schools.

Members of opposition factions led by John O’Shanassy argued that the Victorian public had sent to Britain a donation of £20,000 for poverty relief and could therefore support industrial schools in the colony. His supporters argued that the history of industrial schools showed that only those that were privately run had succeeded, and government-run schools had failed.<sup>20</sup> O’Shanassy, who was described by his biographer S.M. Ingham as ‘the leading lay Catholic’ of his day, was also a free trader and more inclined to private ownership.<sup>21</sup> The O’Shanassy-led opposition suggested that private schools could be operated more economically than a state institution. Later, reports went some way towards supporting this view; for example, private schools received donated goods and used volunteers, advantages unlikely to be available to a government institution.<sup>22</sup>

Both sides of politics claimed the 1862–63 charitable institutions royal commission report supported their respective cases for private and state-run industrial schools. In the report the commissioners suggested that the private industrial schools proposed by the O’Shanassy government preceding the McCulloch administration would resolve the problem of destitute children. On another page, however, the commissioners recommended that reformatory and industrial schools should be the responsibility of the state, as opposed to the municipalities.<sup>23</sup> The McCulloch government had the requisite majority during the Neglected and Criminal Children’s bill’s passage through the Legislative Assembly, and state-run industrial schools were thus legislated.

As a concession to the opposition led by O'Shanassy, Section 9 of the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864* nevertheless allowed for private industrial schools to be established. The government subsidy doubled the amount received from private contributions to schools, to a maximum of 5 shillings per child per week. Under the Act, three private industrial schools were opened: St Joseph's, Geelong, in 1865; the Abbotsford Convent in 1866; and the Benevolent Asylum in Sandhurst (Bendigo) in 1868. By the end of 1870 a total of 295 children were accommodated in these schools. The inspector of industrial schools reported favourably on the condition of the children in these private schools in his annual reports up until 1872, as did the press for the same period.

Another school, the Melbourne Orphan Asylum, operated outside the 1864 Act, but was supported by the government. Under the Melbourne Orphan Asylum rules of 1855 all orphan children were admissible, but from 1870 the priority in order was: double orphans, orphans without fathers, and the fourth and subsequent children of widowers.<sup>24</sup> The Orphan Asylum also undertook industrial training. As in government schools there was no minimum age restriction, so children were cared for from just after birth until age fifteen, as noted in the school's annual reports and the press.

An important aspect not considered by members of parliament responsible for determining the necessity for industrial schools was that, by accepting children under seven years of age, the schools' goal of providing industrial training to fit them for adult life was thwarted. Such children were too young to learn the necessary skills or even help with domestic chores to reduce their upkeep costs; in fact they required more resources to care for them.

Victoria's level of destitution required an appropriate policy solution for younger as well as older children, so funnelling them all into government industrial schools would prove a mistake as O'Shanassy and his supporters had warned. For instance, on 24 April 1863, some twelve months before the bill was passed, O'Shanassy, then chief secretary (premier), said that if industrial schools became state institutions 'the probabilities were that ... 2,000 or 3,000 instead of 200–300 children would soon be upon its hands.'<sup>25</sup> By the end of 1868, there were 2165 children in Victoria's industrial schools.

O'Shanassy had also argued that he received complaints daily about parents deserting their children. In parliament on 1 May 1863, his fellow

conservative Mr J.T. Smith said that: ‘If the government were to advertise that they were prepared to take charge of 500 children under three years of age, they would not have to wait three days to make up the number.’<sup>26</sup> There were also warnings about the rise in destitution because of men leaving Victoria for the Maori wars and goldfields of New Zealand. These prognostications against the model the McCulloch government proposed and adopted can be seen in hindsight to have heralded its potential for failure.

‘Industrial school’ was not defined in the *Neglected and Criminal Children’s Act 1864* despite the question as to its meaning being posed in parliament on 27 April 1864. However, Britain’s *Industrial Schools Act 1861* did so; an industrial school was ‘a school in which industrial training is provided and in which children are lodged, clothed and fed as well as taught.’<sup>27</sup> The Victorian government said that it had access to the latest British legislation when shaping the 1864 Act. In Victoria, even though children were employed to undertake household chores in the schools to reduce costs, there was no ambiguity about the meaning of ‘industrial’ training. From the beginning, the goal in Victoria was to remove children from the streets to provide them with care and skills so that they could earn a living and not fall into a life of crime as adults. Each annual inspector’s report from 1866 to 1873 referred to ‘industrial training’, usually in the form of a table showing the discipline in which children were trained, such as tailoring, blacksmithing, butchery, carpentry or as seamstresses, domestic servants etc. In Britain, social reformer Florence Davenport Hill described a private school begun in 1859 at Brockham in Surrey where girls were trained for domestic service such as ladies’ maids, laundry and kitchen maids.<sup>28</sup> Hill also talked about the income the children could earn from their industrial training. While a definition of industrial training was not included in the 1864 Victorian legislation, the intention was clear: that children were to be provided with specific industrial skills for them to earn a living as adults.

Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel suggest that child abuse was an ever-present danger in all children’s institutions and, although evidence for its occurrence in private industrial schools is not readily available, it may have occurred.<sup>29</sup> Historian of British child welfare Lydia Murdoch argues that press reports were highly selective, so criticism of private schools may have been muted for fear of offending prominent members of society who supported these schools.<sup>30</sup> Even if abuse was not present,

a non-family environment and care without emotional ties must have impacted on children's self-esteem.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, from the published reports available, the four privately run industrial schools in Victoria that closely followed the British industrial schools model seemed less affected by the problems that befell the colony's state-run industrial schools.

### **Government Industrial School Management and Administration**

Following an announcement in the *Government Gazette* of 12 August 1864, the site previously known as the 'Immigrants' Home' became the Princes Bridge industrial school with separate accommodation for boys and girls.<sup>32</sup> Each child at the Immigrants' Home was administratively transferred to the industrial school. The inspector of the Immigrants' Home, James Harcourt, became superintendent of this and future industrial schools. On 5 September 1864, a newspaper report described the Princes Bridge school buildings as being 'ugly barn-like constructions' located in the Botanical Gardens on the south side of Princes Bridge (Figure 1).<sup>33</sup> The buildings were whitewashed, sanitary, without pests and each dormitory had a bath. The children appeared clean, contented and attentive except for one boy who, for punishment, was chained to a log on the floor. Four and half months after opening, the school housed 590 children aged between one month and fourteen years, 190 children above its capacity, with further arrivals daily. Twelve months later, it was reported that numerous children were suffering from whooping cough, ophthalmia, chilblains and cutaneous disease. Following its opening, the limitations of Princes Bridge were quickly recognised, foreshadowing the dire health problems that plagued industrial schools throughout their existence.

Nowhere were the early deficiencies of the state-run schools better demonstrated than in the case of Mrs Sullivan and her three children.<sup>34</sup> Sullivan's husband had gone to New Zealand. She approached the Magistrates' Court at Chewton in June 1865 to put her children into an industrial school because she could not care for them. This was less than one year after the schools had been established. The magistrate was sympathetic, and Timothy, Ellen and Patrick were committed to Princes Bridge industrial school. Two months later, Sullivan's husband unexpectedly returned to Victoria, and an application to restore the children to Sullivan was approved. However, Sullivan was advised that her



**Figure 1: Immigrants' Home, and swamp near Princes Bridge. Chas. L. Bennett 1883** (Courtesy National Library of Australia, Bib ID 180370, PIC Drawer 2942 #R9651)

daughter Ellen, and another boy 'Thomas' (who was not her child), were in hospital and could not be released immediately. On 21 August 1865 Sullivan was told that Patrick had whooping cough, which was expected to be fatal. Then on 24 August she received a telegram saying that Ellen was dead, but that Patrick was well and 'Thomas' had improved.

A very confused and worried Mrs Sullivan met two of her children at the railway station but failed to recognise them. Timothy called out to her and, when they met, she discovered that he had only one eye. He told her that he arrived at the school with a slight eye infection. The following day a red lotion was applied to it, causing him severe pain, and the attendant told him that the lotion was caustic. Timothy also informed his mother that he had seen his sister Ellen in the playground shortly before his departure. Mrs Sullivan was left to explore whether Ellen was alive or not. As this case and others show, child mistreatment and administrative blunders quickly became a compelling reason for industrial schools to be seriously evaluated.



**Figure 2: Extant Sunbury industrial school 'barracks', currently used by the Sunbury Primary School and the Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Specialist School. Photograph by Geoff Palmer 2021 (Courtesy Geoff Palmer)**

The deleterious effects of the *Neglected and Criminal Children Act 1864* quickly came to the public's attention, particularly through the schools at Princes Bridge in Melbourne and Jackson's Hill in Sunbury (Figure 2). Princes Bridge was to have been temporary until a purpose-built school at Sunbury was completed. These schools epitomised the faults in design, funding, and objectives of the schools in Victoria. A vanguard warning of the problems bedevilling the government industrial schools was a report published by the *Age* in November 1865, just over one year after their opening.<sup>35</sup> Despite changes in management and building improvements, the problems largely persisted until a royal commission delivered its findings in 1872, sounding the death knell for Victoria's state-run industrial schools. Through a series of administrative missteps and poor design, the government had created a nightmare for itself and the community, whereas in other countries industrial schools, though not without their critics, lasted between 40 and 100 years.<sup>36</sup>

The Sunbury industrial school was purpose built yet failed abysmally to meet its objectives. Building began in September 1864 and was planned for completion in December 1865 with a proposed capacity of 650 children. A board of enquiry visited the site during the construction phase and found it unsuitable, but, to preserve existing capital outlay, decided to allow its completion. It was opened on 23 January 1865, ten months

early, with only three out of ten 'barrack' dormitories available. The school was built on what was claimed to be 1150 acres of 'good agricultural land' but was later described as ill suited for farming.<sup>37</sup> It had three further defects: it was windswept and was one mile away from both the railway station and a source of water at Jacksons Creek. A total of 411 children were transferred there between January and October 1865, in order to relieve the serious overcrowding at Princes Bridge. The inspector's 1866 report shows that at the end of 1865 there were 1095 children in all the schools, with around 450 at Princes Bridge (capacity 400) and 411 at Sunbury (capacity 150). Both schools remained perpetually overcrowded. The Sunbury school emphasised the government's haste and planning deficiencies; it remained inadequate even when finished.

Administrative imperfections were not confined to Sunbury. In May 1869 William Wallwright, a three-month-old baby in the care of a wet nurse Adelaide Grant, died at the Princes Bridge industrial school. At an inquest, Dr Neild advised that the baby had starved to death; accordingly Nurse Grant was committed for trial on 16 July 1869. Four nurses gave evidence that Grant had underfed William and, contrary to instructions, had fed him cow's milk. The other nurses also said that she had slapped the baby, been rough with him and said things like 'the D... shanikee would never die' and 'Why don't you die, you little devil? I have been waiting long enough for you'.<sup>38</sup> When examined, Dr McGaurin, medical officer at Princes Bridge, said that he was unaware that the Wallwright baby was fed cow's milk until the day of Grant's dismissal. The matron, Emma Narracott, said that the baby was 'puny' when handed over to Grant. Consequently, she saw him daily for the following three weeks, and was reassured he was clean and secure.

After the judge's summing up, the jury took three quarters of an hour to find Nurse Grant not guilty. A qualification was that Dr McGaurin and Matron Narracott were culpable of a high degree of negligence in the discharge of their duties, an assessment with which the judge agreed. The defendant was discharged. As discussed further below, the government was fully aware of management issues in its industrial schools, but even by 1869 it had failed to deal adequately with them.

The awful conditions suffered by children in state-run industrial schools generally, but at Sunbury in particular, had been vividly described in the *Age* over four separate days in November 1865. Numerous newspaper articles portraying the same poor conditions had been

published as early as April 1865. The *Age* report contains extensive detail, and the chief secretary authorised the unnamed journalist to have access to everything relating to the school administration. This enhances the journalist's credibility for us, even though newspapers then, and now, can sensationalise issues.

The *Age* report focused on the children's health and reasons leading to their current condition. There were 380 children at Sunbury, 330 of them under ten. The children were blighted by disease, 300 of them had 'colonial pox' (probably scabies), which covered their entire bodies, manifesting in itchy boil-like eruptions, and leaving them 'scarred and disfigured'.<sup>39</sup> One hundred and nine children were infected with ophthalmia, fifteen of whom tragically had lost the sight of one eye. The reporter personally observed some boys with pus in their eyes who could hardly see, and others had blistered mouths and scabs. One child was said to have been 'literally picking his eye out'.<sup>40</sup> This graphic *Age* report shone a spotlight on the problems at Sunbury and the 'ill-treatment' of children supposedly in the 'care' of the state.

When Sunbury was opened in January 1865 there was no cookhouse, no boilers, and a lack of water because it had to be carted in, pending the installation of a pumping system to draw water from Jacksons Creek. This was not installed until July 1866. Meanwhile the reporter observed around 70 children were being washed from a bucket as there were no baths on the premises. The same water was used and reused, and the children were dried with sheets from the nearest bed. Little wonder that ophthalmia was rife! The lack of hot water also obviated the opportunity for appropriate treatment of injuries and infections. Clothes were washed in the creek and left out to dry, and, if it rained while they were drying, there was no change of clothing. The children were in a filthy state from these conditions, and workmen would take them to a small shed, nicknamed the 'slaughterhouse', to rid them of vermin.<sup>41</sup> Newspapers subsequently applied this name to Sunbury industrial school, presumably referring to its squalid conditions and their effect on the lives of its inmates.

The journalist further reported that management and medical care at the school were appalling. The school was more difficult to access than Princes Bridge and consequently subject to less supervision by visitors. On 29 April 1865 it was reported that Dr William McCrea had ordered 36 of the worst cases of ophthalmia, out of 109 children with the disease, be sent to Sunbury. The children went by furniture cart rather than by train,

allegedly to avoid public scrutiny of their appearance. The barracks were incomplete so McCrea recommended that 120 healthy boys be housed in tents. Strong winds saw the tents blown over ‘night after night’, and the boys thus returned to the wards and slept in beds with other children.<sup>42</sup> In winter, they would sleep together for warmth. Both ophthalmia and a skin complaint, colonial pox, were highly contagious, and infections spread rapidly when not properly treated. These events demonstrate a profound failure of care and responsibility by the government, resulting in enormous suffering for these children.

### **Medical and Professional Neglect**

The overall management of industrial schools was defective, but the actions of two key administrators, Dr William McCrea and James Harcourt, were especially significant in contributing to the failure of the schools. From the beginning, despite his protestations to the contrary, McCrea was principally responsible for the poor medical treatment in the industrial schools. He was born in Stewartstown, County Tyrone, Ireland, in 1814 and, after being apprenticed to his uncle, a doctor, in Islington, London, he joined the Royal Navy.<sup>43</sup> He obtained a Bachelor of Medicine degree in 1851 and arrived in Victoria in 1853 where he became the chief medical officer.<sup>44</sup> As noted by Jaggs, in his early days Dr McCrea provided his services free of charge to the Melbourne Orphanage. When the problems with sickness first occurred at Princes Bridge, he was requested to inspect the children and provide a report to the chief secretary.<sup>45</sup>

McCrea’s services were often inadequate, even negligent. He was allegedly responsible for sending the 36 children with ophthalmia to Sunbury. He was also criticised for not seeking expert medical advice on treating ophthalmia from Melbourne’s hospital specialists and resenting the presence of three doctors who attended the Princes Bridge school free of charge to examine the sick children. In March 1867 he was roundly criticised in parliament by George Levey, MLA for Normanby, for the number of complaints against him, his cruelty and his lack of tenderness.

Seven months later, the three Princes Bridge doctors, Dr Benjafield, Dr Towls and Dr Julian, resigned following a conflict with McCrea concerning the children’s medical treatment. Dr Julian wrote to the chief secretary complaining about McCrea’s competency and was immediately sacked for his criticism of the chief medical officer. Julian said that in five months he had reduced the number of eye infections from 192 to

nineteen, with no deaths and no children confined to their beds. Julian pointed out defects endangering the children in the existing treatment. He said that McCrea was grossly ignorant as to the nature of ophthalmia and its treatment, prescribing 'weak lead drops' that were about as farcical as prescribing a 'pinch of snuff' for an epidemic of tuberculosis.<sup>46</sup> Julian further complained about his dismissal for standing up to a bully whom he described as 'abrupt, domineering and arrogant'.<sup>47</sup> This character trait had previously been identified in 1863 when McCrea was convicted of assault. He had denied the charge, but his language and offensive behaviour in court drew particular criticism from the bench. The resistance by Dr McCrea to improving faulty medical treatment seems to be consistent with this behaviour and had serious consequences for the children under his care.

Adding to Sunbury's woes, and contrary to regulations, was the lack of a medical officer to provide daily treatment to sick children between January and May 1865. Dr Thomson then assumed the role, but for the next three months he concentrated on the ophthalmia infections and gave no attention to the colonial pox. This was left to the schoolmaster, Mr Fay, who was provided with rudimentary medicines such as magnesia and castor oil. By September 1865 the children were in a dreadful condition as acknowledged by both Fay and Thomson, and it was only then, six months after Thomson arrived, that infected and healthy children were separated.

The regulations required that children with infections or sickness be immediately sent to hospital. A 'careful' record was also to be kept of the 'names and ages' of sick children, 'their symptoms', and full details of treatment including the medicine used in each case. The *Age* discovered that neither Dr Benjafield at Princes Bridge nor Dr Thomson at Sunbury kept records of treatment and outcomes.

The general management of the schools was woefully inadequate. The first superintendent of industrial schools, James Harcourt, visited Sunbury twice or three times a week and said that he scrutinised the children carefully. This beggars belief because he apparently only discovered an outbreak of colonial pox in August 1865 when there were 148 cases, 85 serious ones, it having been rampant in the school since May.<sup>48</sup> Fay, the schoolmaster, said that everybody knew about it but that it was not formally reported to Harcourt. Failure by the government to provide appropriate support and medical treatment to protect children is further evidence of a broken system.

Harcourt managed the industrial schools during the most turbulent part of their history and was heavily criticised for his management style. He was born in Warwickshire, UK, in 1813 and gained a reputation in England for managing the insane. Within eight months of his appointment in Victoria, parliament was told that the commissioners of lunacy in England had strongly reproached Harcourt for his treatment of patients. William McLellan, MLA for Ararat, considered him unfit for his post.<sup>49</sup> Harcourt also owned and ran a ‘lunatic asylum’ at Cremorne, near Richmond, in Melbourne while simultaneously holding down his job as superintendent of industrial schools. In parliament, Francis Longmore, a farmer and MLA for Ripon and Hampden, complained about deplorable conditions for patients in Harcourt’s government-subsidised asylum.<sup>50</sup>

Harcourt’s character again came into question over the treatment of a boy committed to the industrial schools in August 1865. The boy’s mother, Mrs Winstanley, had initially been unable to properly care for him but had subsequently sought and retrieved her son from Sunbury. She alleged that when he went into the Sunbury school he was quite robust but, through eating rotten meat and dirty rice, he had become sick. The boy was brought before the magistrates and was noted to be very thin. The court ordered that information about the treatment of Winstanley’s son be submitted to the court in accordance with the Act’s regulations. Instead, Harcourt produced declarations from other parents saying that their children had not been mistreated. He also sought to undermine Winstanley’s character, saying that she was intoxicated when she went to the school. The court refused to accept these statements because they knew Winstanley well, and that she was hard working and of good character.<sup>51</sup>

The court had initially just sought medical records but now resolved to ask the chief secretary to hold a public enquiry into how industrial schools were conducted. Harcourt had managed industrial schools for a period of seventeen months but was previously at the Immigration Home for five and half years, so he was well known to the government. The *Age* report, together with Harcourt’s belligerence in the Winstanley case, may have added to the government’s concerns about his management style.

Harcourt resigned as superintendent in February 1866. Reading out his resignation letter to parliament, the chief secretary, William McCulloch, stated that Harcourt was ‘finding that he was unfit to cope with the difficulties connected with the management of the schools.’<sup>52</sup>

The unfitness for his role that Harcourt acknowledged in his resignation appeared to justify the criticism levelled against him by the press and in parliament. His incompetence was borne out by the facts. From the beginnings of the industrial schools in August 1864 to the end of 1865, there were 127 deaths and up to fifteen children lost the sight of one eye. Princes Bridge was still overcrowded and 150 children were sent to the newly completed school at Geelong.

Harcourt's departure did not resolve the problems. He was replaced on 19 February 1866 by George Duncan, who was born in Dumfries, Scotland, in 1819. He arrived in Victoria in 1853 and trained in the penal colony at Norfolk Island, ultimately becoming the inspector general of penal establishments in Victoria. Duncan reported that he found defective records, and untrained or 'hopeless' staff, whom he gave three months to re-qualify for their positions.<sup>53</sup> He immediately set out to resolve some of the building and equipment issues in the schools to remedy the situation. But in 1866 there was a measles outbreak, a further 99 children died, eight children were transferred to the Blind Asylum, and 70 cases of ophthalmia remained at the end.<sup>54</sup>

A damning feature of the industrial schools was the death toll, which amounted to 277 children between August 1864 and 31 December 1867, over 90 per year. This represented a child mortality rate four times higher than the general population.<sup>55</sup> Inspector Duncan was optimistic that an improvement in the children's health and the industrial schools' goals would be evident during 1867. Though he appeared more capable than Harcourt, he struggled to cope with the constant flow of children, scarce resources and inadequate accommodation. Notwithstanding his efforts, the death toll still averaged around 50 children per year until 1872.<sup>56</sup>

The manner of recruiting staff to industrial schools diminished their administrative efficacy. Just one year after the commencement of the schools, members of the parliamentary opposition were critical of the government's management, accusing Harcourt of being too busy with other commitments to properly fulfil his duties.<sup>57</sup> The 'mis-management' at Sunbury was raised in parliament again in April 1867.<sup>58</sup> Ararat MLA William McLellan provided further criticism, asserting that: 'A wrong system had been adopted in selecting officers ... because they were Government supporters, and not because they possessed the necessary qualifications for their posts.'<sup>59</sup>

June 1862 had seen the passing of an Act to regulate the civil service in Victoria. This provided for competitive entrance to government positions in order to obtain talented employees and avoid political appointments. However, until the 1880s, around two thirds of civil service employees were appointed on the basis of who they knew.<sup>60</sup> Given that the survival of babies depended upon breastfeeding, the employment of wet nurses did require some flexibility, although this was sometimes problematical, as shown in the case of William Wallwright above. But recruitment practices did contribute to the problems in the government's industrial schools overall, reinforcing the administrative failures.

### **Unsatisfactory Supply Chains and Industrial Training**

In addition to the other problems, unsatisfactory supply chains contributed to the poor nourishment and wholesale sickness of children at Sunbury. Only sufficient medical and food supplies for one day at a time were sent from Melbourne.<sup>61</sup> On numerous occasions vital medicines, food and other supplies did not arrive, or food was unfit for consumption. Children went without if replacement items could not be locally sourced in Sunbury.<sup>62</sup> Short supply sometimes occurred due to short measure. Some four-pound loaves of bread only weighed three and a half pounds, reducing the amount for each child.<sup>63</sup> The supply of clothing was also erratic or short. Clothes were swapped between the children, encouraging cross infections.<sup>64</sup> Boys often had no socks, leading to severe foot infections that resulted in them being unable to wear boots, making things worse.<sup>65</sup> This paucity of nourishment, together with the inadequacy of clothing and medical supplies, produced dire and eminently predictable health consequences and reflected the government's administrative shortfalls.

Another management weakness in the industrial schools was the inconsistent flow of information. The 1864 Act authorised certain people to visit the schools and provide comments on their findings. Reports, some contradictory, came from government representatives, official visitors, the inspector, journalists, doctors and various commissions.<sup>66</sup> Of the 21 visitors' reports between 22 December 1864 and 11 October 1865, the majority praised the condition of the children at Princes Bridge.<sup>67</sup> During this period, in September 1865, Dr McCrea had apparently examined each of the 655 children in Princes Bridge school in one day! He found 20 cases of ophthalmia, many children with scabies and eczema,

40 children with whooping cough, 12 cases of diarrhoea, 3 of gastric fever and 3 children with scorbutic disease of the mouth. Just sixteen days later, Thomas Lavar, the Congregational minister at Hawthorn, paid an unexpected visit and commented on the good health of the children! On 6 December 1865, Dr Mackin discovered a re-emergence of ophthalmia cases, some serious, and recommended isolating the affected children. Aside from ophthalmia, numerous children were suffering from cutaneous and other diseases.

The contradictory nature of the information about the schools was systemic. On 16 December 1865 the Board of Inspection, including Dr McCrea, stated that 61 children were sick but nevertheless reported positively on the school.<sup>68</sup> The board also reported many children sleeping two to a bed. Mrs Atkins complained in January 1866 that her eight-year-old daughter was put into bed at Princes Bridge with three other children, one of whom was covered in sores.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless the board advised that the children were in good spirits, well nourished, the bedding excellent and Mr Harcourt was doing a good job.<sup>70</sup>

Two major goals for the industrial schools were to be self-supporting and to provide industrial training. In his 1869 report Duncan admitted that 'this training has not been so successful as could be desired'.<sup>71</sup> By 1870 revenue was £8,351 against operating costs of £53,253 for all schools.<sup>72</sup> In the inspector's report of 1869, the school population was 2299 with an average of only 321 children learning trades.<sup>73</sup> The goal of training children for industry was illusory virtually from the outset given the conditions in government industrial schools. Victorian manufacturing in the 1860s was embryonic, and it took three decades for the surplus labour force emerging from the goldfields to be absorbed.<sup>74</sup>

The four reasons that the objectives were not achieved were continual sickness, overcrowding, the children's ages, and the schools' lack of focus. In November 1866 almost 400 out of 1418 children were confined to their beds. In respect of overcrowding, the Act stipulated that all 'neglected' children were to be accepted despite the inspector's reluctance to accept sick and handicapped children or babies.<sup>75</sup> By the end of 1867 there were 1634 children in all schools with room for only 1400.

The age of children committed to the schools and half-hearted government interest were other factors explaining the lack of industrial training. In 1867, 75 per cent of children were under age ten and 'too young for much work to be expected from them'.<sup>76</sup> Lack of government

intent can also be judged from two examples. In early 1867 a member of parliament complained about thistles growing on government land and suggested they be removed by the boys from Sunbury industrial school, to which the government agreed. Around the same time the school was criticised for not planting 20,000 vines and 1000 mulberry trees that had been ready for planting twelve months earlier and had now deteriorated. This lack of focus was another element of the failure to achieve self-sufficiency and industrial training. The children were said by one journalist to be ‘contained rather than trained’.<sup>77</sup> Self-support and industrial training for the children were major goals of the legislation but were a chimera.

### **The End of State-owned Industrial Schools in Victoria**

The denouement of Victorian government industrial schools was the finding by the 1872 royal commission that they had failed in their objectives.<sup>78</sup> The commission did not consider the shortcomings of the model that had been adopted. Instead it focused on the schools’ history and major problems. According to the commissioners, these were: the number of children coming into the system; sickness; poor administration; and the failings of the Princes Bridge and Sunbury sites. It recommended that the schools be discontinued because they did not provide an environment in which children could thrive. It observed the Sunbury boys as having a ‘downcast and spiritless appearance’, the opposite to healthy schoolboys.<sup>79</sup> The last of the reasons that industrial schools did not work was their cost. The commissioners quoted the various setting-up and maintenance costs, concluding that £21 per annum per child was excessive compared with the cost of maintaining a child outside an institution. Absurdly, the commissioners said that parents treated the schools as ‘a comfortable asylum and a good education’ despite numerous adverse press reports and their own observations of the boys at Sunbury.<sup>80</sup> This failure to meet objectives led to a merciful reconsideration of industrial schools.

The commission made several recommendations for amending the 1864 Act. The main suggestion was to board out children to respectable homes of their ‘own class’, so that they were not supported and educated to a level grander than the station in life to which they had been born.<sup>81</sup> They considered that children could be ‘profitably and advantageously’ deployed in rural communities.<sup>82</sup> The government rejected most

recommendations, except the main one about boarding out, schemes for which were gradually being adopted in other countries and other Australian colonies. By the end of 1873 there were 569 children boarded out to private homes in Victoria. According to press and government reports, boarding out worked reasonably well, but, as with all systems, it was not problem free. The problems included abuse, loss of family connection for boarded-out children and, too often, care without love where children were treated as a form of cheap domestic help.<sup>83</sup> Industrial schools in Victoria were slowly closed, and those remaining continued as receiving depots, pending children being boarded or licensed out.

## Conclusion

This article contrasts the British privately run model of industrial schools with the scheme adopted in Victoria and argues that decisions made by the McCulloch ministry meant that the Victorian state-run model was quite different. This is contrary to what many historians have hitherto claimed. The decision to create state-run institutions (with a few exceptions) in Victoria, together with the absence of institutions for younger children, meant that children of all ages were accepted into the Victorian industrial schools. This led to a myriad of problems as the state's industrial schools were overrun and beset by public health crises. Poor management compounded the problems. Although definitive evidence is lacking, it seems that the four private industrial schools operating at the time were performing better than state-run schools, given they could benefit from donations and free labour available to them from religious orders.

The two important goals of industrial schools were economic self-sufficiency and industrial training, the latter purportedly the reason for their existence. Neither was achieved before the royal commission of 1872 effectively ended the system, leaving the industrial schools to continue as mere transition places for children before being boarded out. The decisions made by Victoria's government in the setting up and managing industrial schools resulted in tragic outcomes for many of the children as well as permanent damage for those who survived incarceration in industrial schools, leaving families and the community to find ways of dealing with the consequences.

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# The Politics of the Victorian Education Act of 1872

*Geraldine Moore*

## **Abstract**

*The Victorian Education Act of 1872 arose from the failure of the Common Schools system to satisfy both the intention of the government to see progress towards a common system, and the diverse aspirations of the major religious denominations. Over the decade 1862–1872, Anglicans and Catholics chafed at the Board’s policy of withdrawing funding from non-compliant schools and transferring it to compliant schools. In 1872 the Supreme Court found that the Board lacked the power to do this. The decision deprived the Board of its authority and created a crisis that needed to be redressed immediately. The resulting Act was flawed, but its passage at least allowed progress on the main aim of making primary education widely available.*

## **Reconsiderations**

In 2022 we marked the 150th anniversary of the Victorian Education Act. To some of us, this is a cause for celebration, but to others the Act means something different. This division is a distant echo of the bitterly divided views of our community 150 years ago. To many people living at that time, the Act was a welcome piece of progressive legislation that made education accessible to nearly all Victorians. But to about one quarter of the community in 1872, talk of ‘free, secular and compulsory’ was merely a hollow catchcry. They saw the Act as a piece of anti-Catholic legislation that forced Catholic parents to pay for their own schools without government assistance. As my name suggests, I am of Irish descent, and my education was through the Catholic system. During my secondary education in Catholic schools of the 1960s, I remember that the sense of grievance from the passage of the Education Act 90 years earlier was still palpable. When I researched the topic for my Master’s thesis, a more complex picture emerged, and I found some oddities regarding the origins of the 1872 Act that did not fit comfortably with either of the prevailing views of the Act.

The first oddity was this: the ministry of James Goodall Francis, which introduced the Education Act, was not composed of visionaries, intent on bold schemes for the betterment of mankind. They were predominantly a pragmatic, even conservative, group. So how can we explain the emergence of such a radical Act from a conservative ministry?

There is a second oddity. It was the Attorney-General in the Francis Ministry, James Wilberforce Stephen, who guided the bill through the Legislative Assembly, and then became Victoria's first Education Minister. Stephen was a relative newcomer to the Parliament. He was a law lecturer at the University of Melbourne. As the Chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, he was a prominent and devout Anglican. He had never been an advocate of secular education. How did it happen that he was the driving force behind the new education system?

The third and greatest oddity is that the Legislative Council cooperated in passing the Act. The Legislative Council at the time was elected on the basis of a most restrictive property franchise.<sup>1</sup> Many of its members believed that it was their role to defend the rights of property holders against what they saw as the ultra-democratic tendencies of the Legislative Assembly.

Since its inception in 1856, the Legislative Council had obstructed many of the bills sent to it by the Legislative Assembly, particularly anything that was progressive. In its first decade, the Council blocked 59 bills. By 1865, the two houses of the Victorian Parliament were locked in a desperate struggle for power. Two very bitter and protracted constitutional crises in 1865 and 1867 left the colony effectively without a government for many months. A third crisis — the bitterest phase of the struggle — lay ahead in 1878. Yet in 1872, the Legislative Council cooperated readily with the Legislative Assembly in passing the Education Bill. The question is why?

## **The Background**

A decade earlier, in 1862, the Common Schools Act devolved power to a Board of Education to oversee the management of the education system and to allocate government aid. The framers of that Act envisioned that the major denominations would be represented on the new Board of Education, and they hoped that the members of the Board would reach an amicable agreement for the apportionment of government aid to the colony's schools. They also hoped that the thorny question of religious

instruction in the schools would be resolved at the local level by having a management committee from each school drawn from the local community and reflecting the mix of denominations in each school's catchment. These local committees could arrange for religious instruction according to the preferences of the local community. The framers of the Common Schools Act also hoped that, in time, the denominational heads would become convinced of the advantages of a well-managed common system and relinquish many of their schools.

These assumptions did not take account of the Catholic Church's model of school management, which reflected its hierarchical structure. The local parish priest was in charge of the Catholic school. He reported to the bishop, and subject to the bishop's instructions, he appointed teachers and supervised the buildings, grounds and general management of the school. Accepting conditions for the allocation of government aid was regarded as undermining the church's authority. But after some negotiations, the Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, James Alipius Goold, agreed to accept the conditions that were specified for receipt of government aid.

### **Conditions for Receipt of Aid**

As European people settled the less fertile and drier regions of Victoria, in localities with sparse population, it sometimes happened that religious denominations would attempt to establish rival schools and apply for government aid. The Board of Education was anxious to discourage a wasteful duplication of schools. To be eligible to receive aid, schools had to be located a certain distance from the nearest school in receipt of government aid, and their enrolments and the average attendance of scholars had to meet the Board's requirements. The school had to accept a share of the 'destitute scholars,' and for this it received some additional funding from the Board.

### **Disputes**

Teachers' salaries were calculated according to the number of students in attendance, as recorded in the attendance rolls, and by the achievement of scholars, as measured by the inspectors. The Common Schools system inadvertently provided incentives to both teachers and local committees to falsify attendance records. This might be done for reasons of salary or to justify the continuation of aid to a school whose attendance hovered near

a critical figure.<sup>2</sup> Teachers and local committees often found themselves in dispute with each other and the Board over these and other issues.

The most controversial condition turned out to be the Board's requirement that local committees be established to manage the schools. Catholic schools often listed the bishop on the local committee, although he was not normally a local resident. This led to tension with the Board, because it was incompatible with the Common Schools Act's requirement for a local committee of management representing the mix of denominations in the area.

Throughout the period 1862 to 1872, the Board found itself frequently drawn into disputes between local committees and teachers. In some cases, the local committee was effectively the Catholic bishop. Increasingly, these disputes reached the courts. Legal decisions added to the complexity of the Board's job of managing the fragile consensus on which the system rested. For a part-time Board composed of volunteers, the strain was becoming unmanageable. The dilemma for the Board of Education was this: when schools flouted the Board's requirements how could it enforce its conditions for receipt of aid? In April 1868, a new Board regulation was announced.

Board Regulation 63 (1868):

The existence in any locality of a school not vested in the Board shall not be regarded as a hindrance to the establishment of a vested school in that locality, should such be applied for, although the granting of aid by the Board to such school should, according to Section X of the Common Schools Act, necessitate the withdrawal of aid from the non-vested school.

Board Regulation 63 meant that any school that did not comply with Board regulations could lose aid and that its aid could be transferred to another school in the same locality that did comply. From the Board's point of view, this was a good solution. It penalised the non-compliant school without inconveniencing the community, because the government aid could be transferred to another nearby school. The Education Committees of both the Catholic and Anglican churches strenuously objected to the new regulation.<sup>3</sup> As they feared, a number of their schools began to lose aid by its operation.

## Duffy Becomes Chief Secretary

In June 1871, the long-serving government of James McCulloch was defeated on the floor of the House. This occurred in the context of its attempt to impose a property tax. Charles Gavan Duffy became the new Chief Secretary (Premier). Duffy was a prominent and popular Catholic layman and an experienced politician, but Bishop James Goold and he were not close. Duffy agreed that the Catholic community should have its own schools but he believed that a compromise regarding government aid could and should be negotiated so as to satisfy most people in the Catholic community as well as other denominations.



**Charles Gavan Duffy**  
(Courtesy Parliament of  
Victoria)

Three months after Duffy came to power, Father Horatio Geoghegan, a member of the local committee of a Catholic-operated Common School in Kyneton, applied to the Supreme Court for a writ of *certiorari*. His intention was to seek a review of the legality of Board Regulation 63. The application was unsuccessful, possibly because the wrong type of writ was selected for this purpose. However Geoghegan's action served as a warning to the Board that another attempt to challenge the legality of Regulation 63 could be expected and might prove successful. If the regulation should be found not to be legally valid, the members of the Board feared that they could be held responsible for acting illegally by withholding aid.

The Catholic representative on the Board of Education was Michael O'Grady, a long-standing friend of Charles Gavan Duffy and a member of the Catholic Education Committee. On 17 December 1871 O'Grady and three other members of the Board of Education decided that it was in the Board's best interests to accept the suggestion of the Catholic Education Committee and apply to the Supreme Court to test the legality of the Regulation.<sup>4</sup> They did so, and in June 1872 the Supreme Court of Victoria

declared Regulation 63 to be *ultra vires*.<sup>5</sup> This meant that the Board had, for three years, been exceeding its powers.

The court's decision threatened to unleash a spate of law suits by denominational heads on behalf of the schools that had lost government aid. Those schools that had received the aid taken from a nearby school now feared losing that aid.<sup>6</sup> The Board of Education had lost its authority because it no longer had any means of enforcing any of its requirements. The government's strategy of progressing towards a system of common schooling by using the administrative powers of the Board of Education had ended in chaos.

Since Duffy's accession in 1871, the opposition in the Legislative Assembly had repeatedly urged him to bring forward a new education bill. Curiously, despite eleven months in office, he failed to do so. In June 1872, the month in which the legal judgment regarding Regulation 63 was delivered, the opposition moved a motion of no confidence, and Duffy lost office.

### **An Urgent Need for a New Education Act**

The new Chief Secretary was James Goodall Francis. He announced that the introduction of a new Education Act was a priority for his government. He and his ministers saw that, without new legislation, the denominations would be in fierce competition with each other to be the first to open a school in a new area, on their own terms, and to monopolise the available government aid. The threat of imminent law suits to recover lost aid made education reform urgent. The Legislative Council could see that a number of adverse court judgments would require government payment. They feared that this could strengthen the hand of the Legislative Assembly in imposing a new property tax.



**James Goodall Francis** (Courtesy Parliament of Victoria)

Since 1862, the number of Catholic schools had increased by fourteen, while the Anglicans had relinquished 57 of their schools in the expectation that a common system, catering for all, was developing.<sup>7</sup> The Anglicans now realised their mistake, for the defeat of Regulation 63 had given the Catholics an advantage over them in securing government aid. Without new legislation, their children's only option in the future in some areas might be to attend a Catholic school, where, as non-Catholic parents, they would be unlikely to have any voice in the governance.

### **How the Bill Passed into Law**

James Francis included in his Cabinet representatives of each of the major religious denominations. James Casey, Minister of Agriculture, was a practising Catholic. Casey, like his famous fellow church member, Peter Lalor, opposed state aid to denominational schools. Casey supported Catholic co-operation with a government system, provided that the system allowed for separate religious teaching. Francis insisted on unity, and he made the framing of the Education Bill a joint act of the whole Cabinet.

A novel and controversial feature of the new education system that the Education Act ushered in was the provision of sweeping powers to the Minister to enable him to exercise control, and to shield him from legal challenges.<sup>8</sup> Teachers were to be appointed by the Governor-in-Council, rather than by local committees.

In the lead-up to the passage of the Education Bill, Stephen wooed teachers away from the denominational schools by promising that those who joined the new system would be eligible for retirement allowances.<sup>9</sup> The lack of retirement allowances had long been a grievance, and the promise converted many teachers into enthusiastic supporters of the Education Bill. But the proposal alarmed the members of the Legislative Council, who feared that it would necessitate a new tax. In order to avoid a breakdown in co-operation with the Legislative Council, the government in the Legislative Assembly then substituted a form of words that served as a smokescreen to obscure the abandonment of their commitment.<sup>10</sup> To make matters worse, those teachers who took Stephen at his word regarding the retirement allowances, and joined the new government teaching service, found to their dismay that they lost between one-tenth and one-eighth of their salaries.

## The New System of Government Schooling

Over the first five years of the establishment of the new education system, government aid to the common schools that were owned and operated by the denominations was phased out. Many Catholic schools and a number of schools operated by other denominations continued as fee-paying schools. The Education Act established local Boards of Advice to arrange for religious instruction to be provided to the students in government schools outside school hours. The Boards of Advice were also expected to report the names of parents who failed to send their children to school.<sup>11</sup> However, a royal commission into education in 1878 under Professor Charles Henry Pearson reported that few of the Boards of Advice were functioning. It also revealed that, over the five-year period, the ‘compulsory’ principle had never been enforced. Despite this, the threat of legal repercussions for non-attendance, as well as the rapid building program in the first five years of the Act, resulted in a great many more children being enrolled at school, both in the centres of population and in the sparsely populated areas.

While many teachers had chafed under the rule of local committees in the Common Schools era, the salaries and conditions in the government teaching service were a disappointment. It soon became obvious that the promise regarding retirement allowances was not being honoured. Pearson’s Royal Commission reported that, instead of teaching positions and promotions reflecting merit or length of service, they were usually awarded on the basis of political patronage. The reduction in salaries, the broken promise regarding retirement allowances, and the issue of political influence in teaching appointments and promotions led to a disaffected and divided teaching service.

## Pope Pius IX

Movements in the international Catholic Church provide a context to explain Catholic reaction to government education schemes. In 1864, two years after the passage of the Common Schools Act, Pope Pius IX issued the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, with an appendix entitled ‘The Syllabus of Errors’. This identified and denounced 80 ‘errors’ in modern thought and practices that contravened Catholic teaching. The 48th proposition to be condemned was that: ‘Catholics may approve the system of educating youth unconnected with the Catholic faith and the power of the Church.’<sup>12</sup>

This was effectively a denunciation of any intrusion by state governments into the education of Catholic children. In so far as the acceptance of government aid for Catholic schools would entail procedures for accountability to government and acceptance of conditions for the use of that aid, it meant that such arrangements contravened Catholic teaching and should be rejected.<sup>13</sup>

Some bishops and heads of religious orders expressed reluctance to accept the new policy.<sup>14</sup> But in 1870 Pius summoned the world's Catholic bishops to attend the Vatican Council in Rome. It was here, in July of that year, that the doctrine of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed. This pronouncement isolated those who disagreed with the Pope's conservative stance because it showed that the majority of bishops accepted the absolute authority of the Pope when he spoke *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals.

### **Lessons from the Fall of the Common Schools System**

The timing of the pronouncement of Papal Infallibility could not have been worse for Duffy for it left him no latitude to negotiate a compromise between his government and his church. He fell back on the tactic of declaring education reform to be a matter of conscience and therefore an open question, that is, one on which his government, as a whole, was not prepared to bring forward a bill.

For Francis and his ministry, the lesson of the previous decade was that a common system based on co-operation between the churches had failed, and a different approach must be tried. The problem was that, whatever model was chosen, it was likely to cost money. How could the Legislative Council be induced to pass it? In 1868, the former McCulloch Government had abandoned its Education Bill at the second reading stage, possibly because the Attorney-General, George Higinbotham, had envisioned a land tax to fund the expanded education system. In 1872 the Francis Ministry saw that a new education system was essential but that, in order to have it pass the Upper House, they would have to reassure the Legislative Council that there would be no new tax. Economies would instead be made via a withdrawal of grants to denominational schools, a reduction of teachers' salaries, and by reneging on the promised retirement allowances to teachers.

## Conclusion

History has forgotten the anguish of the first generation of state school teachers whose expectations were so heartlessly raised only to be dashed. The bitterness of many in the Catholic community regarding the Education Act was even more enduring, for they lost government aid to their schools for the best part of a century.

Did the end justify the means? The government's determination to create a new system in which education would become widely available was far-sighted and had widespread support. In the government's defence it must be remembered that the tactics that it used to secure the co-operation of the Legislative Council were forced upon it by the Victorian Constitution of 1855. This Constitution gave too much power to a grossly unrepresentative Upper House. Many decades would elapse before successive amendments of the Constitution would overcome this problem. In view of the bitter warfare between the Houses of the Parliament, the government's success in securing a remodelled and expanded education system for Victoria was a remarkable achievement. If it was not a just peace, it was at least a peace that could be built upon.

Few Victorians today would recognise the name of James Goodall Francis. Although he confessed himself to be 'a wretched speaker', his political skill and pragmatism mattered more than his oratorical skill. He enabled Victoria's new education system to rise from the ashes of the Common Schools system. He succeeded in the most difficult of circumstances, where others before him had failed, and where other aspiring educational reformers after him would also fail. Despite the faults of the Education Act, many thousands of Victorians, (including many Catholic children, such as my grandfather), would not have received an education without it.

## Notes

- 1 Under the Victorian Constitution of 1855, membership of the Legislative Council was restricted to those who owned property valued at £5000, or a property leasehold that returned £500 annually.
- 2 Kenneth E. Dear, 'Payment by Results and the Status of Teachers in Victoria 1862–1872', in S. Murray-Smith (ed.), *Melbourne Studies in Education 1975*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1975, p. 72.
- 3 L.J. Blake, (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol.1, Melbourne, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, p. 106.

- 4 Minute 71/23571, *Agenda Book*. Vol. 8. Board of Education, VPRS 899, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). See also Geraldine Moore, 'The Victorian Education Act of 1872: A New View', M.Ed. thesis, Monash University, 1987, pp. 46–48. See also Ann Shorten, 'Matters of Fact and Fiction: The Lauriston School Cases, 1871 and 1872', unpublished essay, 1983, Education Faculty Library, Monash University, p. 8.
- 5 *Bourke v The Board of Education* (1872) 3 VR (L.) 148, 148–150.
- 6 Shorten, p. 16.
- 7 J.S. Gregory, *Church and State*, Melbourne, Cassell, 1973, p. 269.
- 8 Section 7 of the Victorian Education Act (447) declared: 'No action or suit shall be brought or maintained against any person who shall be, or shall have been a Minister of Public Instruction for any nonfeasance or malfeasance in connection with the duties imposed upon him by this Act'. At first the Legislative Council objected to this section, and reported the bill with the section removed. Stephen insisted that the section must remain. *Victoria Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, Vol. XV. 1872, p. 2255. For further discussion see Geraldine Moore, pp. 78–83.
- 9 James Frances Glennon, Secretary of the Victorian Institute of Teachers (formed in 1873), claimed that in 1872 Stephen had sent to every head teacher in Victoria a copy of his parliamentary speech in which he stated that teachers would have the same retiring allowances as civil servants: *The Teacher*, vol. 11, no. 8, August 1878, p. 86.
- 10 After amendment, Section 22 of the Education Act (447) referred to teachers being entitled to 'a retiring allowance on the same basis as may hereafter be provided for members of the Public Service'. There was no longer a commitment to basing retirement allowances on the Civil Service Act of 1862, only on a basis to be determined 'hereafter'. No complementary legislation was passed until the Public Service Act of 1883: by this, public servants were required to provide for retirement through private life insurance. Section 22 of the Education Act was therefore inoperative until 1883.
- 11 Section 15 of Act 447.
- 12 Ann Freemantle (ed.), *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context*, New York, Mentor Books, 1964, p. 148.
- 13 During the passage of the Education Bill, Bishop Goold submitted a petition to the parliament calling for a system of 'payment by results'. He proposed that teachers in Catholic schools should receive payment from government according to the results of their secular teaching, combined with a capitation allowance for each pupil: Petition E5 on the Education Bill, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Victoria 1872*. By 1875, Bishop Michael O'Connor of Ballarat no longer sought a capitation allowance, but purely a 'results' payment: Blake (ed.), Vol 1, p. 232.
- 14 The Franciscan Bishop Laurence Sheil of Adelaide believed there was no bar to accepting government grants to his schools. During his extended absence following the Vatican Council 1870, Mary Mackillop and Father Julian Tennison Woods, co-founders of the religious order the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, established an independent, unaided system of Catholic schools in the diocese. On his return, Sheil excommunicated Mackillop. In 1873 she travelled to Rome and received papal approval for her order, and for its goal of establishing an unaided system of Catholic schools in the Australian colonies. See William Modystack, *Mary Mackillop: A Woman Before Her Time*, Sydney, Rigby, 1982, pp. 134–135.



## The arrival of Mr Alfred Deakin

**The picture:** a bevy of top hats and bowlers crowd delightedly around the newly returned figure of a man. In the background the tall carriages, turret and engine of a train.

**The place:** a platform on Spencer Street Station, Melbourne.

**The time:** Friday, 17 June 1887, about 9.50 a.m.<sup>1</sup> Fifteen years after the passing of the 1872 Education Act.

Image: 'The Arrival of Mr Alfred Deakin', *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 June 1887

## Fifteen Years after the Education Act: The Democratic Crowd at Spencer Street Station A Pictorial Essay

*Alex McDermott*

This image illustrates the well-established civic ritual of welcoming arriving dignitaries and famous figures at Spencer Street Station in Melbourne. With the opening of the overland rail route from Adelaide to Melbourne in January 1887, this quickly became the pattern for keenly anticipated travellers: to disembark from their ocean-going steamships at Adelaide and take the train direct to Melbourne. Others might disembark in Sydney, having come from San Francisco via Auckland, then catch the Sydney–Melbourne express, also recently introduced, and make for Melbourne, the largest city in Australasia.

By the time Alfred Deakin stepped off the special Boudoir carriage on a cold June morning he had already been preceded by a newly arriving Anglican Bishop, two Chinese Commissioners on a Pacific tour of émigré Chinese communities, a successful young opera singer returning from a decade spent as ‘the Australian Nightingale’ in the United States, an English Liberal politician and future Victorian Governor along with his popular travelogue-writing wife, and an Irish Catholic Archbishop.<sup>2</sup> Yet for the two major metropolitan daily newspapers, the *Age* and the *Argus*, Deakin’s arrival belonged to a different order of significance.

Some of these recent arrivals formed the immediate contextual backdrop for the *Age* correspondent as he begins describing the scene of Deakin’s return. We witness the moment as depicted in the *Illustrated Australian News* a week later.<sup>3</sup> There is ‘a responsive grasp of the hand; a hurried word of welcome; a Victorian “well done old man!” sailing over the heads of the crowd from the rear ranks ...’<sup>4</sup>

This ‘simplicity of Mr Deakin’s arrival stands out in strong relief to recent events in the same direction.’<sup>5</sup> On this occasion there is ‘no display, no genuflections, metaphorical or otherwise; no ceremony’. In a few short sentences we reference two of the preceding arrivals.

‘Their Excellencies the Chinese Commissioners’, had stepped out less than a month before.<sup>6</sup> They were greeted on the platform with the ‘most profound bows and salutations by the guard of honour, such as is customary for the denizens of Oriental cities to pay to their superiors.’<sup>7</sup> Both commissioners were ‘dressed in the garb of their country’, the General sporting a black plume in his round hat to exotically signify his seniority of office. The station yard was crowded with spectators ‘including many Chinese, apparently of the poorer class’, who paid their respects as the horse-drawn vehicles passed through towards the street.<sup>8</sup>

The Saturday before Deakin’s return, Archbishop Thomas Carr, ‘Professor of Dogmatic Theology’,<sup>9</sup> had been greeted at the station by ‘large numbers of priests’,<sup>10</sup> all vested in soutane and biretta, an executive committee and the Cadet Corps assembled in the yard outside. After the first welcome, all on the platform took part in a procession under the direction of mounted and foot marshals on a widely extended route from Spencer Street to the newly completed St Patrick’s Cathedral. The procession boasted a cast of many hundreds, and included school children, musical bands, boys from Jesuit colleges, various confraternities, sodalities and benefit societies. At the Cathedral (admission ‘by ticket only’),<sup>11</sup> Carr was ‘vested in full pontificals’<sup>12</sup> and again presented with the clergy, this time in strict order of authority. Handel’s *Messiah* accompanied by full choir closed out the service, during which time Carr had declared the ungodliness of Victoria’s secular schooling system and the necessity of Irish Home Rule.<sup>13</sup>

These are the arrivals that the *Age* correspondent makes such a studied contrast in his casually swift evocation. No display, no genuflections, no weird garb, no gilded, elaborate ceremony. Here instead a robust, egalitarian democratic culture models its respectable civic enthusiasm.

So too in the picture: there is a crowd, but nothing unruly. No mob: it is a picture of men in full possession of their sense of at least roughly equal dignity. No obsequious bowing. Instead, stretching out the hand in welcome, keeping one’s feet, no servile bending of the knees. The enthusiasm is clearly fervent, but it is ‘rational manhood’ in action, an enactment of public selves ‘defined by moral authority, strength of will and a sense of public duty’.<sup>14</sup> The picture tells a story. And the story models a polity.

The polity that the *Illustrated Australian News* picture encourages us to imagine—bolstered by the opening passage of the report in the *Age* (a newspaper with more than a passing interest in modelling progressive liberalism and radical democracy, asserting Victorian self-sufficiency and autonomy above practically all else)—is a notion of government without subservience. In this modelling, a crowd is not a ‘vast body of the multitude’, but something more representative of a self-governing, mass manhood suffrage colony, and one that feels itself on the cusp of maturity.

This happened to be the very theme which Deakin articulated at Spencer Street Station, as he described the significance of the Imperial Conference from that he had just returned. The Conference, he said, (and he, like the newspaper writers, preferred the grander sounding ‘Imperial’ designation to the actual ‘Colonial Conference’, which was its official nomenclature) was the moment when the (white and self-governing) colonies of the British Empire had attained ‘their majority’. They had been ‘recognised not only as self-governing peoples, but as mature people, whose advice should be sought, whose advice should, if possible, be followed, and who should be heard in the councils of the empire of which they formed such a great part’. From this period on, ‘we will no longer be regarded as children and dependants, but as independent allies and followers of the Empire of Great Britain. (Cheers.)’<sup>15</sup>

All of this makes more striking the actual account that follows the *Age*’s opening paragraph quoted above.

Here, in contrast to the robust, rational ‘well done old man!’ manhood modelled in the lines preceding, the reader is confronted with a boisterous, surging, out-of-control crowd rather than an orderly if spirited gathering of pleased yet sober men.

The exact moment that the *Illustrated Australian News* aims to capture—Deakin alighting the train and the first salutatory greeting—now verges on a type of melee. We now find out it was no less than 40 men who immediately surged forward and broke across Deakin’s figure in a wave, all simultaneously struggling to grab his hand and enthusiastically shake it. ‘Fully five minutes the hand shaking went on.’ The spontaneously assembled crowd (could we say mob?) swarm the returning hero, as different figures fight to get into the magic circle immediately surrounding him.

The clerk of the Legislative Assembly is ‘swept away’. A departmental undersecretary too is ‘whirled out of sight’.

Two deputations representing Deakin's diverse political and generational support networks—his liberal constituency's organisation, and the Australian Natives Association, the friendly society for Australian-born colonists—are pushed aside.

One government minister (John Nimmo, like Deakin a former *Age* writer as it happens, and by now Minister of Public Works) bursts through the scrum 'like a footballer ... with a battering ram for those who did not get out of the way'.

From the midst of this scene Deakin pantomimes to the wider crowd, which numbers some 300 who continue to swarm and shout and buzz beyond the tighter melee of Premier, ministers, MPs, government departmental chiefs, Australian Native Association leaders and electorate organisers, forming that magic circle that surrounds him. He signals with outsize gestures that they are forgetting their liberal democratic selves. 'Put your hats back on' is the semaphored message Deakin telegraphs, to not especially great effect. The returned *wunderkind* statesman has no interest in this display.

They should not take their hats off to acknowledge him, for he is their humble representative only. Several minutes later, when the crowd has stilled enough to receive and understand words of speech, he will tell them:

As for myself, gentlemen, I can only say that what in me lay to do I did so far as I believe the people of Victoria would endorse and support it. My aim was not to say a single word for myself, but to make myself as far as my poor abilities would permit, the mouthpiece for the people of Victoria. (Applause.)<sup>16</sup>

Or in other words, do not take your hat off to greet the mouthpiece of the people. It may not constitute bowing, or genuflecting, but it carries still its own whiff of illiberal subservience.

The opening passage of the *Age*, then, is the enactment of a sober polity, which we see represented to great effect in the *Illustrated Australian News*. The substantial body of the account, however, foregrounds something both potent and simultaneously more dangerous in the Victorian *demos*.<sup>17</sup> Why does the *Age* writer so swiftly contradict himself, letting the first image be immediately undermined by the second? Because, as that high priest of democratic manhood, American poet Walt Whitman, might say, because he contains multitudes.<sup>18</sup>

You could say the eruptive, joyous yet dangerous crowd is generating warring metaphors, transferred to the popular, mass readership newspapers. The event in the newspaper columns is for the polity no sideshow either. Earlier in the decade one of the most shrewd observers of the Melbourne scene dubbed Australia the Land of Newspapers.<sup>19</sup> Comparing it to Britain, Richard Twopeny reckoned ten times the proportion of population read newspapers than in the home country. Doubtless he exaggerates, but not so much as we might think.

Whatever its flaws as legislation, the 1872 Education Act had by 1887 largely ensured that basic literacy and education was universally available to all children in the colony, boys and girls alike.<sup>20</sup> A mass education for a mass democracy. Some fifteen years later, almost everyone who had grown up in the colony could read. Add to this the Eight Hour Day. The birth of a genuine leisure society made reading a realistic possibility for the mass of ordinary people. Penny editions of *The Pickwick Papers* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* were ubiquitous and, thanks to the free libraries springing up around the colony, widely available.<sup>21</sup> The country-born would-be poet, Bernard O'Dowd, working as law clerk at the Supreme Court, is so smitten with Whitman's free verse that he commences writing him fan letters, and is thrilled and inspired by the replies he receives. In the Land of Newspapers, with imaginations nourished by diverse novels, tracts, journals and sundry entertainments, the mass readership newspaper columns are themselves arenas for the enactment of public events.

But here, now, emerging from the surging crowd, looking for Alfred Deakin, is George Higinbotham—the intellectual liberal statesman, the colonial Gladstone mixed with a spice of Jacobin, who inspired every Victorian radical liberal politician in the generation that now followed. For young, ambitious men such as Deakin and Henry Bournes Higgins, Higinbotham is the model.<sup>22</sup> For upwards of three decades, and even though he has never been Premier, he has been the difference-maker in Victoria's public life, the political godfather of the 1872 Education Act. He had chaired the royal commission that paved the way for it and provided the intellectual and political heft to make its 'Secular, Compulsory and Free' a realisable project.<sup>23</sup> A public system of secular instruction, free from interference of the religious denominations, and under the firm direction of an Education Minister, was 'urgently demanded by the highest national interests',<sup>24</sup> he said. He pursued the project of mass, secular education in service of a vision of social unity, whereby all

divisions of sect, caste and class are done away with: ‘when the children of neighbours shall walk side by side to school, sit side by side at the common task, and be trained to mutual kindness which may endear them to one another in their common journey through life.’<sup>25</sup> He pursued it, ironically enough, with an ‘evangelical determination.’<sup>26</sup>

For Deakin himself, Higinbotham was ‘the towering figure’ who lifted the sometimes squalid, grubby colonial politicking to a lofty level of liberal political principles and ideals. His oratory was ‘slower, grander, more stately and impressive, with far more dignity in style and grace of phrase’ than that of any other liberal leader or politician. And always so ‘terribly intense and effective in its admirable climaxes’. It was, others said, the ‘fervent eloquence’, the ‘pre-eminently noble bearing’, the ‘lofty conception of duty’, and most of all ‘his unswerving devotion to what he conceived to be right and true’ during the struggles between the lower, democratic and upper, restricted franchise houses of Victorian Parliament in the 1860s that secured for him the permanent adulation of ‘mass of the people’. He was ‘the people’s champion ... There has been no closer approach to Hero Worship in the history of the colony.’<sup>27</sup>

By 1887 Higinbotham has retired from politics, having given it up as a kind of ‘Pandaemonium’ where lost and damned souls spend their time in increasing each other’s torment.<sup>28</sup> The word itself is telling of Higinbotham’s lofty conceptions, originating in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, describing a type of Satanic Parliament, a ‘solemn council’ and ‘infernal court’ held at ‘the high capital of Satan and his peers.’<sup>29</sup> He has gone back to the bar, appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court the year before. Oddly, the arch-democrat, now Chief Justice, ‘surrounded by the insignia of office’, has become ‘one of the severest champions of the forms and ceremonies of the law ever seen on the Victorian bench.’<sup>30</sup>

Now, though, a different Pandemonium before him, which no legal ritual will contain or quell: an excited crowd—a mob, you could say—of enthusiastic citizens, ululating wildly. He may not have predicted the collapse of civic decorum, but he had acutely predicted the motivation that had seized the crowd to shake the Deakin hand. He had said as much a few days previously when speaking at a welcome banquet to the Chinese Commissioners that he had organised in the city. ‘All native Australians would be eager to grasp the hand of Mr Deakin,’ he had said, to applause. Many, if not all, of the native-born colonial Australians, who had become the young Deakin’s chief political support base, had clearly

agreed with that.<sup>31</sup> Now he steps into the human maelstrom that has been elicited by the preceding weeks of excited newspaper commentary, by the conversations bubbling out and around statements made by public figures like himself at the Menzies Hotel, personally to shake Deakin's hand.

He will shake the hand of the man who has followed his own lead in rejecting the seductive bauble of a proffered knighthood and title by the calculating Downing Street crew—the crew against which Higinbotham has spent much of his career making principled war. 'A base, contemptible distinction,' Higinbotham had called such titles in 1873: something that ill-befitted the mutual equality enjoyed between citizens in a liberal democracy.<sup>32</sup> 'Among unequals what society ...?' as the Arch-Antagonist said in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>33</sup>

To shake Deakin's hand, though, he has to cross through the crowd, and Higinbotham, beloved of the Victorian *demos*, is definitively not of the Victorian *demos*. 'A quondam democrat and a leveller of public thought and sentiment'<sup>34</sup> he may be, but he loathes the loss of rational self-possession, which a surging crowd suggests.<sup>35</sup> The most radical liberal democrat hated the implications of unthinking, debased crowd tyranny that mobs and mob enthusiasm suggested. It is—another irony—similar to his hostility towards the clergy of the churches who, with their 'unfounded claims to infallible authority' in a progressive, scientific age, made their own war against the reasoning individual self who relies on his or her own authority of 'natural understanding'. Both churches and mobs will deprive a man of his individual self-possession, his own self-sovereignty.

At Spencer Street Station then, Higginbotham, that great, towering public figure, was dwarfed, reduced to strictly human size, by the "I'm as good a man as you are" sentiment which has shaped Victorian politics: the sentiment whose cause he had championed.<sup>36</sup> 'The omnipresent terror of the Law Courts' found himself 'sunk into the private citizen.'<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, he will shake Deakin's hand. 'After a struggle, a little lane was made' through the surging demotic crowd. Moses-like, if in miniature, the great surging mob tide clears, momentarily at any rate. Higinbotham steps through to meet his man. The two 'met and gripped each other' in that pre-eminent gesture of manly mutual recognition between social equals.<sup>38</sup> They shake hands.

For Deakin, clearly, the moment tells. It tells so strongly that he is to be freely forgiven for a momentary *faux pas* committed against

‘democratic manners.’<sup>39</sup> Now, and in contrast to his pantomimic urgings of a few minutes before, ‘off came’ his own hat. No bow, nor genuflection, but a brand of personal homage suddenly seems necessary. It turns out there are some things you can humble yourself before, with no loss of self-dignity, or at least very little.

## Notes

- 1 *Argus*, 18 June 1887, p. 5e.
- 2 Anglican Bishop, Dr Field Flowers Goe arrived Tuesday 12 April. The Qing Imperial Commissioners, General Wong Yung Ho and Consul U Tsing arrived Thursday 26 May. Tasmanian opera singer Amy Sherwin arrived Friday 3 June. Lord and Lady Brassey arrived on Saturday 11 June (although Brassey had arrived previously on his ocean-going steam-powered yacht, *Sunbeam*), and Catholic Archbishop Thomas Carr also arrived on this day.
- 3 ‘The Arrival of Mr. Alfred Deakin’, *Illustrated Australian News*, 25 June 1887, p. 116.
- 4 ‘Arrival of Mr. A. Deakin’, *The Age*, 18 June 1887, p. 10.
- 5 ‘Arrival of Mr. A. Deakin. Enthusiastic Reception at Spencer-Street Station’, *The Age*, Saturday 18 June 1887, p. 10.
- 6 *Argus*, 11 June 1887, p. 16e.
- 7 ‘The Arrival of the Chinese Commissioners’, *Argus*, 27 May 1887, p. 3h.
- 8 ‘The Arrival of the Chinese Commissioners’, *Argus*, 27 May 1887, p. 3h.
- 9 *Argus*, 13 June 1887, p. 7a.
- 10 *Argus*, 11 June 1887, p. 10f.
- 11 *Argus*, 11 June 1887, p. 10f.
- 12 *Argus*, 11 June 1887, p. 10f.
- 13 *Argus* 13 June 1887.
- 14 Bethany Phillips-Peddlesden, “‘A stronger man and more virile character’”: Australian Prime Ministers, Embodied Manhood and Political Authority in the early 20th Century’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 48, 2017, p.510. The phrase quoted is Phillips-Peddlesden’s evaluation of Deakin’s political style; I’m indebted to Michele Matthews, biographer of Sir John Quick, for drawing it to my attention. On Deakin’s gendered identity in relation to self-government, see Marilyn Lake, “‘The Brightness of Eyes and Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American’”: Alfred Deakin’s Identification with Republican Manhood’, *Australian Historical Studies* vol. 38, no. 129, 2007.
- 15 *Argus*, 18 June, 1887, p. 5.
- 16 *Argus*, 18 June 1887, p. 5f. Deakin deployed this theme in all the speeches he made at welcome banquets and parliamentary speeches in the several weeks after his return.
- 17 For extended considerations of the role gender played in the self-formation of political subjects, and in the public rhetoric of late 19th-century colonial democracy in Australia, see especially Marilyn Lake, whose multiple publications on the subject are referred to in her *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2019. See also Melissa Bellanta’s contributions, including ‘A Man of Civic Sentiment: The Case of William Guthrie Spence’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 2008.

- 18 'Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.' Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself' (1855).
- 19 Richard E.N. Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia* (London, 1883), Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973, p. 221.
- 20 David Kemp, *A Free Country*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2019, p. 19.
- 21 *Argus*, editorial, 27 May 1887, p. 5a.
- 22 John Rickard, *H.B. Higgins: The Rebel as Judge*, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1984, pp. 88–9 and p. 55.
- 23 Kemp, *A Free Country*, p. 17, and chapter 1, *passim*.
- 24 Higinbotham, *Victoria Parliamentary Debates*, 1869, p. 1829, quoted in Denis Grundy, *Secular, Compulsory and Free: The Education Act of 1872*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972, p. 11.
- 25 Higinbotham, *Argus*, 6 February 1858, quoted in Stuart Macintyre, *A Colonial Liberalism: The Lost World of Three Victorian Visionaries*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 134.
- 26 Kemp, *A Free Country*, p. 17.
- 27 Quotes drawn from Higinbotham's obituary, *Argus*, 2 February 1892, pp. 5–6.
- 28 McIntyre, *A Colonial Liberalism*, p. 32.
- 29 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 2, lines 750–798.
- 30 Higinbotham obituary, *Argus*, 2 February 1892, pp. 5–6.
- 31 Judith Brett on native-born Australians as Deakin's critical support base, in *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2017, p. 201.
- 32 *Australasian*, 17 May 1873, quoted in Macintyre, *A Colonial Liberalism*, p. 15.
- 33 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 8, line 380.
- 34 Higinbotham's obituary, *Argus*, 2 February 1892, pp. 5–6.
- 35 See Macintyre, *A Colonial Liberalism*, pp. 32–4 for Higinbotham's 'antipathy to mobs.'
- 36 *Age*, 18 June 1887.
- 37 *Age*, 18 June 1887.
- 38 *Age*, 18 June 1887.
- 39 See John Hirst, 'Egalitarianism', in his *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, Melbourne, Black Ink, 2005, especially pp. 172–3 for 'the democracy of manners' in Australian life.



**Ellen Mulcahy in the garden at 'Garra-Cloyne' 179 Royal Parade, Royal Park**  
Photo dated 1908 (Courtesy of John A. Mulcahy, historian, Co. Cork, in 2012)

## 'Open the Doors!'

### Ellen Mulcahy and the Victorian Education Department from 1873

*Wendy Dick*

#### **Ellen Mulcahy (1859–1920)**

Among post-Famine Irish families who made the long voyage to a new life in colonial Victoria was the Mulcahy family of County Cork.<sup>1</sup> John Mulcahy and his wife Bridget Connell arrived in Victoria in November 1864 with their two little girls—four-year-old Ellen and two-year-old Catherine (Kate). They had lost baby Timothy from debility on the voyage out, but he was always included in years to come in family records of births or deaths.

This article focuses on the early experiences of Ellen in a 30-year teaching career with the Victorian Education Department, dating from 1873 to 1905.<sup>2</sup> Her years as a pupil teacher and then in her first placement as a registered government appointee thus coincided exactly with the passing of the Education Act 1872 (Victoria 447) on 17 December 1872 and the inauguration of the Victorian Education Department from 1 January 1873.

Some of the situations Ellen Mulcahy encountered exemplified what many young women entering teaching would have faced and form a kind of first-hand record. But some challenges and how she as an individual dealt with them are more remarkable, considering her youth and her determination. Her long service as a government primary-school teacher was to be followed by years of intensive political, industrial and social activism till her death in 1920. For Ellen Mulcahy, it was *not* to be a quiet retirement.<sup>3</sup>

In brief, from around 1906 she continued an active concern for the wellbeing of children and families by almost immediately becoming a Children's Court Probation Officer. Later, during World War I, she would take up voluntary work for soldiers and their families in 'home front' projects.

It was, however, in Labor politics and in the industrial organisation of workers that she would assume leadership roles. She became an office-bearer of the Women's Organising Committee and then a member of the Political Labor Council (PLC) Central Executive, its Minute Secretary and Press Correspondent. She founded several unions for women workers, advocated for men in heavy metal and farm machinery industries, and was writer of 50 or so by-lined articles in *Labor Call*. Mulcahy campaigned across Melbourne for the 1910 federal elections, culminating in a women's meeting that she had booked in at the Melbourne Town Hall. In these elections, the Labor Party would be victorious as the world's first majority labour government. She then campaigned across Victoria for Labor in the 1911 state elections, when women, for the first time, could vote and stand as candidates for this state. Her political involvement peaked in 1913 when she rebelled against the denial of women's equal pay rights and their low status, both in general and at the Trades Hall, and she became one of only six women up to that time to stand for federal parliament, 30 years before the first two were elected.

The outline of Ellen Mulcahy's later activism adds another dimension to this account of her earliest years as a young teacher in colonial Victoria. Her experiences, from 1873, might point to the development of qualities that were later evident in visiting workers on the wharves, booking a Town Hall meeting (at her own expense, initially), campaigning across Victoria, writing on economics, recording minutes of Political Labor Council Executive meetings, and successfully organising a union for women that set up a workers' self-help co-operative.

### **Taking up a Teaching Career**

By 1865, the Mulcahy family settled in Kilmore, an inland town about 40 miles from Melbourne with a strongly Celtic population.<sup>4</sup> There, John established his boot- and shoe-making business at the main street location that was both home and workplace, and Bridget bore four more children. The parents sought a good education and secure careers for their children, hopes that imbued the lives of many townsfolk, as shown in the existence of half a dozen schools (including Roman Catholic, Church of England and Presbyterian) at the time when the Victorian government passed the Education Act of 1872 and established the new Education Department.<sup>5</sup>

The influx of population to Victoria during the gold rush, together with the ideas of mid to late nineteenth-century liberalism, placed the

education of ‘the rising generation’ high on the agenda. The challenge was to build and staff schools across the whole colony.

Away from main settlements, the husband-and-wife teacher partnership was practical and common, where the wife, who may not actually have passed any examinations, could be the designated ‘Work Mistress’ and teacher of younger children. Ellen Mulcahy was to encounter two instances of this employment situation as challenges in her own earliest placements.

Teaching was accepted as a natural role for women. But, as Farley Kelly in her 1983 PhD thesis and Marjorie Theobald in her highly regarded book, *Knowing Women*, demonstrate persuasively, for some women (and Kelly names Ellen Mulcahy at the head of one list) a teaching career proved formative in developing communication skills and independent thought and action that might later be employed in political activism.<sup>6</sup>

Note must be made of the remarkable achievement of the Education Department in the keeping of records. Even allowing for losses from the ravages of time, substantial files of employment, attendances and examinations, student assessment, school building, and ‘special cases’ are available for study, nowadays at the Public Record Office, which took over the well-kept documents from the Department’s History Unit.<sup>7</sup>

With the advent of the Education Department, the transition from Common Schools and Denominational Schools to State Schools took several years to complete. The most important influence in Kilmore education was the parish priest. Father Michael Farrelly was one of those fabled Irish priests who worked tirelessly in his wide pastorate, from 1870 until his death in October 1906 ‘still in harness’, in the words of his people.<sup>8</sup>

On 31 July 1873, Father Farrelly addressed the Education Department Secretary from Roman Catholic School No. 358 Girls, thus: ‘I have the honour to appoint Ellen Mulcahy as pupil teacher in the above school. She is a very clever smart girl and for a considerable time trained to teach classes in the low standards.’<sup>9</sup>

Ellen was officially appointed from 1 November 1873, during the transition period before the new state school was opened. She was then 13 years and 11 months (almost a year younger than her age as shown on her Department record).<sup>10</sup>

On 7 January 1875 Ellen wrote to the Education Department about her salary. This letter is probably the earliest writing of hers to survive.

I was appointed as fourth class pupil teacher in No.358 School on the third of November 1873. I have received no salary for the two months in that year, but I have received it every month in 1874. I would be thankful to you if you would send it to me if it is due to me or else an explanation of it.

Please answer this letter

I remain your obedient servant

Ellen Mulcahy Kilmore<sup>11</sup>

The Education Department Secretary replied that she had not passed the exam. This led to the first crisis of her teaching career. She had been given the wrong Pupil Teacher exam (level 3 instead of level 4) and indeed had not as yet passed. The Roman Catholic School No. 358 closed on 30 April 1875 and the new State School No. 1568 opened on 1 May 1875—*without* Ellen on the staff. She was shattered. Her letter this time was addressed to ‘The Minister of the Education Department’: ‘I hope you will be kind enough to consider this as it is a very serious matter to myself. I thought when I got the letter that I was transferred and I was glad but I was very sorry when I found it was not.’<sup>12</sup>

Another element of pressure was now used—the appeal to the support or patronage of a significant member of the local community.<sup>13</sup> In the small communities of colonial Victoria, citizens seeking positions for themselves or their family could have ready access to their Member of Parliament. Personal visits, conversations in the street, letters and petitions were common means of appeal. As a bootmaker in the main street, Ellen’s father might have found a ready ear open to a request for support.

On 30 April 1875, fellow Roman Catholic, Thomas Hunt MLA, approached the Minister on Ellen’s behalf:

If there is a vacancy I should like her request would be conceded, as she is an active industrious good girl, her parents residing in this town. If it is not possible to appoint her to the Kilmore State School perhaps provision would be made to locate her in some other school in the immediate neighbourhood, as she is very young and would like to be near her parents.<sup>14</sup>

Hunt received the same reply, that she had not passed the required exam. Father Farrelly then seized the opportunity to re-establish a Catholic

school—at Beveridge, about ten miles from Kilmore—and appointed Ellen to take charge from 19 October 1875. She was not yet sixteen.

The Education Department continued to hear of and from Ellen Mulcahy. At Beveridge, Ellen found herself in unwelcome competition with the Wall family, who had charge of the school that was now the state school. This was her first professional encounter with a husband-and-wife teaching team. It seems that her school took nineteen of the state school pupils.<sup>15</sup> The Walls had been in the district for some years, had a very large family (eleven children at that stage) and a hotel!<sup>16</sup> Thomas Wall defended this arrangement, declaring that his ‘present salary [was] entirely inadequate to meet their needs, since the Catholic School [had] opened’ and ‘he had been unnecessarily opposed by another school’.<sup>17</sup> Ellen continued teaching her school of up to twenty pupils, completed her Licence to Teach and then submitted her official application form for an Education Department position.<sup>18</sup>

As I have now passed the examination for a License to teach I consider that I have strong claims to a position as I was a Pupil Teacher receiving aid from the Board for 16 months in the No.358 Girls school in Kilmore. I would take a Head Teachership in a small country school or assistant in any school. I hope that this ... will receive due consideration which my case deserves and that I will be favoured with an appointment within a short period.<sup>19</sup>

Kilmore citizens continued their letters in support of Ellen’s claims. The Police Magistrate (Arthur P. Akehurst, Church of England) wrote:

The father of Ellen Mulcahy an applicant for employment in the Education department having applied to me for a recommendation, I beg to say that I believe her to be an intelligent and respectable young woman and I shall be pleased to hear of her having obtained a permanent position under your department. The way in which she appears to have improved herself augurs well, I venture to think, for her success in teaching others.<sup>20</sup>

The delays continued, with the Department inundated by applications backed by supporters. From Kilmore, several other prominent citizens sent in letters of support for Ellen Mulcahy, and the local Member, Thomas Hunt, continued his involvement with a visit to the Education Department’s Melbourne office.

Alfred Sugden, whose business interests in the region included a tannery that connected him to Ellen's bootmaker father, directed his letter to W.H. Handfield, then Education Department Secretary but also prominent in Melbourne's cricket scene. This letter is worth quoting in full as a gem of colonial social stratification:

An old neighbour of mine has called upon me and requested me to write you relative to a Daughter of his Ellen Mulcahy who has applied to the Education Department for employment under the Board the Father is under the impression that a note from me to you would be of service to the applicant in obtaining an appointment. I have known the family for a number of years they are considered poor but I do know them to be honest & industrious with a large family—if you can use your influence in the matter of an appointment for the applicant *without prejudice to yourself* you will be conferring a boon upon I believe a deserving young woman who has up to the present time conducted herself most properly and who is a great credit to her parents up to the present time and

Obliging your well wisher

Alfred Sugden

PS an Old Member of M C C<sup>21</sup>

The flood of appeals for special consideration from keen young would-be teachers or for clerical and other positions in the growing civil service can be seen to have led to the Victorian 1883 Act (773) where the Preamble declares that 'it is expedient and highly desirable to abolish all patronage with respect to appointments and promotions in the public service' and which in clauses 43 and following established (for teachers) the Committee of Classifiers and the Classified Roll.

In July 1876, Ellen wrote again to the Secretary in what can only be described as a very bold tone: 'Hoping that I will receive due consideration and that this will be the last time that I will have to trouble the Department for the same thing.'<sup>22</sup>

The Minister of Public Education, Robert Ramsay, did at last step in, after more appeals from Kilmore on Ellen's behalf. Ramsay's response, written inside Ministerial Office linen-weave stationery, has been glued down but, as the paper is translucent, it can be read!

Dear Mr Venables [*Secretary of the Education Department*]  
 Let this girl be appointed to some school as soon as possible. She  
 will go anywhere.  
 R.R.<sup>23</sup>

Ellen was about to set off ‘anywhere’ to her first appointment as an Education Department Assistant Teacher to Panmure State School No. 1079 in remote south-west Victoria from 1 October 1876. She was then not yet seventeen years of age. Panmure, about 16 miles east of Warrnambool, was a Cobb and Co. stopping point with a farming and timber-cutting population of about 450.<sup>24</sup>

Briefly, at Panmure she was not welcome, as Head Teacher Lowe strove to have his wife appointed Assistant and Work Mistress.<sup>25</sup> His wife, however, bore nine children and so was not always available for employment, though the main barrier in the eyes of the Department was that she was not qualified.

Ellen faced the added problem that the public-spirited head teacher, fully involved in town life, had incurred the antipathy of the most prominent local squatter.<sup>26</sup> Correspondence files show that Ellen became caught in the midst of this dispute. Compounding these problems was the fact that, in less than one year at Panmure, Ellen found herself in the position faced by many of the new Education Department female staff—that of having nowhere suitable to live. From Panmure, her record carries the following note from 1877:

To be transfd in consequence of information having been recd of indiscreet conduct on the part of Miss Mulcahy which has caused a scandal in the neighbourhood but which was not considered by the Department sufficient to necessitate an investigation.<sup>27</sup>

She was to be transferred on 15 September 1877. What had she done? The situation bears out Marjorie Theobald’s identification of the Education Department’s quandary in trying to staff its schools when ‘the very notion of a young unmarried woman, unchaperoned and in pursuit of a livelihood, violated understandings of womanhood at the deepest level.’<sup>28</sup>

Key letters from this crisis at Panmure are registered, but missing from their place in the archives. Digging and delving revealed to me that the problem was, indeed, one of accommodation. It was the letter of resignation from Ellen’s successor at Panmure that revealed what Ellen had done. On 9 November 1877, less than three months after Ellen’s departure, Miss R.E. Neil wrote:

The people I have been with till now are unable to accommodate me any longer; there is no other place but the Hotel for me to go to, to which I entirely object unless I follow the course of my predecessor which is very undesirable.<sup>29</sup>

From Panmure, Ellen was posted to State School No. 502 Pleasant Creek, Stawell, one of the largest outside Melbourne, headed by a dynamic, competent man, Richard Zerubabel Davies.<sup>30</sup> From that time in late 1877, her immediate family (John and Bridget and their then five children) moved from Kilmore to Stawell and were to live together or very near each other in Stawell and then in inner Melbourne for the rest of Ellen's life.

This is not to suggest that all was rosy for Ellen from Stawell onwards. Her career advanced very slowly, as was common for women teachers. Promotions and the opportunity to be allowed to teach the 'extra subjects'—for which there was both added respect and monetary reward—were beyond her reach in the male-dominated system. She suffered times of severe ill health, including eye problems at Stawell where a type of conjunctivitis was endemic, and, later in Melbourne, severe pyonephrosis. Professionally, she survived several incidents involving head teachers and district inspectors, where justice seems to have prevailed in her favour.

## Conclusion

Early in this article, I made note of the importance of the Education Department records maintained over all these 150 years. I leave you with a final and remarkable fact from the Department's files. When Ellen Mulcahy retired on her pension after 30 years and 28 days service on 30 April 1905, her record was altered by the Department to 3 June 1905 and she was granted additional leave on half pay.

There seems to be some doubt as to whether Miss Mulcahy recd payment for the period 1 Nov to 31 Dec '73. To get over the difficulty it is recommended that Miss Mulcahy be granted leave on half pay for the period 1st May to 3rd June 05.<sup>31</sup>

The Victorian Education Department had proved to have both a very long memory and very good records.

## Notes

- 1 For biographical details of family from County Cork, the voyage to the colony of Victoria and life in Kilmore, Victoria, see Ruth Wendy Dick, 'Ellen Mulcahy: A Study of Her Work and Life in the Context of Her Times', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2012.
- 2 Teacher Record No. 6314, Ellen Mulcahy, Teacher Record Books, Education Department, VPRS 13718, Public Record Office Victoria, Melbourne (PROV).
- 3 See: Wendy Dick, 'Ellen Mulcahy (1859-1920)', in Judith Smart and Shurlee Swain (eds), 'The Encyclopaedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth Century Australia', Australian Women's Archives Project, 2014, at <https://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>.
- 4 See, for example, Walter Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, Melbourne, Polding Press, 1973, pp. 97–116.
- 5 Parliament of Victoria, *Fourth Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1865*, Melbourne, John Ferres, Government Printer, 1866.
- 6 Farley Kelly, 'The "Woman Question" in Melbourne 1880–1914', PhD thesis, Monash University, 1983, p. 226; Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth Century Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- 7 Note work of Neville Drummond, first Education Department History Officer, and his successor, Catherine Herrick.
- 8 Rev. W. Ebsworth, 'Kilmore's Pastor for Thirty-Six Years,' (Fr Michael Farrelly), *Advocate* (Melbourne), 30 October 1946, p. 15.
- 9 VPRS 794/P, Unit 74, File 73/21494, PROV.
- 10 Author holds copy of baptismal record from National Library of Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers.
- 11 VPRS 794/P, Unit 185, File 75/524, PROV.
- 12 VPRS 892/P, Unit 29, Special Case 476, File 75/14384, 29 April 1875, PROV.
- 13 See, for example, Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1978, especially chapter 5, for how the patronage system operated and the intention of the 1883 Public Service Act Vic No.773 to minimise the power of patronage.
- 14 Special Case 476, File 75/14385, 30 April 1875, PROV.
- 15 J.W. Payne, *The History of Beveridge*, Kilmore, Lowden Publishing, 1974, p. 9.
- 16 Teacher Records, No. 2144, Sarah Wall, and No. 2145, Thomas Wall, VPRS 13718. See also their case from July 1872 to January 1879 in VPRS 892/P, Unit 28, Special Case 455, PROV.
- 17 VPRS 892/P, Unit 28, Special Case 455, 1 and 6 January 1876.
- 18 VPRS 892/P, Unit 28, Special Case 455, 8 March 1876.
- 19 VPRS 794/P, Unit 293, File 76/8431, PROV.
- 20 VPRS 794/P, Unit 293, File 76/8431, PROV.
- 21 Sugden, letter to Handfield, 10 May 1876, as punctuated: VPRS 794/P, Unit 316, File 2384/76/17192, PROV.
- 22 Ellen Mulcahy, letter from Beveridge, dated 25 July 1876, VPRS 794/P, Unit 340, File 76/26501, PROV.
- 23 VPRS 794/P, Unit 352, File 2384/76/32382, registered 11 September 1876, PROV. This document consists of a heavily-worked cover sheet with Ramsay's note glued to it.

- 24 Pauline Flynn provided copies of *Warrnambool Almanac 1879* and of Dedy Friebe *et al.*, *School on the Rise: Panmure Primary School 1079: Celebrating 125 Years of Service to the Panmure Community, 1870–1995*, Panmure (Victoria), Collett Bain and Gaspers, 1995. As this was a first appointment, Ellen's fares (£1 15s) were paid by the Education Department: VPRS 794/P, Unit 358, File 76/35027, PROV.
- 25 Teacher Record No. 1214, Thomas Lowe, and Teacher Record No. 1461, Mary Ann Lowe, VPRS 13718, PROV.
- 26 Robert Vickers, seven-page letter to Minister of Public Instruction, 18 October 1879, VPRS 640/P, Unit 650, File 79/41125, PROV.
- 27 Teacher Record No. 6314, Ellen Mulcahy, VPRS 13718, PROV.
- 28 Theobald, p. 166.
- 29 R.E. Neil resigns from Education Department, 9 November 1877, VPRS 794/P, Unit 461, File 77/42810, PROV.
- 30 Miss Mulcahy left Panmure on Friday evening 14 September and commenced teaching at Stawell on Monday 17 September: see VPRS 794/P, Unit 451, Files 77/36368 and 77/36012. See also: Teacher Record No. 645, Richard Zerubabel Davies, VPRS 13718, PROV.
- 31 Ellen Mulcahy, retirement documents 1905, VPRS 640/P, Unit 66, File 05/4009, PROV.

# The Church of England Denominational School at Little Eltham

*Geoffrey A. Sandy*

## **Abstract**

*This is a short history of the Church of England Denominational School at Little Eltham, which opened 15 August 1853 and closed in 1872.<sup>1</sup> It is a salutary tale of what can go wrong with the provision of education. This is especially so for children from a relatively poor area. The Victorian Education Act 1872 provided for free, compulsory and secular education in all state schools. Mercifully the withdrawal of state aid from non-state schools ended the Eltham denominational school. It should have happened sooner—but even then, the Church of England committee fought to save the school. In their desperation they appear to have denied it was a church school at all.*

## **Background**

The first school of any substance established in Eltham was the Church of England Denominational School. It commenced with 30 enrollees. During 1863 the new Board of Education allocated it school number 371.<sup>2</sup> The land on which it was built was donated by Josiah Holloway, a colonial property developer who was Church of England by religion. It was situated in Swan Street, which runs westward of the Diamond Creek. The location was on the south side of the street opposite present day Fay Street, in the area known as Little Eltham.<sup>3</sup> The separate government-surveyed village reserve of Eltham was south of Dalton Street.

The Swan Street land was vested in trustees, and it was to be used for Church of England educational purposes. Until 1861, when St Margaret's Church of England, Eltham, opened for Divine Service, the management of the school was overseen by St John's, Heidelberg. After that it was managed locally by the Eltham church committee. Before 1861 the Church of England inhabitants of Eltham met in a rented house or made the long trek to St John's, Heidelberg.

On 20 September 1852 Bishop Perry, the first Church of England Bishop of Melbourne, wrote to the Denominational School Board (DSB) regarding a planning application prepared by the Rev. Francis Hale, minister at St John's. It requested aid to build a school room and for a grant of £80 per annum for a teacher for Eltham. Aid was granted. The school room was a building 24 feet by 24 feet, with six windows hung on pivots and estimated to cost from £150 to £170. It was built by Thomas Hunniford who, after 1855, ran the Eltham post office with his wife. He was also a member of the Eltham Church of England committee.

On 17 October 1853 Thomas Hunniford applied for aid to construct a teacher's dwelling at Eltham. The cost amounted to £100 supplemented by £50 to be raised locally for a three-roomed building of slabs and shingles. It took many months to acquire the grant. Eventually the teacher's house was built.<sup>4</sup>

The non-denominational Eltham National School (later Eltham Common School and from 1873 Eltham State School) opened three years later, during 1856. It was situated in Dalton Street, east of Diamond Creek.<sup>5</sup> This was in a central position for the developing Eltham township in the 1850s. Over time, the centre of Eltham progressively moved further northwards, following first the new post office and later the railway station. As a result, the current-day Eltham Primary School in Dalton Street now finds itself south of the main business area of Eltham.

One or more small schools were established in Eltham around this time. All were short lived. David Clark and his sister Catherine established their first school in 1855. Both were schoolteachers and members of the Church of England at Eltham. David was a member of the church committee and later served in many roles, including treasurer. The Clarks' school was not a denominational school. They sought assistance from the National School Board. Their schoolroom was a slab and bark hut built by Thomas Hunniford in Henry Street, Eltham.<sup>6</sup>

Later the Clarks taught at the Dalton Street School, after their school ceased to operate. David was headmaster there for many years. Chief Inspector of Schools, Arthur Bedford Orlebar, visited the Dalton Street School and prepared a report of the school and staff. He reported, 'Of Mr Clark I cannot pass him as coming up to the full standard of a probationer. He promises however to pursue a course ... if the commissioners take him into their service'. He continued, 'With reference to Catherine, she makes a promise similar to that of her brother'.<sup>7</sup> Orlebar had visited Dr

Robert and Mrs Martin, wealthy squatters who lived at the Viewbank homestead, on his way to Eltham. The Martins vouched for the moral and religious character of the Clarks.<sup>8</sup>

As an aside, Orlebar had been appointed Secretary to the National School Board in June 1854 and Chief Inspector in 1856. He was well credentialled with qualifications in mathematics and natural philosophy. He was a central figure in the development of the Victorian National educational system.<sup>9</sup> His main concern was about poor teaching skills. This is reflected in his many reports as inspector, so his comments about the Clarks are consistent with this.

### **The Salutory Tale**

Here begins the sad and salutory tale of the Eltham Denominational School. It is a case study of a school beset with problems, many of its own making. The withdrawal of state aid following the passing of the Education Act 1872 ended its existence. As parish archivist and historian of St Margaret's Anglican Church, Eltham, I was the first to document its history, which had been lost for over 100 years. It seems the church had expunged knowledge of the school from its corporate memory.

### **Feuding Neighbours**

Frederick Falkiner was a troublemaker who feuded with numerous Elthamites over many years. Bad blood existed between him and Thomas Hunniford. Both claimed adherence to the Church of England.<sup>10</sup> On 13 April 1854 Falkiner wrote to the educational authorities in Melbourne complaining about the poor state of the schoolhouse and about the church's building committee. He instanced the shoddy workmanship of Hunniford, implying a lack of proper oversight by the committee. Two days later the minister at St John's, Heidelberg, stated that in his opinion the charge by Falkiner was frivolous and vexatious. And so it was judged to be—not good for morale. The poor relations between Falkiner and several Church of England men continued for many years.

At the June 1860 meeting of the church committee, Charles Wingrove moved and Thomas Hunniford seconded a motion that Frederick Edward Falkiner be precluded from becoming a subscriber to the church building fund. The motion was carried unanimously.<sup>11</sup> The committee members were leading men whose children probably attended the school. Wingrove has been called the grand old man of Victorian

local government.<sup>12</sup> Another leading man on the committee was Henry Dendy, best known as the founder of Brighton although he spent more time in Eltham. Feuding neighbours and parents at the denominational school contributed to its poor culture, which persisted.

### **Revolving Door of Teaching Staff**

The founding head teacher, John Hughes, was sacked on 2 October 1854. This may have been triggered by a charge of doctoring the numbers on his roll. Soon afterwards, the DSB received correspondence from the parents at the school asking that he be reinstated. This was ignored and James Murdoch was appointed head teacher. In 1855 the head teacher was changed again, and William Clarke was appointed. Then during 1856 Harriet Hunt replaced Clarke. On 29 January the Rev. James Lynar (St John's, Heidelberg) commented that the sewing mistress of the school was about to resign and added that if she did not, he would retire from school management. He obviously had a very negative opinion of the sewing teacher.

After a damning report of the school by Inspector Henry Sassel during 1861, the head teacher George Rogers was to be sacked. The Dean of Melbourne sent to the DSB a petition from 81 persons of Eltham expressing regret at the contemplated removal. The petition was ignored, and Rogers was sacked. Until it closed in 1872 there may have been as many as four other head teachers appointed who were sacked or who resigned. Dr Short, a Mr Atkinson and John Johnstone were three of them. In its death throes (July 1872) the school committee appointed James Walker. He wisely refused to take up his position. Between 1853 and 1872 the school had eight head teachers, nine if you count Walker. There was no continuity of teaching staff, and the 'revolving door' of staff indicates something was very wrong with the school.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to George Rogers, his sacking caused a stir within the church committee and the wider church community. Alfred Armstrong wrote to the chairman Henry Dendy on 9 October 1861 resigning from the church committee.<sup>14</sup> He listed the treatment of Rogers as one of two reasons for doing so, referring to Rogers's declining years, that Rogers's wife was ill and that he had suffered a loss of character and was without friends. He believed Rogers had a strong claim to the sympathy of the committee, which evidently was lacking.

## Non-viable Numbers of Pupils

The number of pupils determined school funding. Viability was judged at an average attendance of 20. This was always a challenge for the Eltham Denominational School. At its opening in 1853, the school enrolled 14 boys and 16 girls and claimed an average attendance of 7 boys and 13 girls. In 1854 enrolments again numbered 14 boys and 16 girls, with an average attendance of 7 and 8 respectively. On 20 December 1856 the Rev. James Lynar requested the DSB not to withdraw aid from the school although the average attendance had again fallen below 20. Viability continued to present a problem until 1872. In early June 1871 John Johnstone, the head teacher, wrote in desperation to the DSB to explain away the non-viable numbers. His main point was that the Diamond Creek was a natural barrier and he claimed that in times of flood it rose 3 to 17 feet over the bridge, and during such times school attendances fell. I am unsure if any such floods were experienced at this time. I doubt they presented a major problem for attendance over the nineteen years of the school's existence. Johnstone also questioned whether the official attendance figures were accurate. The school inspector John Sircom was unsympathetic. He did not believe the Diamond Creek was a natural barrier. He pointed out that there was no need for two schools in Eltham, with the implication that the denominational school should go in favour of the common school at Dalton Street. The inspector pointed out that the denominational school had been closed for the first four months of 1871 anyway.<sup>15</sup>

## Lack of Funds

The non-viable number of pupils impacted on the provision of funds to operate the school in two main ways. First, the Denominational Schools Board could withdraw or lower teachers' salaries, and this is what was experienced in this case. It probably contributed to excessive staff turnover and no doubt to falling morale. Second, the loss of state funds was compounded by the non-payment of fees by the parents of the school. During the headship of James Murdoch, the fees collected amounted to £44 13s. It was certified that six children were unable to pay the fee.<sup>16</sup>

The property subcommittee of the church committee visited the school in the afternoon of 6 August 1860, noting in its minutes that the master was present. The main findings were that the schoolhouse was in a very dilapidated state, that average attendance was above 20 scholars,

that the master was paid £100 per annum and the teacher £40, and that the fee paid by each child varied from threepence to ninepence per week. It noted that there had been a visit from the inspector a week earlier. It did not mention in the minutes that the inspector had written a damning report of the school after an earlier visit, during May 1860.<sup>17</sup>

### Poor Educational Performance

It is not surprising, given the persistent problems, that the school performed very badly academically. On 21 March 1861, Inspector Henry Sassel visited the Church of England Denominational School at Little Eltham. Two reports concerning the school are extant with different dates, but essentially they convey the same meaning.<sup>18</sup> Sassel's report was sent to the Very Rev. the Dean of Melbourne, who managed the Church of England denominational schools, by Richard Hale Budd, secretary of the DSB. The salutation reads, 'I have the honor, in compliance with a recent order of the Board, to forward to you the last Report upon the Church of England School at Eltham. I have the honor to be, Very Rev sir your most obedient Servant.' Incidentally, it seems Bishop Perry did not have a good opinion of the inspectorate at any time.

Sassel's report is on a standard form filled out by the inspector and addressing eight areas. First, buildings, of which the entry reads: *bad, building had apparatus insufficient. Books very much needed.* Second area, apparatus: *insufficient books very much wanted.* Third, organisation: *as well as premises and the want of books will permit. The school appears very much neglected by the previous teacher.* Fourth, instruction: *At present the instruction is very elementary and does not meet the Board's programme.* Fifth, discipline: *Of discipline the Rev Mr Bertram says it is better it should still improve.* Sixth, methods: *mixed.* Seventh, teachers: *Mr Rogers is not competent to teach children above the age of eight.* Eighth, special: *As to the roll care should be taken that the Christian names are correctly spelled.*<sup>19</sup>

The denominational school lacked good quality teachers and facilities, parents were at times disunited, and proper funding was lacking. It is not surprising this was reflected in poor academic performance.

## The Passing of the Education Act 1972

The writing was on the wall for the Church of England school at Little Eltham. With the withdrawal of state aid, the denominational school could not survive—perhaps did not deserve to survive. And yet St Margaret’s Church of England committee fought on to save it. On 15 October 1871 Alfred Armstrong on behalf of the committee wrote to the Board of Education. He stressed the inconvenience for many of the children if the school closed. Inspector Sircom was unimpressed with the argument. The committee put to the Board the idea that the denominational school and the common school (Dalton Street) should both be closed; Eltham residents would then be asked to contribute funds to build a new school, central to all of Eltham. Inspector Sircom and the Board of Education expressed opposition to this proposal.

The church committee seemed confused. A letter dated 20 April 1872 to the Board, signed by Alfred Armstrong and including Walter Wippell and Isaac Briggs, stated that it would be impossible for local people to raise such funds for a centrally located Eltham school: a contradiction to what was formerly proposed. The vicar of St Margaret’s, the Rev. Andrew Brown, also wrote to the Board of Education on 25 June 1872. He too argued about the inconvenience to local families if the denominational school closed. Then, in what amounts to an own goal, he quite revealingly claimed, ‘The school is not a church school, where the catechism is taught and cannot be made so ... being attended chiefly by Methodists’.

The desperation of the church committee to keep the school open continued with the proposed appointment of James Eccleston Walker to replace John Johnstone, who ceased duty on 31 July 1872. Walker was to commence duties on 10 August. Wisely he refused to take up the position. It was reported that in January 1873 an attempt was made to re-open the denominational school by the school committee. That proved unsuccessful.<sup>20</sup>

The 1872 Act hastened the end of this poorly performing denominational school, and others like it. It helped eliminate the duplication and waste of educational resources, in Eltham and elsewhere. Attendance at a state school was free and mandatory for children, and so provided greater educational opportunities. It helped mitigate but not eliminate the divisiveness based on religious intolerance.

## Postscript

At the 1 March 1876 meeting of St Margaret's church committee, the chairman the Rev. Arthur James Pickering stated he had requested the attendance of Isaac Briggs, who was a trustee both of the school and of the land originally donated by Josiah Holloway.<sup>21</sup> He inquired as to whether something might be done with the school building. Briggs replied that he was willing for its sale or removal. The other trustee, the Rev. Canon Hales, who was absent from the meeting, believed it would cost more to remove it than it was worth. The committee decided to put to tender its removal. William Andrew, a cousin of Henry Dendy and a fellow church committee member, was the only tenderer. He tendered £10 to remove it. He then promptly donated the £10 back to the church.

It seemed that St Margaret's Church, Eltham, expunged the existence of the denominational school from its corporate memory. This was gradually awoken in the 1970s, when the church was in financial trouble and looking to sell land. It took much time and research to discover how the church came to hold the Swan Street land, and for what purposes it was once used. It took even longer to sort out the legal difficulties before the land could be sold.<sup>22</sup> All the trustees were dead. The trust deed said that the land was to be used for Church of England educational purposes—so could it be sold at all? Eventually during 1987, after 139 years of disuse and with the legal issues resolved, the land was sold for \$56,914.67.<sup>23</sup> The funds were mainly used to pay off loans so a mud brick church hall could be built at St Margaret's. It was completed during 1978 and was dedicated by Bishop James Grant in the same year.

## Notes

- 1 The full story of the denominational school at Eltham is found in: Geoffrey A Sandy, *A History of St Margaret's Church Eltham: Volume One, The Foundation Years, Beginnings to 1888*, Eltham (Victoria), Busybird Publishing, 2014, pp. 295–304.
- 2 Keith L. Chappel, *Eltham Shire History: Research Notes, Volume 1: Public Record Office Victoria*, 'Extracts from the Correspondence Registers of the Denominational School Board, School Number 371', Eltham Library Local History Section.
- 3 Information from Russell Yeoman, Eltham District Historical Society meeting, 12 October 2022.
- 4 Chappel, Extracts.
- 5 Ian Anderson, Tarja Fellowes, and Barry Carozzi, *We Did Open a School in Little Eltham: Eltham Primary School 209, 1856–2006: A History*, Eltham (Victoria), The Learning Team, 2006.

- 6 Alan Marshall, *Pioneers and Painters: One Hundred Years of Eltham and Its Shire* Melbourne, Thomas Nelson, 1971, p. 65 ff.
- 7 Marguerite Marshall, *Nillumbik Now and Then: Eltham and Beyond*, Eltham (Victoria), Marshall, 2002, p.18.
- 8 Eltham National School Files, School Number 209, Folder 40, Eltham District Historical Society Archives.
- 9 Barry Lachlan Archibald, 'A History of Inspection in Victorian Colonial/ State Government Schools: 1852–2012', PhD thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2017, p. 66.
- 10 Sandy, Vol. 1, pp. 186–189.
- 11 Church Committee Meeting Minutes, 18 June 1860, St Margaret's Church Eltham Archives.
- 12 Marshall, p. 20.
- 13 Chappel, Extracts.
- 14 Letter of Alfred Armstrong to Henry Dendy, 9 October 1861, St Margaret's Church Eltham Archives
- 15 Chappel, Extracts.
- 16 Chappel, Extracts.
- 17 'Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Denominational School Eltham', 6 August 1860, St Margaret's Church Eltham Archives.
- 18 Denominational School Board Office, 'Report of the Church of England School at Eltham, 20 May 1861', St Margaret's Church Eltham Archives; Denominational School Board Office, 'Report of the Church of England School at Eltham, 17 September 1861', St Margaret's Church Eltham Archives.
- 19 Chappel, Extracts.
- 20 Chappel, Extracts.
- 21 Church Committee Minutes, 1 March 1876, St Margaret's Church Eltham Archives.
- 22 Geoffrey A. Sandy, *A History of St Margaret's Church Eltham: Volume Three, The Post-War Years 1945 to 2015*. Eltham (Victoria), Busybird Publishing, 2016, pp. 246–7.
- 23 Sandy, Vol. 3, p. 247.



## Catholic Reaction to the Education Act: A Case Study

*Margaret Pagone*

‘Dear Rev. Mother,  
From the ends of the earth, I write to you for help ...’

With this heartfelt plea, Father James Corbett wrote from St Mary’s Catholic parish, Dandenong Road, St Kilda, on 28 January 1873. Within the year, seven Presentation sisters had braved the journey from Limerick, Ireland, to remedy what was seen by some as a fate worse than death. Fr Corbett was desperate to save local Catholic children and, in his words, to ‘protect from infidelity and atheism the little ones for whose souls we are responsible to God’.

It may be difficult today to comprehend the anguish felt by many at what they were afraid would eventuate from this Act but the anguish was very real, as expressed by Fr Corbett. We can see from the debates in the colonial parliament of the day and public meetings, as well as in discussions within and between religious denominations and other communities, the differences in perspective in a time of perhaps greater sectarianism and at a time when religions, mainly Christian, were paramount in the lives of a majority of the Australian population.

The divisions of free, secular and compulsory cannot be mutually exclusive, so forgive me for not focusing on the matter of compulsion. The questions of who could or should be taught what and by whom, and how they were to be financed and supported, were complex indeed.

My paper is a case study examining this example of one reaction to the 1872 Education Act in the Catholic community of Melbourne. I learnt of the Act when I began my second year of teaching in 1978 at PCW—Presentation Convent (later College) Windsor—after completing a BA and Dip. Ed. at Monash University. This was the start of a very happy fourteen-year stint, and I learnt much about Nano Nagle, founder of the teaching order in Ireland, as well as the story of Mother Mary Paul Mulquin and several other nuns who had answered this call in 1873 to venture to a far-flung British colony.

I must thank a few Presentation sisters, one of whom I taught with—Sr Nola Vanderfeen—who then generously met with me, answered questions and allowed me access to their archives, including the amazing letter from Fr Corbett, which was returned to Melbourne several years ago. It has been a very exciting opportunity to see this and other primary sources. This letter itself deserves a thorough exegesis. I present it in full at the end of this paper.

Fr Corbett had a most persuasive tone. Not only did he make a plea for the assistance of ‘three or four sisters’, he offered to give over his own presbytery, which suddenly became ‘sufficiently commodious for even six sisters’; and by the next breath, he was hoping for ‘at least eight volunteers ... from your devoted community ... for this bright sunny land of the south’. Sounds very much like some of those enticing migration posters displayed in Australia House, London, in the mid-twentieth century! In the end, five nuns and two postulants arrived.

In adding that the bishop had also requested four nuns for Melbourne, Fr Corbett showed a competitive spirit in coaxing the Reverend Mother: ‘Cork recently sent several sisters to the neighbouring colony of Tasmania and I shall be very much disappointed indeed if our own old city cannot spare a few from your flourishing community’. It is fascinating to note the parochialism, not only in colonial terms but in the connections to communities of origin in the motherland, which I assume was mirrored in many other spheres.

Bishop Goold did add a paragraph approving of the application but cautioning that perhaps it would be best to wait on any volunteers for Melbourne until the ‘first community has arrived and reported to the Parent House’. A more prudent tone? A final page with his signature does not seem to be extant. I see from other sources that Fr Corbett was acting as secretary to the bishop.

Some relevant phrases of explanation in Fr Corbett’s letter include: first, that the Education Bill, recently passed, is diametrically opposed to our interests; second, that it requires that no religious instruction be imparted, at any time, in our schools; and further, with satirical edge, that we are permitted to tell the children in our schools that there exists a God—who is to reward virtue and punish vice—but even this ‘wonderful privilege we shall not be allowed to exercise for a longer period than the last day of this year’.

This clarifies what was seen by him and others, whether justified or not, as an existential crisis for a growing population. I will not attempt to detail much in this regard beyond noting the exponential increases in Victoria's European population, particularly from the 1850s. This included a high percentage of Irish Catholics—including some of my maternal ancestors who shipped out of a very poor Galway and Tipperary in the 1850s for opportunities, mainly in central Victoria.

To allude to the wider context, it seems that Bishop Goold worked tirelessly in Victoria between 1848 and his death in 1886 to establish Catholic primary, secondary and seminary education. He slowly gained help from some religious orders, although recruitment seemed difficult in the 1850s and 1860s, in part because of small communities in Ireland and competition from other parts of the world, long distance and slow travel. Faster and more frequent steamships may at last have made the prospect of such a journey more appealing. Between 1849 and 1862, Catholic schools receiving aid from the Denominational School Board increased from five to 115—in just a dozen years.<sup>1</sup> In the book *Catholic Education in Victoria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, a collection of papers from a 1985 conference held by the Catholic Education Office of Victoria on the occasion of Victoria's 150th anniversary year, Frances O'Kane Hale noted:

On his arrival ... Goold had realised that the most immediate need in education was to provide Catholic elementary schools for children of working-class parents ... He was, however, also concerned with providing a solid secular, moral and religious education for the sons and daughters of the rising Catholic middle class ... which would help them attain a social equality with their Protestant neighbours and to share with them the advantages of influence and respectability.<sup>2</sup>

I cannot here detail all the related debates and demographics but note that the politicians of the 1860s and 1870s were representative of the changing nature and influence of growing groups in Victoria, with varying sectarian or socio-economic interests. Figures such as Sir John O'Shanassy and Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, who both served as Premier of the colony, are examples of the growing strength of Catholic interests. Parliamentary debates of late 1872 record comments such as these from James Stephen, the Attorney-General: 'It does not at all follow that, because I and others

advocate secular education, therefore we undervalue religion<sup>3</sup>; and ‘I fully concur with the principle that the State has nothing to do with the teaching of religion.’<sup>4</sup> Thomas Fellows (Member for St Kilda) asked, ‘What right has the State to interfere on the subject of education? ... and to what extent that interference is justifiable, consistently with the maintenance of the proposition, already placed on our statute book, involving the existence here of perfect civil and religious liberty and equality.’<sup>5</sup>

Sr Mary Kavanagh of the Presentation sisters (now in her 90s, and someone I was also privileged to teach alongside and learn from) also presented a paper at the 1985 Catholic Education Office conference, drawn from her 1965 thesis for her degree of Master of Education at the University of Melbourne. Her paper was entitled, ‘Catholic Education in Victoria: 1872–1947’.<sup>6</sup> Her section headings are amusing as well as instructive: ‘1872, The Year of the Great Divide’; ‘Double, Double, Toil and Trouble ...’; ‘Blazing a New Trail’; ‘The Heart of the Matter’ (concerning the calibre of teachers—a whole other topic); and ‘A Man for All Seasons’—the latter on the influence of Archbishop Daniel Mannix.

In her section on ‘The Great Divide’, she notes that 1872 to many Catholics was ‘a year of disaster’, with questions of Church and State being debated and ‘the colony in a ferment of activity’. Her suggestion is that ‘any politician determined to stay afloat steered well away from the secular clause, with its capacity to stir the sectarian waters’ but that bishops such as James Quinn in Brisbane and his brother, Matthew Quinn in Goulburn, ‘anticipating the results of the secular trend throughout Australia ... had already established congregations of teaching religious in their ... dioceses’. The 1872 Act was set to change the provision of funding to Catholic schools in Victoria. So, she says, in this era, ‘began the great quest for congregations of teaching religious.’<sup>7</sup>

It was into this milieu that seven nuns from Limerick, Ireland, arrived on 21 December 1873, just a few days before Christmas. Their journey is recorded in a diary kept by Mother Mary Paul Mulquin. They left Limerick on 22 October. In her tome *Adventure in Faith: The Presentation Sisters in Victoria*, Kathleen Dunlop Kane notes ‘tearful relatives clustered around the 11 o’clock train’, and ‘so protracted was the parting that the train was half an hour late in leaving’. Most expected never to see their relatives again.<sup>8</sup>

They travelled across to Dublin and, after an overnight stay with a community there, boarded a ship named the *Windsor*—how prophetic!

They suffered a stormy passage across the Irish Sea to the port of Liverpool, where they boarded one of the relatively new, zippy steamers bound for Australia, SS *Great Britain*. Their initial sight of the ‘very large city’ of Liverpool, with its ‘astonishing ... amount of traffic’ and ‘tremendous showers of rain’, did little to encourage them on their ‘first experiment of sea life’, which she reflects ‘is not the glorious scene people say’. She continues: ‘For our part, only the thought of going for God’s glory, would reconcile us to undergo the trial.’

I was impressed by the good humour shown in the journal, even with nuns tossed about the deck or falling down staircases in storms, suffering the inevitable seasickness or the heat of the tropics. They were travelling in the saloon with a small group of ‘persons of every creed’ but did on some Sundays venture down into the ‘confined and narrow’ passages of steerage to say prayers with their ‘national emigrants’. Despite being an enclosed order, they seem to have been most spirited and practical in their dealings.

I note here a point about the foundation of their order. Honora ‘Nano’ Nagle was the daughter of a well-to-do Irish family who largely evaded the restrictions on Catholics in the early eighteenth century by living and being educated in Belgium and France. Nano returned to Ireland in her twenties, after having moved from the ‘social gaiety of life’ to begin work to ‘alleviate distress ... of poor ... in the slum quarters of Paris’. From the 1750s she began work, first in Cork, ‘for the sick, the poor and the suffering ... but also in education’. This was at a time when ‘the Law did not allow the existence of any Catholic school.’<sup>9</sup> She persisted with schools for the poor, as well as with gaining permission to establish an order of nuns.

Awaiting her nuns in Melbourne’s St Kilda, a century later, was Fr Corbett, who seems to have been a man of action, as well as of letters: a dynamic and devoted builder. From his arrival in 1863 in the colony he oversaw the building in St Kilda of a new presbytery, as well as a church that ‘must have seemed colossal in those early days’, according to the Rev. Walter Ebsworth in the chapter on St Kilda in his 1973 book, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*.<sup>10</sup> The St Kilda mission, which he described as being in an ‘aristocratic neighbourhood’, was of ‘growing importance’. It had two priests and, by 1873, ‘Fr Corbett secured the organ built by Fincham of Richmond, which had won the gold medal at the Exhibition of 1872’—a most prestigious brand. But Walter Ebsworth posits that ‘Fr Corbett’s

greatest contribution to the district was his splendid gift of Catholic education'.<sup>11</sup>

The nuns took over the primary school run in the church and also began a 'high school with 23 pupils in the presbytery'.<sup>12</sup> Moves were already afoot to purchase Turret Lodge, a Gothic mansion across the road. It was on this site that PCW buildings were adapted and built.

Of course, questions of funding—or lack thereof—were, and still are, central to the provision of education. Contemporary reports advertised the school, as well as fund-raising efforts to establish its buildings post-haste. In the *Advocate* of Saturday 17 January 1874, Fr Corbett has a letter to the editor alerting the readers to the announcement in the same journal of 'a select day school for young ladies at St Kilda'. He applauds the 'laudable generosity of ... the Order in Limerick' and the 'heroic self-sacrifice' of the Presentation sisters who were ready to 'provide a good course of secular instruction based upon religion'. Importantly, and consistent with their foundation, the point is made: 'It is the wish of the Sisters of the Presentation Order that great expense should not be a necessary attendant upon the acquisition of a thorough education', setting their terms at reasonable rates as an 'incentive'.<sup>13</sup>

The 'Town Edition' section of the *Advocate* of 7 February advertised a lecture to be given in the Athenaeum by the Rev. Woods on his 'Travels in Australia' in aid of the 'funds for providing the Presentation Nuns at St Kilda with a convent and schools'.<sup>14</sup> And in the 'Catholic Intelligence' section, a longer article appeared summarising the 'heartly and substantial welcome' given the week before to the recently arrived nuns. It reported the main address at the mass given by Fr Corbett, who spoke at length about his gratitude to the 'good Nuns ... who had stepped into the breach'. He referred to a Papal Encyclical of 1864 concerning the education of youth, which, he explained, meant that 'Catholics therefore could not participate in the present system of education'. The nuns would offer 'a general and perfect system, not a half education: they would train the whole child secularly and religiously', he said.<sup>15</sup>

All roads, this past year, have been leading me back to the Presentation sisters: this story of the foundation of PCW; agreeing

to act this year as an exam supervisor at a school in Elsternwick in what was for many years O'Neill College, a Presentation novitiate and school; and, to top it off, in reading Dr Andrew Lemon's fascinating book, *The Pebbled Beach at Pentecost*, I learnt that the nineteenth-century Brighton mansion, 'Kamesburgh', built for the Presbyterian, W.K. Thomson of McEwan's hardware fame, has recently become part of a Catholic School, Star of the Sea—founded by a then separate group of Presentation sisters.<sup>16</sup>

I hope you have found this case study of the foundation of PCW of interest. It is now, after a long and illustrious history, no more, as such. The grounds and school, along with the former Christian Brothers' College, St Kilda (also founded by Fr Corbett, who studied at CBC in Limerick), now form part of the new co-educational St Mary's College. That letter of 1873 from St Mary's parish has had a long reach.



**The Presentation Convent, Windsor**

From *The Australasian Sketcher*, 19 November 1884

## Appendix

### Transcript of letter from Father Corbett, St Kilda, to Limerick, Ireland

St Mary's  
St Kilda  
Victoria  
January 28th 1873

Dear Rev. Mother  
From the ends of the earth I write to you for help.

An Education Bill has been recently passed by our local Legislature which is diametrically opposed to our interests. It requires that no religious instruction be imparted, at any time, in our schools, either by Priest or Masters.

We are, however, permitted to tell the children in our schools that there exists a God who is to reward virtue and punish vice and, even this wonderful privilege we shall not be allowed to exercise for a longer period than the last day of this year.

What then are we to do? How are we to protect from infidelity and atheism the little ones for whose souls we are responsible to God? ...

You can contribute very materially to enable us to meet the difficulty by sending three or four Sisters, to whom I shall give my house, which is sufficiently commodious for even six Sisters, and is as convenient to the church as your convent is to your chapel; and furthermore, as soon as I hear from you I shall collect funds to have everything in order on the arrival of the Sisters ...

I am directed by the Bishop to ask you for four sisters also for Melbourne, for whom his Lordship will provide a house and schools in the city. Cork recently sent several sisters to the neighbouring colony of Tasmania and I shall be very much disappointed indeed if our own old city cannot spare a few from your flourishing community.

If I had the slightest doubt that the Sisters would not find everything to their entire satisfaction, nothing could induce me to say 'Come'. Come,

then, in God's name, and aid us to stem the torrent of irreligion against which we must wage war. I am sure that from your devoted community at least eight volunteers can be had for this bright sunny land of the south, where the hearts of the young shall be gladdened at the sight of the devoted Nuns of the Presentation.

As a guarantee of good faith, I have asked his Lordship to add his name to this letter and I remain in anxious expectation of a prompt reply which I trust will be favourable.

If the sisters provide and pay for passage to Melbourne they shall find everything to their entire satisfaction on arrival here.

I shall be much obliged if you will have the kindness to send me an immediate reply. God grant that it may be favourable.

I remain

Dear Rev. Mother,

Yours sincerely

J.F. Corbett

*[Additional note on this letter, from Bishop Goold]:*

Fr. Corbett's application for a community of the Presentation Order for his mission has my most cordial approval. The application for Melbourne I approve of but it seems to me that we can wait its acceptance until the first community has arrived and reported to the Parent House the results of their experience here, which doubtless will be most favorable. We need very much the spiritual aid of the well-known religious of the Presentation Order. If they offer themselves to this diocese for the good work to which they have consecrated themselves, I will assist them to the utmost of my ability.

J.A. Goold

Bishop of Melbourne

## Notes

- 1 *Catholic Education in Victoria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Melbourne, Catholic Education Office, 1985, p. 12.
- 2 *Catholic Education in Victoria*, p. 9.
- 3 C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History 1851–1900*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1965, p. 712.
- 4 Clark, p. 711.
- 5 Clark, p. 716.
- 6 *Catholic Education in Victoria*, pp. 21–9.
- 7 *Catholic Education in Victoria*, pp. 21, 23, 24, 25.
- 8 Kathleen Dunlop Kane, *Adventure in Faith: The Presentation Sisters in Victoria*, Melbourne, Belwood Printing Enterprises, 1974, p. 12.
- 9 Dunlop Kane, Appendix A, pp. xiii–xiv.
- 10 Walter Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, Melbourne, Polding Press 1973, pp. 470–1.
- 11 Ebsworth, p. 471.
- 12 Ebsworth, p. 471.
- 13 *Advocate*, 17 January 1874, p. 14.
- 14 *Advocate*, 7 February 1874, p. 9.
- 15 *Advocate*, 7 February 1874, p. 6.
- 16 Andrew Lemon, *The Pebbled Beach at Pentecost: A Novel*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, 2021, p. 402.

## Irish Catholic Opposition to the 1872 Education Act: The Case of Crossley

*Helen Doyle*

Addressing the Victorian Parliament in 1893, the one-time Member for Port Fairy, Thomas Bent, remarked that while driving up the Marsh Road at Crossley he had seen a Catholic school and a state school sitting side by side, only 20 feet apart, and noted that the Catholic school was full while the state school was empty. He asked the parliament, 'Are we to establish State Schools for the purpose of fighting that old boggy about the Roman Catholics? I hope not.'<sup>1</sup> Using the Crossley State School as a case in point, Bent attacked the vote allocated to public education, pointing out the waste of public money on education in some districts. According to records of the Department of Education published in 1887, the Crossley State School had an enrolment of around 14 students while the Crossley Catholic School had an attendance of 210.<sup>2</sup> In 1892, the state school had been forced to close as a result of low enrolments. In investigating why this state school had been built for a population that was almost entirely Catholic and firmly opposed to secular education, the story emerges of one community's efforts to oppose the Education Act.

Crossley was a small hamlet that was situated close to the western ridge of Tower Hill, deep in the rich volcanic potato country of south-west Victoria. The closest towns were Koroit to the northwest and Port Fairy to the west; the hamlet of Killarney lay to the southwest. Early tenant farming schemes in the 1840s had brought Irish farmers to the area. The area around Tower Hill had won fame as a rich potato-growing district and this had attracted a large Irish Catholic population. Many small hamlets had emerged around Tower Hill in the 1850s, each with its own small school. Visiting the Tower Hill district in 1857, James Bonwick had observed no fewer than five schools around the edge of the Tower Hill Lake.<sup>3</sup> A nominally Catholic school had operated at Tower Hill from 1850, which was later known as Tower Hill School No. 634 and served the population of Tower Hill, Killarney and Crossley. As a denominational school this received some government aid through the 1850s and 1860s and was also resourced by the community it served.<sup>4</sup>

Irish Catholics brought with them to Victoria a long legacy of discrimination in their own country imposed by British imperialism, which privileged the Church of England (and, in Ireland, the Church of Ireland). Irish Catholics felt a deep sense of grievance about the injustices that they and their forebears had been subject to. They had suffered the notorious penal laws, in force in Ireland from the late 1600s as a means of penalising those of the Catholic faith and suppressing the Catholic Church. These laws, which prohibited Irish Catholics from such things as speaking Irish, celebrating Mass, owning a horse of a certain value, standing for parliament, or attending university in Ireland or England (except under an oath of allegiance to the British Crown), maintained the subordination of the Irish Catholics to the Anglo-Irish and the Protestant Ascendancy. Although the penal laws were mostly repealed by 1829, their legacy was significant. The long struggle for Home Rule, which promised Ireland a measure of independence from the authority of the British, also potentially strained relations between the Irish Catholic community in Victoria and the government.

To Irish immigrants of the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, who were predominantly Catholic, Australia promised a new world of social and political progress, and religious tolerance. Victoria by the late 1850s represented a liberal democracy that was fair to all, having introduced electoral reforms, the eight-hour day, and reforms associated with land ownership. By that time, many small Irish Catholic communities across the colony had built their own schools, which educated their children within the faith. Like Crossley, these were typically church-schools, which served as a classroom during the week and as a church building on Sundays.

The Education Act of 1872, several years in the making, sought to centralise and streamline the administration of publicly funded education in Victoria. As well as providing 'free, compulsory and secular' education, the new system of public schooling was designed to be more efficient than the previous models. There had undoubtedly been inefficiencies and, indeed, a clear waste of public funds in the provision of government-funded education over the previous decades. By the late 1860s, it was a muddled system, burdened with the legacy of the National Schools system of the 1850s followed by the Common Schools system of the 1860s, with its vested and non-vested schools.

The passage of the Education Act, which put an end to the government funding of the many small denominational schools, was welcomed by many local communities. There was broad support for the proposed bill from the predominantly Protestant population, and an appreciation of the economic sense in creating one uniform and arguably more equitable system of government-funded schools. Many schools were subject to overcrowding or operated in poor quality buildings with dirt floors, poor sanitation or inadequate heating. In many cases, the promise of free education and the enticement of improved school facilities (that did not rely solely on local fund-raising) outweighed the discontent felt about the abolition of religious teaching.

The new bill was a death blow, however, to many hard-won church schools, which relied in varying degrees on government funding for their survival. For Catholics and other faith communities, there was an integral connection between church and school, between faith and education, the two elements being entwined and inseparable. The Catholic Church felt this blow the hardest, though there was also opposition from some Anglican schools. In the then largely binary world of Catholic–Protestant, many Catholics saw themselves as outside the realm of government and public office. Through that lens, the government and the Education Department were part of the Protestant world. It followed then, for many Catholics, that the new legislation was unjust and designed to weaken the influence of the Catholic Church in Victoria. For free thinkers, Orangemen and others, Roman Catholicism represented an archaic, medieval model of faith that perpetuated old divisions. The *Melbourne Argus* welcomed the secular model of education, declaring: ‘For the first time in this colony, the young will now have an opportunity of acquiring the rudiments of education unmingled with the leaven of sectarianism.’<sup>5</sup> The New World presented an opportunity to do away with the sectarianism of the Old World, but inherited prejudices and grievances made this a complex issue. The arguments of those for and against the funding for church-run schools were diametrically opposed, each infuriating the other and fueling the fire of sectarianism. There was no easy solution and no compromise that could be reached.

As historian Chris McConville has pointed out, the sectarian divide was certainly alive and well in many towns and country districts in Victoria, but this old battle line had faded to some extent in the pursuit of common goals and the celebration of local successes.<sup>6</sup> The proposed

Education Bill enflamed sectarian grievances. There are suggestions that sectarianism in fact helped to bring about the conditions written into the new legislation. The Premier at the time, James Francis, was accused of introducing the bill in 1872 because, as an Anglican, he had wanted to raise the question ‘merely to undermine his Catholic predecessor’, Charles Gavan Duffy. A hero to Irish nationalists, Gavan Duffy had been welcomed to Victoria with great fanfare, and briefly served as premier in the period 1871–72. He departed the colony in the 1880s because he could no longer tolerate the bitter sectarianism.

The Archbishop of Melbourne, James Goold, a fierce and vocal opponent of the new legislation, penned a pastoral letter that was read from the pulpit of Catholic churches across the colony in July 1872. Goold admonished the government for forcing Catholics to send their children to ‘godless schools’ under pain of imprisonment or a fine.<sup>7</sup> He declared:

They boldly and defiantly tell you it is their determination to do away with your schools, and substitute for them Godless schools, to which they will compel you, under penalty (or imprisonment) to send your children. In a word, they threaten the Catholics of the Colony, a fourth part of the entire Christian population, with religious persecution in the shape of a Godless and compulsory system of education.

Largely obedient to their church leaders, Catholics were on the whole united in their opposition to the bill. Catholic communities appear to have shown greater opposition in localities where there was a dominant Irish population and where there seemed to be some chance that an independent Catholic school was viable—for example, in Kilmore, and at Bungaree, outside Ballarat. In poorer working-class areas of Melbourne where there was no such possibility, Catholics had little choice but to move to the new state school, as was the case for example in Carlton. In some cases, local support from non-Catholics in the area helped to keep the school going. This was the case at St Mary’s Catholic School, Castlemaine, where some ‘generous and liberal-minded’ Protestants were among those subscribing to fund the Catholic school after government aid was withdrawn in 1876.<sup>8</sup>

The survival of Catholic schools rested with the large numbers of men and women from religious orders, mostly in Ireland, who arrived in Victoria from the late 1870s for the express purpose of teaching. Other

remedies were also sought. Bishop Goold formed the Catholic Education Defence Association in 1879, asking that a branch be established in every parish. In 1894, his successor as Archbishop of Melbourne, Thomas Carr, proposed that where there was a sufficient number of students in a locality to warrant a separate school, the school could be run by the state in the same way as the other 'state' schools but with the additional component of Catholic teaching, the cost of which would not be borne by the state.<sup>9</sup>

From the late 1860s, the Catholic Church and other religious groups across Victoria had argued, petitioned and lobbied against the proposed bill, which they considered a gross injustice, pointing out that if they paid taxes they should be entitled to have their schools funded in the same way as government schools. This matter was a great source of antagonism for the Catholic population, whose taxes were used to fund secular schools. Catholics made up around one-quarter of the population of Victoria, with higher numbers in particular districts. At Crossley in the late nineteenth century, the population was from 80 to 90 per cent Irish Catholic. The Catholics of Tower Hill and Belfast presented a petition against the proposed bill in 1867, adding their voices to this litany of dissent.<sup>10</sup> For this community, the new legislation would bring significant disadvantage. No longer would the community be able to operate its own school, which attracted some government aid and permitted a degree of religious teaching.

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While the Irish farming community at Tower Hill had operated its own Catholic school on Rocks Road since 1850, the survival of this school was threatened from 1872. Long before the new Education Act was passed there had been a battle brewing in Victoria over the question of government funding for religious education. This debate was as old as the colony itself but came to a head in the late 1860s and early 1870s. The new legislation instituted a new type of government school, the 'state school', and terminated all government funding of religious schools, effective from 1874. The only government-funded schools in Victoria would now be 'free, compulsory and secular'. The Crossley Catholic School figured prominently in the controversy over state aid to Catholic schools, in the late 1860s and through the 1870s. It had been placed on the Education Department's blacklist of superfluous church schools earmarked for closure.

To rationalise the large number of schools at Tower Hill, the Education Department sought to merge the Tower Hill Catholic School with another school at nearby Bridge End, which was a non-denominational school, where Catholic children were in the vast majority. This second school occupied an inferior building on low ground prone to flooding. In place of the two schools attended by Catholic children, the Education Department made plans to erect a state school. In 1873 the Department announced that it had secured a suitable site at Crossley for the new school.<sup>11</sup> In 1876 the Department finalised its purchase of a site on ‘elevated ground’ on the Marsh Road.<sup>12</sup>

By December 1877, both the Bridge End School and the Catholic school at Rocks Road, Tower Hill, had been closed.<sup>13</sup> There was now a large number of children in the vicinity of Crossley, Killarney and Tower Hill without a school—this figure was estimated at 260 students. The Catholic community actively sought an alternative school site. By early 1878 the new Crossley State School was completed at a cost of around £1500.<sup>14</sup>

William Collard Smith, known as ‘the Major’, was the Minister of Public Instruction, later Minister for Education, from 1877 to 1881. In May 1878 Smith visited Koroit, just a few kilometres from Crossley, to officially open the new Koroit State School, which had also been completed that year. His comments at the opening ceremony indicate his intolerance of any opposition to the new system of state education. In his address, Major Smith expressed his regret that ‘at the present time a considerable section of the community were opposed to the state system of education.’ He hoped that ‘before many years all would join heart and soul in the maintenance of the system’ for he ‘would not permit any interference with his administration of the act in its fullest integrity.’ He concluded his address with a firm warning that ‘No man should dare to interfere with him in carrying out the act in the spirit in which it was passed.’<sup>15</sup> Smith’s membership of the Loyal Orange Lodge and the Loyal Liberal Organisation would indicate a deeper opposition to Catholic education.

In 1878, in the absence of an alternative and in line with compulsory attendance at school, local families at Crossley, Killarney and Tower Hill had no choice but to send their children to the new state school or risk being fined. This no doubt upset many Catholics, who felt aggrieved for what they had lost: the means of educating their children within the faith.

As events unfolded, however, their children's attendance at the Crossley State School would only be brief.

The local Catholic priest, based at nearby Port Fairy, was the fiery and outspoken Father John O'Dowd. There was perhaps no one in the district more vehemently and vocally opposed than O'Dowd to the new Education Act and the closure of the district's Catholic schools. In a strategic move, O'Dowd purchased an adjoining block of land on the Marsh Road, which was on slightly higher ground than the newly completed Crossley State School. This was to be the site of a new Catholic school. A combined church-school was completed in 1878 as a direct response to the Education Act of 1872.<sup>16</sup> Part of this building survives as the present-day St Brigid's Hall.

Once the new school was completed, the local Catholic children transferred there *en masse*, leaving only a handful of children at the state school next door. They had attended the Crossley State School for only a brief period.<sup>17</sup> The Catholic Bishop of Ballarat, Michael O'Connor, was sufficiently enthused at this minor triumph to make an unscheduled stop at Crossley in December 1878, when he 'congratulated the people on their prompt withdrawal of their children from the State School as soon as the Catholic School opened recently'.<sup>18</sup> The two schools at Crossley—Catholic and state—operated side by side on the Marsh Road for four years, from 1878 until 1892 when the state school was closed. They were probably uncomfortable neighbours.

The resurrection of a Catholic school for the Crossley and Tower Hill district, achieved through a fiercely determined local priest and local community support, and the subsequent closure a few years later of the new Crossley State School, was used as an example to the Victorian government, warning public servants to avoid a similar wastage of government money by building new state schools in places where there was little likelihood they would succeed. The Crossley case was also drawn on in political debate to illustrate the injustice of Catholics paying taxes towards education and being denied funding for their own schools. In 1883 Father O'Dowd gave evidence to a Board of Enquiry into State Aid for Denominational Schools. He reported that the Crossley State School had a total enrolment of fifteen children, all of whom were eligible for government aid, while the Catholic school over the fence had 220 children, none of whom qualified for state aid.<sup>19</sup>

Government bureaucrats armed with their demographic research had anticipated a good attendance at the new state school at Crossley and had not counted on the opposition by the large local Catholic population. They had done the figures in calculating the need for a new school, but had not factored the commitment of Catholics in the area to providing their children with a Catholic education. The Crossley State School with its low attendance was forced to close on 24 April 1892. The waste of public money was particularly regretted during the economic depression of the 1890s. In 1896, to seal the fate of the unwanted state school, the Catholic Church purchased the disused building for use as additional classrooms for St Brigid's School.<sup>20</sup>

As much as the divided position on the Education Bill was fuelled by the legacy of prejudices and historical grievances, its passage served to reinforce these grievances. In the long term, the Education Act created a long-enduring tripartite system in Victoria of government, Catholic and Independent schools, and a government funding model that remains problematic. In his centenary essay in 1972, Denis Grundy was scathing of the Education Act, arguing that it enflamed sectarianism.<sup>21</sup> Manning Clark, the son of an Anglican minister, was also critical of



**The former Crossley State School, photographed by Laurie Burchell. The school was demolished in the 1980s** (Courtesy State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2006.165/125)

the Act, describing the decision to pass it as ‘one of the most disastrous in Australian history’—in part for its denial of personal faith and in creating the system of Catholic, State and Protestant schools.<sup>22</sup> It had in effect exacerbated the sectarian divide it had sought to ameliorate.<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Serle argued that the passage of the bill had created a decade of sectarianism that was not matched in Victoria until 1916.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1850s and 1860s, despite the inefficiencies and failings of the government-funded schools, the government had adopted what was arguably a more liberal and inclusive approach. The decision to abandon the funding of denominational schools exacerbated sectarianism and helped to fuel many more decades of Catholic-Protestant animosity in many parts of Victoria. It was not until the 1960s, nearly 100 years after the passage of the bill, that government aid to religious schools was reinstated, by the federal rather than the state government. In the meantime, the Catholic system of education would rely heavily on generous bequests of individuals and, more critically, the recruitment of Catholic men and women into religious orders.

The demise of the Crossley State School, and its acquisition by St Brigid’s Catholic School, was a small victory for Catholic education in the wake of the Education Act of 1872. The colonial government had grossly underestimated the resourcefulness of one small Irish farming community.

## Notes

- 1 *Victoria Parliamentary Debates: Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly*, Vol. 72, 8 August 1893, p. 779.
- 2 *Report to the Minister of Public Instruction for the Year 1887–88*, Melbourne, Robert S. Brain, Government Printer, 1888, p. 247.
- 3 James Bonwick, *Western Victoria: Narrative of an Educational Tour in 1857*, Geelong, Thomas Brown, 1858.
- 4 Helen Doyle, *The Church on the Hill: A Centenary History of St Brigid’s, Crossley, and its Irish-Australian Community*, Melbourne, Bridin Books, 2014, p. 31.
- 5 *Argus*, 18 December 1872, p. 4.
- 6 Chris McConville, *Croppies, Celts and Catholics*, Melbourne, Edward Arnold, 1989.
- 7 *Argus*, 24 June 1872, p. 5.
- 8 *Advocate*, 13 May 1876, p. 6.
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- 10 *Argus*, 31 May 1867.
- 11 *Report of the Minister for Public Instruction for the Year 1873*, Melbourne, John Ferres, Government Printer, 1873, p. 42.

- 12 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Melbourne, Education Department, 1973, pp. 44–5, 47–8, 800.
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- 15 *Argus*, 29 May 1878, referring to the Education Act of 1872.
- 16 Blake (ed.), p. 926; Walter Ebsworth, 'Koroit Church Most Magnificent and Costly', *Advocate*, 13 August 1947, p. 16; Thomas J. Carr, *Some of the Fruits of Fifty Years: The Annals of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, Melbourne Massina, 1897, p. 75.
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- 18 *Advocate*, 7 December 1878, p. 7.
- 19 The Board of Enquiry was heard in 1883; Ebsworth, 'Koroit Church Most Magnificent and Costly', *Advocate*, 13 August 1947, p. 16; J.J. Russell, *Journey in Faith: Koroit Catholic Parish 1886–1986*, Timothy J. Auld, Warrnambool, 1986, pp. 9–10.
- 20 Back to Crossley School Committee, *St Brigid's School Crossley: To Commemorate the Closing–1971*, c.1972; Blake (ed.) 1973, p. 926; Russell, pp. 9–10.
- 21 Denis Grundy, 'Secular, Compulsory and Free': *The Education Act of 1972*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972.
- 22 Grundy, p. 1.
- 23 Michael Cathcart (ed.), *Manning Clark's History of Australia*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1999, p. 333.
- 24 Elizabeth Campbell and Dianne Hall, *A New History of the Irish in Australia*, Sydney, NewSouth Books, p. 287.

# Yarra Park State School No.1406

## The First 25 Years

*Ian Hind*

### **Overview of the School's History**

Yarra Park State School (No. 1406), located on the intersection of two major thoroughfares, Punt Road and Wellington Parade, was one of the first large Melbourne metropolitan schools built following the passing of the 1872 Education Act. By the 1890s the school had become one of the largest state schools in Melbourne with over 1700 students on the roll and 1000 in average attendance. It quickly developed a strong reputation for its academic results.

Alumni from Yarra Park became prominently represented in the fields of politics, public administration, education, medicine, the arts, the armed services and sports. Sir John Monash and sculptor Sir Bertram Mackennal are two of the most notable from its early years. During the first two decades of the twentieth century the school became very well known for its success in competitive school sport, in particular cricket and Australian Rules football.

In the 1920s the enrolment and average attendance started to decline, driven by the gradual drop in the population of the City of Richmond. As part of the reorganisation of Richmond's state schools, in 1938 the school lost its senior classes—Grades 7 and 8.

After the Second World War the character of the school population changed significantly. In the immediate postwar years, the school enrolled children from refugee families from Germany and eastern Europe, and by the mid-1950s large numbers of immigrant children from southern Europe were attending. School inspection reports referred to Yarra Park as a 'migrant school' and to the pupils and their parents as 'New Australians'.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s many inner urban schools experienced a rapid decline in student numbers resulting from demographic changes. Yarra Park was among the first tranche of

Melbourne schools targeted for closure. In 1985 the Minister for Education, Ian Cathie, asked the Regional Board of Education to conduct a review of the primary schools in the Richmond district, looking forward to the year 2000. The working party established by the Board recommended that only four of the existing schools remain open and that the other four, including Yarra Park, either amalgamate with an existing school or close. Yarra Park finally closed at the end of 1987. In the early 1990s the Victorian government arranged with the Urban Land Authority to develop the site and the building for residential development. The school building has been classified by the National Trust and the site has been placed on the Victorian and Australian Heritage Registers because of its architectural and historical significance as one of the first state schools established in Melbourne after the 1872 Act.

The balance of this article looks at the first 25 years of the life of Yarra Park School, examining how the key elements of free, compulsory and secular, and other provisions of the 1872 Act, were realised in the operations of a large inner urban state school.

### **The Local Context**

During the 1860s following the gold rushes, both East Melbourne and Richmond experienced rapid growth, fuelling demand for the provision of more education for the school-aged population.

At the time of the passing of the 1872 Act, Richmond and East Melbourne were served by four national schools and about half a dozen denominational schools. Several of these were in buildings not built for the purpose of education. The Act provided for the establishment of District Boards of Advice with a number of roles, including formulating plans for establishing schools in their districts. Although originally scheduled for inclusion in District No. 1, for the City of Melbourne, Yarra Park School was gazetted in District No. 11, for the City of Richmond. This gazettal reflected the fact that around 70 per cent of the student population resided in Richmond, with the balance coming from the more middle-class families of East Melbourne and other parts of central Melbourne.

## Acquiring the School Site

The land on which Yarra Park School was built was excised from the Police Barracks reserve within the Yarra parklands. In July 1873 the newly appointed Secretary of Education, Henry Venables, in a minute marked ‘URGENT’ and addressed to the Commissioner of Lands, requested that two acres from the Police Barracks reserve be transferred to the Minister of Public Instruction for state school purposes.<sup>1</sup> A subsequent memo in February 1874 from Venables advised that he had been directed by the Minister of Public Instruction to alter the application and to apply for a reduced area of just over three-quarters of an acre—a very small site for a planned student population of around 1000.<sup>2</sup>

## Design and Construction

Yarra Park was included in the first batch of tenders for construction of new schools following the Act. The Departmental architect Herbert Bastow engaged the prominent colonial local architect Charles Webb (1821–98) to design the school.<sup>3</sup> Webb’s portfolio of buildings at the time included Church of Christ, Swanston Street (1863), Wesley College (first stage completed 1865), the Alfred Hospital, and Royal Arcade (1869).



**Yarra Park State School 1907: Postcard, 'Victorian State Schools and Students' collection** (Courtesy State Library Victoria)

Following his design of Yarra Park, Webb's works included Mandeville Hall, Toorak (1876), Tasma Terrace (1878), South Melbourne Town Hall (1880), and the Windsor Hotel (1883). The only other state school designed by Charles Webb was Dorcas Street, South Melbourne, constructed in 1880—which, like Yarra Park, is now a residential complex. Webb's designs for these two schools were reflected in the designs of many other schools.

A local builder from Collingwood, James Gillon, was contracted to build the first stage at a cost of £4500.<sup>4</sup> This stage of Webb's Tudoresque design—the centre and eastern wing, comprising six large classrooms, three on the ground floor and three on the upper floor—was completed in just a little over six months. In 1877 a second contract valued at £2400 was let to Gillon for the western wing. This addition enabled the school to accommodate 1000 pupils in eight large classrooms.

### The Official Opening

The official opening of the school on 6 July 1874 was extensively reported in the Melbourne press. Formalities started with some 500 girls and boys mustering and then marching from the former National School (No. 365) in Lennox Street, Richmond, to the new school. There they were received by the Richmond District Board of Advice and several town councillors.<sup>5</sup> Robert Inglis, Chair of the Board and local Member of the Legislative Assembly, formally declared the school open.

In the evening at a public meeting held at Richmond Town Hall with nearly 1000 people in attendance, the Minister of Public Instruction, the Hon. Angus McKay, received deafening applause when he came forward to deliver his speech.<sup>6</sup> He emphasised that the opening of schools such as Yarra Park enabled the government to enforce the compulsory clauses of the 1872 Act. The Minister explained how the secular provisions of the Act had met with more opposition than the other elements.

The very cramped playground was an issue from the outset, and, with an additional 200 children enrolled after the completion of the western wing in 1877, the Secretary of the Department requested an additional parcel of land from the Police Barracks reserve.<sup>7</sup> Nothing eventuated, but in 1881 the government went ahead with a residential subdivision of 83 allotments from land that had been part of the reserve—and four of these allotments were added to the school site in April 1883.<sup>8</sup> This increased the site to approximately two acres, and this remained unchanged for 104 years until the school's closure in 1987.

## The First Head Teacher, Joseph Walker

Joseph Frederick Walker (1830–1909) was the head teacher at Yarra Park for the first seventeen years of its operation. His role in building Yarra Park into one of the leading state schools in Victoria was significant. Prior to the opening he had been head teacher at National School No. 365, Lennox Street, Richmond, for eleven years. His inspection reports pointed to excellent organisational, supervision and school management skills. Many early documents and press articles referred to Yarra Park as ‘Walker’s school’, such was his reputation.

Walker was a strong advocate for the state system of public education and for its teachers, as evidenced through letters to the press when the schools were under attack from critics.<sup>9</sup> He was remembered by former students as a strict disciplinarian. In 1881 Walker was severely censured by the Department after a parent wrote to the Minister complaining about her daughter being caned by the head teacher four times in a month.<sup>10</sup>

Walker retired early in 1891 at age 60. Several letters published in the *Age* 40 years after his retirement remembered Walker as a colourful character who left a lasting positive impression on most of his students, who gave him the nickname ‘Hookey’. Teacher turnover was high as a result of the expansion of the state system in the 1870s and 1880s, and when Walker retired he was the last teacher at the school remaining from its initial staffing establishment. An obituary in 1909 noted Walker’s ‘capacity for organisation being especially advantageous in the large school he built up and made the leading state educational establishment in Victoria’.<sup>11</sup>

## The Pupil Teacher System

In 1878, the year after the school was fully operational with the completion of the western wing, the teaching establishment at Yarra Park of 21 comprised the head teacher, nine assistant teachers and eleven pupil teachers.

The pupil teacher system, which generally accounted for over half of the staffing establishment in large schools such as this, was a form of apprenticeship four years in duration and was key to keeping costs contained. The pupil teachers (PTs) at Yarra Park taught a full day’s work in one of the long schoolrooms under the surveillance of one of the assistant teachers. Being a PT was a tough, tiring assignment. An

examination of teacher records of the early PTs at Yarra Park reveals that turnover was high, with many dropping out of the system before they completed their four years of training. A handful progressed either to sit the matriculation exam, or to proceed to the Teachers' College after it was established.

### **Demography, School Enrolments and Attendance**

Soon after its establishment, Yarra Park became very large and crowded, with more than 1900 students enrolled. Most classes had 50 to 60 children. The need for additional state schools in the district became urgent; most of the denominational schools in Richmond and East Melbourne closed within three years of the passing of the 1872 Act. The closure of these schools, and the continued growth in population, led to the construction of four additional state schools in the Richmond district by 1890—Richmond Central (No. 1561) in 1877, Richmond Cremorne Street (No. 2084) in 1878, and in 1890 Richmond North (No. 2798) and Burnley (No. 2853).

By 1890 each of these schools had a net enrolment greater than 1000 students, with Yarra Park the largest with 1704.<sup>12</sup> These early state schools in Richmond were among the largest in Victoria in terms of enrolment, and in a number of years of the 1880s Yarra Park was the largest state school in the colony.

Enrolment is one thing; regular attendance is another. Implementation of the compulsory provisions of the 1872 Act was a slow but steady process. Under the Act a minimum attendance of 60 days in each half year by any pupil (unless there was reasonable excuse) was required. In 1876 the compulsory attendance provisions were strengthened with the appointment of a number of truant officers. A further legislative amendment in 1890 increased the minimum attendance to 40 days per quarter.

In its first year of operation in 1875, Yarra Park had a reported enrolment of 1906 pupils (999 boys and 907 girls) but an average attendance of 732 (410 boys and 322 girls).<sup>13</sup> The enrolment numbers included every student enrolled at the school for *some portion* of the calendar year. Some of these children transferred to other schools during the year where they were also included in the numbers for these schools. The Department estimated that the transfer of students between schools resulted in a double count of approximately 15 per cent of students.

Allowing for this double count, a reasonable estimate is that, in the first year of the school's operation, 50 per cent of the children enrolled at Yarra Park attended regularly. This increased to around 65 per cent by 1890 as result of the progressive strengthening and enforcement of the compulsory provisions of the Act. While sickness and health factors undoubtedly accounted for low attendance, particularly during the winter months, truancy continued to be widespread. Various forms of child labour were not uncommon.

### **Provision of a 'Free Education'**

To what extent was the education provided at Yarra Park School in its early years really free? The First Schedule of the 1872 Act listed the subjects that were to be free: reading, writing and arithmetic, grammar, geography, drill and, where practical, gymnastics. Singing and drawing were also taught in many schools by visiting teachers. In some schools, particularly larger schools such as Yarra Park, these subjects were taught by classroom teachers when qualified.

For instruction in other 'extra' subjects, the Act specified that fees could be charged on a fixed scale, not exceeding one shilling. A perusal of the appendices to the Annual Reports informs us that only a minority of schools (about 10 to 15 per cent), including Yarra Park, offered these extra subjects. The school was consistently amongst a handful across the whole colony reporting the largest number of students taking extra subjects. These, in most years at Yarra Park, were Latin, French, algebra and Euclid. Offering these extra subjects proved instrumental in shaping the school's character and reputation in the early days. It needs to be acknowledged that while providing 'extra subjects' was a key part of Yarra Park's offering, only around 5 per cent of its students enrolled in these classes. For the remaining students, the curriculum was confined to the free subjects under the Act.

### **Yarra Park's Reputation, and Statewide Exhibitions**

Yarra Park was not only one of Melbourne's largest state schools in the first two decades after the passing of the 1872 Act; it was also a school with a strong reputation in the community for its academic performance. The school built this reputation through its extra subjects, through the success of its students in prize competitions arranged by the Richmond District Board of Advice, through a consistent track record in preparing

students for statewide scholarships and the matriculation exams and, last, by working the much criticised payments by results system to its advantage.

Not long before the passing of the 1872 Act, the Board of Education implemented a small scholarship scheme to offer some students a pathway to higher education. These scholarships were known as ‘exhibitions’ and the winners were referred to as ‘exhibitioners’. These exhibitions, valued at £35 per annum, were tenable for six years—two years at one of the private schools or colleges in Victoria, and four years at Melbourne University. Initially only eight scholarships were awarded each year. This was increased under the Education Department in the mid-1880s to eleven.

The competitive examinations for these exhibitions included curriculum content from the extra subjects. The names of successful students, the schools they attended and the name of the head teacher received considerable coverage in the Melbourne and regional papers.

In 1895 the *Australasian Schoolmaster and Literary Review* published two tables listing all the exhibitioners from 1870 until 1895, the year when the scholarships were abolished.<sup>14</sup> An examination of these tables reveals that in almost every year from 1874 until 1888 a student from Yarra Park was successful, and in seven of those years one of the Yarra Park students achieved the highest marks in the colony.<sup>15</sup> Yarra Park emerged as the leading state school in Melbourne by number of students securing an exhibition—with 20 in total.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Payment by Results System**

The school also built its reputation by reporting its success in the ‘payment by results’ system, a key mechanism within the 1872 Act. This system was inherited from the Common Schools era. In addition to determining a significant part of a teacher’s remuneration, it was a mechanism for monitoring school performance. *Vision and Realisation* informs us that the results system had its origin in England but was discontinued there by the time of the passing of the 1872 Act.<sup>17</sup> Victoria was the only colony in Australia to introduce it. Under the system, the school inspector examined all children in Class 2 and above in the ‘free’ subjects. A percentage was calculated for each school, based on the number of students reaching the required standard.

The results for every school in the colony were published in the Minister’s Annual Report. Effectively a system of league tables operated.

Schools achieving a high level of results used this to build their reputation. The press commonly reported on results for individual schools. Yarra Park was consistently at or near the top of the table. In most years from 1872 to 1890 the school's results exceeded 90 per cent. In some years it was above 95 per cent.

The system had its critics and supporters. Many teachers and experts condemned it as placing a premium on cramming. Fraud and abuse of the system were widespread. Frank Tate, who became the first Director of Education after 1901, was one of the strongest contemporary critics. The official histories of education in Victoria inform us that the system continued for over three decades, as it had the support of many politicians, the press and the departmental administration, all of them arguing that it was an effective form of control and accountability. The government was also able to argue that performance overall had improved. In 1872 the average success rate across Victoria was 65 per cent and by 1900, just before the system was abolished, this had increased to 81.7 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1890s the Annual Reports foreshadowed that the system was to be abolished, but long-standing support from conservative members of the Legislative Council prevented a bill for its abolition passing parliament. It was not until after Tate took control of the Department that the system was finally abolished, by Act of Parliament in 1905.

## **Secular Education**

In the speeches given at the opening of Yarra Park School, the secular provisions of the Act received the most attention. The Act stipulated that the teachers could provide only a secular education, for which four hours were to be set aside each day. District boards could recommend extra classes in religious education but only after the children were formally dismissed from school.

Breaches of these regulations were common. We find from his teacher record that Joseph Walker as head teacher at Yarra Park was reported in 1883 for taking religious education classes. An inquiry was held, resulting in censure by the Minister for not terminating ordinary class work before commencing religious instruction.<sup>19</sup> Walker was admonished to be more careful in the future, and was reminded of his duty to keep himself acquainted with the regulations after the Act.

## Yarra Park and the State School System at 1900

During the 1890s much of the gloss of Yarra Park's achievements had worn off. The severe depression led the government to make deep cuts to resources for state education. The net effect was a reduction of 25 per cent in expenditure per child.<sup>20</sup> Because Yarra Park was large, the cuts would have impacted the school severely, affecting teacher morale in particular.

After Joseph Walker retired in 1891, four head teachers passed through Yarra Park in the space of the next decade. The result was a loss of continuity and strength of leadership. Two of the heads were compulsorily retired from the service as part of the cost-cutting measures.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the government, through its Annual Reports, lauded its achievements in implementing the key provisions of the 1872 Act. The reports pointed to increases in the number of schools, increases in enrolment and average attendance, and expansion in the range of subjects included in a free education. On the other side of the ledger, questions were asked in the press and in parliament regarding the overall quality of education and its administration, the relevance of the curriculum and the limited pathways to further education and employment for children in state schools. The cuts to education funding in the depression provided the background to much of this questioning.

In 1898 the British economic philosophers and social reformers Sidney and Beatrice Webb visited the colonies. The Webbs visited two state schools in Victoria—Yarra Park and Richmond Central. Frank Tate accompanied them.<sup>21</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the two schools were selected as representative of education in the large urban state schools. In their diaries, as later published in 1965, the Webbs were critical of what they had seen in the schools, writing that: 'Altogether education is in a bad way. The State schools teach only the three Rs. If a child desires to learn other subjects he has to pay special fees ... There are no higher-grade schools. Secondary education, alike for boys and girls, is left without State money.'<sup>22</sup>

A couple of weeks after the Webbs' visit to Yarra Park, Alfred Deakin—then a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly—criticised the condition of education in Victoria, and urged steps to make reforms. Deakin referred to the opinions of local and overseas experts that Victoria's education system was in the lowest rank amongst the colonies and far behind the mother country. It has been reported that Sidney Webb and Frank Tate were two of the main experts behind Deakin's speech.<sup>23</sup>

Following Deakin's speech, other members of parliament voiced their criticisms. With strong negative opinions also being voiced by the *Age*, the government in March 1899 appointed Thomas Fink (1855–1942), the MLA for Jolimont and West Richmond, to lead another royal commission into the state of education.

Fink had a particular knowledge of the condition of schools in his own electorate, which included Yarra Park. Frederick Hayden (1846–1909), the recently appointed head teacher at Yarra Park, gave evidence to the commission in which he described the teaching staff demoralised by the 1890s fiscal measures, the largely irrelevant curriculum, and the inequities of the payment by results system. He referred to the situation at Yarra Park where one teacher, supported by one pupil teacher, was responsible for 100 students.<sup>24</sup>

Fink's reports were highly critical of the policies that had wound back state education in the 1890s. While technical education was the main brief of the commission, Fink argued that this could be no better than the primary state schools on which it was built. He recommended, amongst other measures, that reliance on pupil teachers be significantly reduced, and that the payment by results system be abolished. Frank Tate, when commencing work as the first Director of Education in Victoria at the start of 1902, led a major overhaul of the system of state education including implementation of a number of the key recommendations of the Fink Commission.

## Conclusion

While Yarra Park School's history in its first 25 years was embedded in the specific socio-economic characteristics of its local student catchments of Richmond and East Melbourne, the issues and challenges the school faced in implementing the key elements of the 1872 Act—free, compulsory and secular, and other relevant provisions—were not atypical of those experienced by other large urban schools in Melbourne. It was not until almost 40 years after the 1872 Act that provision of state secondary education began to be phased in, providing a realistic pathway to further education for children from schools such as Yarra Park.

## Notes

- 1 Henry Venables to M. Callanan, July 1873, VPRS 242/PO, Unit 118, Item E7092, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).
- 2 Henry Venables to M. Callanan, February 1874, VPRS 242/PO, Unit 118, Item E7092, PROV.
- 3 Lawrence Burchell, *Victorian Schools: A Study on Colonial Government Architecture 1837–1900*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1980.
- 4 *Weekly Times*, 16 May 1874.
- 5 The National School (No. 365) closed after the opening of Yarra Park School with all staff and students transferring to Yarra Park.
- 6 *Weekly Times*, 11 July 1874.
- 7 Henry Venables, Secretary of Education, to Secretary of Lands, 20 April 1877, VPRS 242/PO, Unit 118, Item E7092, PROV.
- 8 Secretary of Lands to Secretary of Education, 18 April 1883, VPRS, 242/PO, Unit 118, Item E7092, PROV.
- 9 *Argus*, 20 September 1879 and 23 November 1883.
- 10 Teacher Record for Joseph Frederick Walker, VPRS 13579, PROV.
- 11 *Richmond Guardian*, 6 November 1909.
- 12 *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the Year 1890–91*, Victoria Parliamentary Papers (VPP), 1891.
- 13 *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the Year 1875–76*, VPP, 1876.
- 14 List of State School Scholars who gained state exhibitions, *Australasian Schoolmaster and Literary Review*, vol. xvi, no. 191, May 1895, pp. 204–05 and vol. xvi, no. 192, June 1895, p. 235. I am indebted to Carole Hooper for alerting me to these tables.
- 15 In 1888 the scholarships were restricted to students already attending one of the private colleges. The new scholarships provided and became tenable for four years tuition at Melbourne University.
- 16 The leading school in the colony was Flinders State School (Geelong) (No. 260) with 27 exhibitors. This school was first established as Flinders National Grammar School in 1858. The third school was the National Model School in Spring Street, with 13 exhibitors.
- 17 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol. 1, Melbourne, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, p. 123.
- 18 *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the Year 1900–01*, VPP, 1901.
- 19 Teacher Record for Joseph Frederick Walker, VPRS 13579, PROV.
- 20 *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the Year 1895–1896*, VPP, 1896.
- 21 R.J.W. Selleck, *Frank Tate: A Biography*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1982, p. 111.
- 22 A.G. Austin, *The Webbs' Australian Diary*, Melbourne, Pitman, 1965, p. 88.
- 23 A.G. Austin, *Australian Education, 1788–1900: Church and State and Public Education in Colonial Australia*, Melbourne, Pitman, 1961, p. 252.
- 24 Janet McCalmán, *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900–1965*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1984, p. 73.

## The Effects of the 1890s Depression, and the Reforms it Created

*Alan Gregory*

A period of boom and prosperity in Australia in the 1880s was followed by a major depression in the 1890s. The causes were complex. Governments were unsure what to do. In the face of financial failures, insolvencies, large unemployment and poverty, economic growth stalled. Governments sought the remedy in retrenchment and major expenditure cuts. Education was particularly vulnerable as they did not see it as contributing to the economy and recovery.

The measures imposed on Victorian state education were severe. They included the dismissal of truancy officers, the abolition of maintenance allowances, and the strict enforcement of the attendance age at school, so that children beyond the lower and upper ranges were not allowed to attend. Capital expenditure was cut drastically, maintenance and repair expenditures were deferred and the scholarship schemes were abolished. Previously, as many as 200 scholarships had been awarded annually with a £40 value for country students. The Teachers' Training College was shut. It was not reopened until 1900. Teacher salaries were reduced, and schools were reclassified so that less senior teachers could be appointed. Special payments that had been given for so-called extras such as singing, drawing, drill and gymnastics were abolished. Increased use was made of juvenile pupil teachers and monitors rather than professional teachers to teach the classes.

The regrading of schools and positions lowered salaries and reduced staffing establishments. which meant there were no promotion opportunities; and, finally, many teachers who had served for 20 years were dismissed. The government mantra was to cut all expenditure to the bone.

The morale of the teaching profession was understandably low, and conditions in our state schools were appalling. At last, searching for remedies, the government commissioned a royal commission into technical education, hoping this might provide some productive answers. There was a belief that the Education Department was a 'non-

producing department’—sadly a long-held view. Many people and groups were crying out for reform of the education system and they tended to culminate in what was known as the Fink Royal Commission. The esteemed Theodore Fink chaired this commission of inquiry and, becoming aware of the state of education generally, extended the terms of reference to cover all state education, not merely technical.<sup>1</sup>

Fink had as a star witness a talented young inspector of schools, Frank Tate.<sup>2</sup> Tate was well informed about overseas developments in education, much of which was called ‘The New Education.’ The report of the commission showed important reforms that needed to be undertaken. These included setting up a new Department of Education headed by a Director of Education. Previously, control had been divided between a Secretary of the Department of Public Instruction and an Inspector-General. This new arrangement came into effect at the end of 1901 and young Frank Tate was appointed the first Director of Education.

Funds were soon restored to the state schools, the payment by results system was abolished, the Teachers’ Training College was reopened, and less use was made of young pupil teachers and monitors. To quote Frank Tate:

Our educational history of late years has been a succession of upbuilding and destruction with constant changes of policy justified at the time in the name of economy and railed at a few years later as extravagance of the worst kind. The different grades of Victorian education are quite unorganised and there is consequent educational waste and inefficiency in the system as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

There had been some positive effects from the retrenchment measures. They forced the amalgamation and closure of some small uneconomic schools—32 twin schools amalgamated. With the retirement and dismissal of many older teachers, opportunities were freed up for younger ones.

Tate had the difficult job of streamlining an administration that had become bogged down with prescription and trivia. It took him time to improve the management and administration of the system. He opened educational opportunity to more students and introduced state kindergarten and secondary schools. Melbourne High School in 1905 was the first state high school, a different but glorious story. Instruction at primary level became truly free and covered almost all subjects: reading,

writing, arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, drill, singing, drawing, elementary science, manual training and, in some cases, gymnastics and swimming. Lessons were also to be offered in health, temperance, needlework, cookery and domestic economy. The payment by results method was phased out, as was the pupil teacher system as it had existed. The classification system for teachers, which affected their salaries and promotion, was also changed. The curriculum that Tate brought in survived well into the late 1950s: a tribute to its fundamental soundness.

It was people like Frank Tate and Theodore Fink, inspiring other reformers, who brought new life to the 1872 Education Act and belatedly fulfilled its promise.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Theodore Fink (1855–1942): solicitor, politician, newspaper proprietor, chairman of The Herald and Weekly Times, patron of the arts. He chaired two significant Royal Commissions, on Technical Education (1899) and on the University of Melbourne (1902–04). The Victorian Parliament gave him the rare honour of being called to the bar for a formal vote of thanks. See Don Garden, *Theodore Fink: A Talent for Ubiquity*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998.
- 2 Frank Tate CMG, MA, (1864–1939).
- 3 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol. 1, Melbourne, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, p. 321.
- 4 For more detail see Alan Gregory, ‘The Effect of Retrenchment on Victorian State Elementary Education in the 1890s’, M.Ed. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1972.



## Livingston: A One-Teacher School in the Gippsland Hills, 1913–1938

*David Harris*

The Livingston one-teacher school was in West Gippsland in the range of the Gippsland hills called the Strzelecki ranges after a Polish adventurer from the colonial period.<sup>1</sup> Livingston was isolated, not by distance but topography.<sup>2</sup> The steep hill country where the settlement was established was difficult to access because of poor roads through hills intersected by deep gullies. High rainfall meant dairying was feasible only in summer and late spring, and the difficulty of getting in and out of the area made it impossible for settlers to take up other work any distance from where they lived. Location, climate and terrain influenced student numbers at the school as families stayed only if they were willing to struggle with the physical conditions that limited their capacity to earn a livelihood or if they had no other choice.

Opened in 1913 and named after the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Gippsland South, Thomas Livingston, the school operated in a newly constructed hall partly funded by the local community on land donated by a local farmer.<sup>3</sup> The Education Department contributed the other half of the construction costs and paid the hall committee £8 a year for the lease. Closed in 1928 due to declining pupil enrolments, the school reopened in 1932 when the Victorian government established a scheme to put unemployed people on blocks of land, along the lines of previous settlement schemes. When first opened in 1913, the school was intended as an inducement for settlers with children to stay and farm the land at Livingston, and so it was again in 1932 when the unemployed families arrived to earn a livelihood from land abandoned under the previous closer settlement and soldier settler schemes. In 1938, the school was closed permanently and the land turned over to forestry.

The focus of this paper is on the place occupied by the one-teacher school in a community such as Livingston and what this contributes to the story of state education in Victoria. Sitting outside the dramatic image of ‘decline and abandonment’—an image suggested by historical geographer Stephen Legg—were other trends apparent at the local one-

teacher school. These were associated with progressive education ideals that had been apparent in different aspects of state education in Victoria since the early 1900s, and they were evident at Livingston particularly in the years 1932 to 1934. Apart from the view that a one-teacher school was an incentive for settlers to stay on land in areas where few other public facilities existed, evidence suggests that the school offered a promise of the future through the education of the children. More unexpectedly, it shows a strong current of idealism attached to rural one-teacher schools. This paper explores aspects of the intriguing legacy left by these schools and the ideas associated with them that were evident across the history of state education in the twentieth century.

### **Frank Tate, John Smyth and One-Teacher Schools**

In the early twentieth century, Frank Tate and John Smyth exerted considerable influence over public education in Victoria. Tate worked for a time in the Victorian Mallee country as a school inspector, was briefly the principal of the Melbourne Teachers' College and, in 1902, became Director of Education in Victoria. Smyth succeeded Tate as Principal of the Teachers' College and was immersed—like Tate—in the educational reform movement that had its origins in Europe and Britain. He later became the first Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne and was instrumental in creating the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria.<sup>4</sup> His advocacy and establishment of kindergartens as part of primary education led to the opening of the first state kindergarten in 1907 at the Albert Street, Brunswick, school.<sup>5</sup> Both Smyth and Tate were strong advocates of rural one-teacher schools, and their passion and idealism fuelled a reforming zeal that coincided with the period when the Livingston school operated.

Smyth's book, *The Rural School in Australasia* published in 1914, contained much of his thinking on one-teacher schools. Aside from his occasional portrayal of teaching as a spiritual quest, and several other idealistic flourishes, he presented an often down-to-earth, practical handbook of good teaching practice. The school, he argued, 'touches the very springs of progress; its services are for humanity and the future'; the one-teacher school was the centre of the district. There, books would be available as well as a fenced, well-tended garden growing flowers and vegetables under 'the careful tendance of willing hands'.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the teacher and the school could be a positive influence in the life of the community, 'a social force, knitting together and uplifting' the people among whom the teacher also lived.<sup>7</sup> At the centre of his thinking were the



**Figures 1 & 2: Frank Tate (left) and Dr John Smyth at Bendigo Teachers' College 1920s. 'Bendigo Teachers' College Photo Album 1926–30'**  
(Courtesy Heyward Library, La Trobe University, Bendigo)

needs of the child and the welfare of the community, with even something like a school garden contributing to bringing the school and community together by means of a yearly event when all the families would 'assist in tree-planting, in fencing, in ploughing, in digging, or in beautifying the grounds in some way'.<sup>8</sup> But Smyth realised not all teachers were capable of fulfilling the demanding task of teaching in a one-room, multi-age classroom with basic or limited resources. The practical aspects of the book addressed some of those potential problems by suggesting timetables or ways of organising the classroom with the use of monitors from amongst the older children or with tasks assigned to each of the children according to their abilities.<sup>9</sup>

Frank Tate was influenced by educational theorists including Montessori and Froebel, but his thinking was also attracted to a nostalgia for the 'pioneering' Australia.<sup>10</sup> Educational historian Dick Selleck suggested a link between the romance of the little bush school from the

nineteenth century in rural Australia and Tate's advocacy for one-teacher schools in Victoria.<sup>11</sup> As a school inspector in the Mallee during the 1890s, Tate praised the sacrifice and commitment of the teachers he met, noting their effectiveness and skill in working with the multiple age levels in the one class room. He considered this method of teaching as an admirable solution to providing education for rural students, something he termed 'this peculiar problem of a sparsely settled country'.<sup>12</sup> Tate's argument was that the education offered in state schools in Victoria should be of the same high quality whether the school was large or small, in the city or in the country, and he imagined the remote rural school as 'a genuine community centre' that enriched the social lives of 'both young and old'.<sup>13</sup> Tate never understated the case for rural education, commenting:

In Victoria we can safely boast that whatever our education is, it is as good in our smallest school as in our largest. And I would go farther and say, that as things are at present, my ideal of the best education to be got to-day in Victoria is to be attained only in the well-taught small country school.<sup>14</sup>

The bush school, Selleck suggests, 'beckoned to Tate for the rest of his life'.

### **The Livingston School in Time and Place: 1913–1938**

The topography of the Gippsland hills, the climate of the temperate rainforest and the removal of native vegetation shaped the lives of the settlers, a reality evident in Figure 3. The photo was taken in 1913, the year when the community hall was built at Livingston and about the time when rabbits arrived in the area. The view in the photograph is across Olsen's Bridge to the road on the right that led up to the school. In wet weather the road from Olsen's Bridge was impassable and the carting of heavy loads was limited to homemade sledges pulled by horses.<sup>15</sup> A 21<sup>st</sup> century viewer recoils at the numerous ringbarked and blackened trees, a view dramatised further by the stark black and white photograph and the perspective of denuded hillsides towering above the group of people on horseback in the foreground. An audience at that time, and more than likely the photographer, saw this view as evidence of work in progress. The land is being cleared and has also survived bushfires—possibly in 1898 and 1906. A road exists where none had previously been, and the people on horseback are there as government representatives from the Country Roads Board inspecting what has been achieved. Rather than a view of



**Figure 3: Looking across Olsen's Bridge and the Morwell River. The track on the right leads up the hill to the Livingston School. 25 June 1913** (Courtesy Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 17684/P0003/104, 13\_00109)

The original title at PROV reads 'Williams Road: bridge across branch of Morwell River below Gonyah'.

destruction, the photograph is typical of a deeply embedded colonial view of the triumph of technology over nature that was repeated throughout the colonial invasion of Gunaikurnai land and the creation of Gippsland.

Evident in Figure 3 are steep hillsides that had once been thick with towering stands of eucalypts (*eucalyptus regnans*) known locally as Black Butt or Mountain Ash. These massive trees had to be felled but were usually first ring-barked, after which they would fall or drop branches during strong winds or gales, potentially taking the lives of both settlers and farm stock. On the cleared land, rabbits ate the grass sown for dairy cattle or sheep, bushfires wiped out any pasture grass that the rabbits had not eaten, and the high rainfall encouraged the growth of bracken and ragwort that required regular clearing. Aside from the rabbits, native wildlife such as wombats acquired the status of pests. Following the destruction of traditional food sources, wombats expanded their diets to include potatoes, and in some areas shire councils paid a bounty for wombat scalps, which became a supplementary income for settlers struggling to make a living from the land.

The Livingston school commenced operation in the year that John Smyth completed the manuscript of his book about the rural school in Australasia. Unfortunately, in the years between 1913 and 1929, that particular one-teacher school appeared to meet the expectations of its critics more than its supporters. A steady stream of men and women arrived to teach at the school, affirming one of the criticisms identified by parents who were concerned about frequent changes in staffing. In this first phase of the school's operation, at least nine teachers taught there, with the majority spending between a year or a few months; but there were probably more, as not all names of staff appear in the surviving records.<sup>16</sup> Seven of the nine were women, which might suggest the school was not on the pathway to a system of promotion that favoured men. It is unclear whether the frequent staff changes were teacher requests or whether this reflected a shortage of teachers. Most were temporary appointments but, judging from their correspondence with the Education Department, the teachers often did not seem to know whether the position there was permanent or temporary. Temporary appointments meant teachers could be moved to cover shortages in other locations or they could be moved on when a one-teacher school was closed.

In 1928 the first phase of the Livingston school came to an end when, with only two families with school-age children in the area, the school was closed. The pressure of earning a livelihood from the land at Livingston pushed settlers with young families to a tipping point. Sam Swindells, for example, was a local soldier settler who had served in Egypt with the 2nd Light Horse Regiment, who had prior farming experience in Queensland and New South Wales, and who had taken up 150 acres at Livingston in 1920 under the soldier settler scheme. The Swindells were one of two settler families there with school-age children. The other family had ten children. More typical of soldier settler families, the Swindells had a baby and just two school-age children, a nine- and an eight-year-old. Sam Swindells had served on the Livingston school committee during the 1920s but by 1930 he was facing difficulties making ends meet. The family home had been destroyed by fire in 1928 and he was attempting to rebuild it. He was behind in his payments on the block, much of which was unproductive, covered in bracken and fallen timber. In February 1930 he wrote to the Education Department requesting that the school be reopened: 'I did my bit for 4½ years at the front and it is a great pity

that I bring 3 children into the world with very little prospect of being well educated. What good are uneducated children to Australia?’<sup>17</sup>

Sam Swindells’ letter draws attention to the incentive that the one-teacher school provided for settler families to stay on the land. In the case of Swindells, the closure of the school coincided with the low point in his attempts to earn a livelihood, his difficult dealings with the land inspectors from the Closer Settlement Board (typical of the experience of many soldier settlers identified by historian Marilyn Lake in her research into this topic), and simply his struggle to make the land pay.<sup>18</sup> The closure of the school combined with the termination of his settler lease at the beginning of 1932 must have been the last straw. He was not there to see the re-opening of the school soon afterwards.

With the onset of the Great Depression, attention turned to Livingston as a possible site for the Victorian government’s unemployed land settlement scheme using the blocks of land abandoned under closer settlement and soldier settlement. The local Education Department District Inspector from the Warragul region, James Bacon, reported on the possibility of reopening the school. Having identified potentially 20 students who would attend, and listing the repairs that would be necessary, he surprisingly suggested ‘the district was hardly suitable for a lady’.<sup>19</sup> Bacon was perhaps not familiar with Livingston or the Gippsland hill country as he had taken up the position as D.I. at Warragul only in 1929, and in his first report he repeatedly added an ‘e’ to ‘Livingston.’ He must not have been aware that most teachers who had taught previously at Livingston were women, and it is also an odd comment given the number of women who worked on the dairy farms in the area. Given his later glowing report on one of the new women teachers, his comments could be read more as an expression of his shock at the countryside, which he described in his first report as ‘extremely hilly and rough—dead timber’, the legacy of the accumulated years of neglect, with blocks covered in scrub. He was concerned that, if the school was not opened, the only one available was more than four and a half miles away along a rough track rising 1000 feet, impassable in wet weather and dangerous when it was windy owing to the possibility of falling timber.<sup>20</sup>

This was hardly an optimistic time—and I am not revisiting a sentimental interpretation of the depression here—but it seemed to be characterised by a common perspective of a shared burden between the teachers and the community, a view not often apparent during the

previous years. Perhaps it took the reality of shared hardship to focus the attention of both teachers and community. In 1931, teacher salaries had been reduced as part of the Victorian government's cost-cutting measures, which included closing Bendigo and Ballarat Teachers' Colleges.<sup>21</sup> Since only temporary positions were now available to teachers, in 1932 it was unclear to anyone appointed to Livingston and having to move from another school whether the new position was temporary or permanent.<sup>22</sup>

It was difficult obtaining resources for a school like Livingston but the arrival of a new teacher and the school re-opening brought some small financial benefits to the community. The Education Department paid £8 per annum to rent the hall and, for one family at least, the possibility of a new teacher meant income. The importance of having the teacher as a boarder was evident in the lobbying that began in October 1931 through letters to the Education Department and an approach to the local MLA at Leongatha to provide the new teacher with accommodation.<sup>23</sup>

When the school reopened in 1932, eleven new families with twenty children between them had been placed on the blocks abandoned under the previous settlement schemes. Three of the new families came under the Victorian government's unemployed relief settlement scheme.<sup>24</sup> Given the previous uncertain years of occasional disharmony between school and community at Livingston, the arrival of a new group of families may have injected a tentative sense of optimism in the existing settlers.

Before long, enrolments declined again. Even then, the new settlers were agitating to keep the school open, but it was too late. The school was closed in 1938 and the land turned over to forestry. A sign now identifies the location of the school.

### **Two Teachers: 1932–34**

A surprising aspect of the Livingston school history is that the period when circumstances were at their most challenging for the teachers and for the community was also the time when the idealism, so evident in the rhetoric of Tate and Smyth, was at its most palpable in the school's classroom. One of the teachers, Arthur Leslie (Les) Harris arrived at the school in March 1932 having just turned 21 the previous December. Recently graduated from Bendigo Teachers' College in 1930, he had been sent from the Kamarooka East School (near Bendigo), which had been closed, to reopen the Livingston School. Les Harris was transferred after only five months at Livingston to a school at Bambill in the Millewa



**Figure 4: The Livingston school with part of the fence for the school garden in the lower right hand corner, 1932** (Photograph by Les Harris)

region in far northwest Victoria. The subsequent teacher was Irene Ennis, who had previously taught at Perenna in the Wimmera region.<sup>25</sup> Ennis, at the age of 26 when she arrived at Livingston, was more experienced and remained at the school until June 1934.

While detail is lacking, it is possible from the archive to discern how the school and its community operated for that brief period between 1932 and 1934. Why does this matter? It points to a surprising level of idealism amongst these young teachers working under less than ideal conditions during the Great Depression. For example, judging from his frequent correspondence with the Education Department, Les Harris arrived at Livingston full of enthusiasm for the challenge and a rather too eager approach to letter writing compared to Irene Ennis. If she had to write something, her letters were perfunctory, requesting the appropriate forms for children who qualified for government support. It says much about her experience, her independence and a lack of interest in seeking approval.

Les arrived at Livingston full of John Smyth's ideas about one-teacher schools and rural education. His frequent correspondence with the Education Department affirms the District Inspector James Bacon's

assessment of him as ‘earnest’ and ‘conscientious’.<sup>26</sup> Equally apparent was his concern for the welfare of students and his engagement with the community. Les understood the economic circumstances of the Livingston families and was concerned to limit the impact of the depression on the children’s capacity to learn, a responsibility he considered lay with the Education Department. After discovering the children of some of the unemployed settlers only had slates on which to write, he requested the Education Department supply the necessary workbooks: ‘These people are receiving a weekly allowance and are unable to buy books. This is very unsatisfactory as no recorded work can be done—only that on slates.’

His attitude reflected John Smyth’s view that the teacher’s responsibility was to ‘provide right tastes and fitting nourishment’ to assist the child’s growth and to respect ‘each child’s individuality’.<sup>27</sup> He was not able to feed them—although at times in the 1930s he did bring lunches to school—but he could provide a different type of nourishment through education. Other initiatives such as the construction of a fenced garden, the purchase of gardening tools and the construction of a yard for the children’s horses could also have been taken from a copy of Smyth’s *The Rural School in Australasia*. The Education Department refused to pay for the fencing of the garden, the wire netting to keep the rabbits out, or the horse yard, so a fund-raising dance was held to cover the costs. Les paid for the gardening tools. In a further echo of Smyth’s ideas, singing lessons were started, with the Education Department granting approval for the wife of the secretary of the hall committee to play the piano.<sup>28</sup>

Other changes occurred where, again in keeping with Smyth’s ideas about beginning with the children’s interests and the importance of physical activity, woodchopping officially became part of school sport. One of the largest families, the Caldwells, were renowned woodchop champions. Children often brought axes to school, each axe varying in size to suit the child, for lunchtime and recess woodchop competitions.<sup>29</sup>

Les brought a wooden trunk with him to Livingston heavy with books to supplement the school readers, and these would have included his copies of Henry Lawson’s *For Australia and Other Poems*, Banjo Patterson’s *Old Bush Songs* and certainly J.J. Stable’s *The High Road of Australian Verse*. At night in his room where he boarded with the Percival family, he also studied for his matriculation. In Figure 6, Mrs Percival’s son Jim, who was educated at the nearby Gunyah school and had written letters for his mother offering board to the new teacher, is standing by



**Figure 5: School sport, Livingston 1932** (Photograph by Les Harris)



**Figure 6: Jim Percival with Les Harris seated on Jim's sledge used to cart Les's heavy wooden trunk up to Livingston from the Grand Ridge Road, March 1932**

(Photograph Les Harris Collection)

the sledge used to transport Les's wooden trunk from the junction of the Grand Ridge Road up to the Livingston settlement.

Being so far removed from this period, we find it easy now to forget how the poems and stories of writers such as Lawson and Paterson were the meeting place between the ideals that Tate promoted about the 'pioneer' nation and the experiences that many of the children lived with in places like Livingston. This intersects with Smyth's concern about the way that good teaching begins with the experiences of the child. In much of the nationalist poetry there was a sense for every child at the school that their experiences were common with others beyond their small settlement, that they were not alone. And the experience of a place like Livingston was as new for most of the children as it was for the teacher. The power of the poetry lay in the way it spoke to their everyday experiences. Les marked in pencil the poems that he possibly used. His choices included Vance Palmer's 'The Snake':

I killed a snake this morning in the grass,  
A lovely, sinister thing of gleaming jet:  
I see it yet,  
Gliding across the place my feet would pass,  
In effortless motion, fluid as molten glass ...<sup>30</sup>

And Henry Lawson's 'The Teams' would have resonated with the children in lines like, 'the rains are heavy on roads like these ... the wagons bogged to the axletrees.'<sup>31</sup> In addition to poems about the bush, Les included poems that aligned with Smyth's ideas on communicating values that could guide the children. A pencil mark beside a stanza from Adam Lindsay Gordon's 'Ye Wearie Wayfarer' suggests something about what might have been read or discussed in the classroom and reflected a way of dealing with the difficult circumstances at Livingston:

Life is mostly froth and bubble,  
Two things stand like stone:  
KINDNESS in another's trouble,  
COURAGE in your own.<sup>32</sup>

Other poems that Les appeared to have used dealt specifically with war, with loyalty to Empire and, tellingly, with the importance of whiteness as central to Australian nationalism during this period—expressed in the final line of a stanza from Lawson's 'For Australia', that

Australia was ‘the Outpost of the White.’<sup>33</sup> Whether he used the poem in class or it was something that framed his thinking is unclear. He had the book at Livingston and it had obviously been read frequently; either way it remains central to an aspect of Tate’s thinking about the one-teacher school and it speaks to an attitude prevailing more generally at the time.

The connection between school and community remained at the centre of Les’s thinking throughout the rest of his career in the Education Department, though his thinking about race changed. Towards the end of his life, using words that might have been said by Frank Tate or John Smyth, he reflected:

During my 47 years with the Education Department ... I count the years spent in rural schools, especially in remote areas ... as the most satisfying of all. The schools as the focal point for educational, social and sporting activities served Victoria very well and ... living in the homes of the children you taught, as I did in two instances, made you very much a part of the community.<sup>34</sup>

By comparison with Les, Irene Ennis left few traces in the archive, but she clearly was a special teacher. It is easy to be critical about what was happening in a multi-age classroom in the 1930s and to be cynical about reports that a stereotypical local district inspector such as James Bacon might write about a teacher. But, in the words Bacon used about Irene Ennis, there is a reminder that good teaching looks the same whenever it happens. In June 1933, Bacon commented that Ennis ‘shows tact and sympathy in dealing with her pupils. Her teaching is on good lines and her preparation is good. Under adverse conditions she has made a good beginning.’<sup>35</sup>

His comments convey a sense of the important contribution Ennis was making to the community in this winter of 1933. ‘Tact’ and ‘sympathy’ were rare enough commodities at the time; and although our distance from this classroom makes it difficult to imagine how difficult those ‘adverse conditions’ must have been or how professional the teacher was in finding ‘tact’ and ‘sympathy’ in her emotional arsenal, it is clear something important was happening between the teacher and the children. In November, Bacon visited the school again and was no less laudatory: ‘An earnest teacher working steadily and conscientiously for the good of her pupils. She has raised standards and has improved the school environment and secured ready response.’<sup>36</sup>

Here was a teacher who had achieved the ideals that Smyth had identified when he discussed how the one-teacher school could add to a community and be the centre of it. The comment, ‘working for the good of her pupils’ suggests a teacher who understood the community in which she was working; and securing a ‘ready response’ from children conveys a sense of the enthusiasm and the noise that must have been part of daily life in the classroom. Bacon understood and admired what Ennis was attempting to do with her students and, given he had taught at Brunswick in 1912, it is more than likely he was familiar with John Smyth’s ideas and saw something familiar in her teaching style and her relationships with the children.<sup>37</sup> At Livingston, Ennis would have been considered a Gippsland local as she was originally from Traralgon and



**Figure 7: Children from the Caldwell, Matheson, Chilvers families and the three Lapworth children on ‘Grey’ 1932** (Photograph by Les Harris)

had also taught in East and West Gippsland in addition to the Mallee and the Wimmera. She was bringing a great deal of experience to her teaching and an understanding of what was needed in such a community.

The continuity between Harris and Ennis is evidence of a fleeting encounter between the ideals of progressive education and the reality of the multi-age classroom at the Livingston one-teacher school. Although the system still had a long way to evolve to achieve the equity it celebrated far too easily during this period, at least here was the evidence that the potential for change already existed. Why subsequent change has been so slow or difficult are questions for another piece of research.

## Conclusion

The Livingston school no longer exists. Perhaps its history mirrors the decline and abandonment narrative of the Livingston settlement more broadly, but in its brief span the school had a rich, varied and complex life. In one sense, the rhetoric about school and community in a liberal democracy or about the importance of a child-centred education still resonates, as the values remain relevant in a contemporary context; but the details cast a shadow across claims of universal inclusion. These were not the good old days. The individual stories of settlers who went through years of endless toil, only to be judged as failures when they discovered their own limits and the limits of the land, have been well documented; but the story of one-teacher schools and the teachers who taught in them seems neglected.

Les Harris was my father. Reading educators like Tate and Smyth, it is easy for me to understand the attraction of the remote one-teacher school for my father's generation of teachers. Blending the sentimental but inward-looking nationalism of the poets and writers like Lawson and Paterson with expansive modern theories about child-centred education was part of the intellectual make-up of my father at the time, although how far it translated more widely to his peers is another matter. Tate certainly embraced it and there are elements of it in the way Smyth discussed rural education and one-teacher schools. Yet there are also unsettling aspects to the story of the one-teacher school. Those teachers who did not succeed were identified as lacking in character, just like the settlers struggling on the land. It was an unforgiving system. For every D.I.'s report like James Bacon's that was supportive and understanding of Irene Ennis, there were others that could be brutal, meaning a teacher could be unemployed with no recourse to question the decision. This happened to at least one teacher in the earlier years of Livingston. This is not to take anything away from those teachers who were successful but it leads to questions about who was excluded from this ideal, and about the children excluded from the ideals of a child-centred education.

The school was clearly connected to the pioneering myths that were part of the culture attaching to other one-teacher schools throughout the state. While these sustained the mythology of 'the little bush school', the more progressive aspects could be swept away in an instant with a new teacher taking over. The dual possibilities of education were apparent in the idealised notion proposed by Smyth, Tate and others but it seems that

the pioneering myth found a more receptive audience during this period than progressive educational ideas about a child-centred classroom or about close links between school and community.

The duality of the ideals of the one-teacher school during this period remains difficult to reconcile but, for all its failings, there were moments when such schools achieved a positive link between teacher, children and community. The legacy for state education remains in the importance attached to the relationship between school and community, and the central place of all children in that alliance.

### Acknowledgement

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- 26 Teacher Record No. 27850–2829 image 271, 16 June 1932, VPRS 13579/P0001, PROV.
- 27 Smyth, pp. 12–13.
- 28 Harris to Education Department, 7 May 1932, VPRS 640/P/0001 Unit 1948, PROV.
- 29 See *Weekly Times*, 18 February 1933, p. 36 for a photograph possibly taken by Irene Ennis. Although only boys are shown in the photograph, some girls had suitably sized axes.
- 30 Edward Vance Palmer, 'The Snake', in J.J. Stable (ed.), *The High Road of Australian Verse*, London, Oxford University Press, 1929, p. 234.
- 31 Henry Lawson, 'The Teams', in Stable (ed.), p. 121.
- 32 Adam Lindsay Gordon, 'Ye Wearie Wayfarer', in Stable (ed.), p. 85.
- 33 Henry Lawson, *For Australia and Other Poems*, Melbourne, Lothian Book Publishing, n.d., p. 1.
- 34 Typescript in the author's possession, 2009.

- 35 Teacher Record No 24500–24399 image 233, 30 June 1933, VPRS 13579/P0001, PROV.
- 36 Teacher Record No 24500–24399 image 233, 9 November 1933, VPRS 13579/P0001, PROV.
- 37 David Holloway, *The Inspectors: An Account of the Inspectorate of the State Schools of Victoria 1851–1983*, Melbourne, Institute of Senior Officers of Victorian Education Services Inc., Melbourne, 2000, p. 216; Factor.

# Beyond Three Rs: The Seven Civic and Citizenship Ideals of State Schooling in Victoria, 1872–1910

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## Introduction

By 1872, Victoria's 1850s gold rush immigrants and children were demanding social and democratic reforms at a faster rate than in most other Australian colonies. Ballarat's events of 1854 had proven that the new Victorians were prepared to challenge the authority of established and conservative groups, especially pastoralists, merchants and representatives of the churches. The immigrants promptly demanded manhood suffrage, land reform, protection of local industries and separation of church and state. Historian, Bob Bessant, has summarised aptly: the new Victorians were 'magnificent economic material with educational qualifications and professional and industrial skills superior to any other group of migrants' and 'brought new ideas and a vitality ... lacking in the older colonies'.<sup>1</sup> And they demanded reform of state education in Victoria. As social, economic, political, technological and environmental factors exerted and changed influences over time, so did different civic and citizenship ideals emerge, increase in importance, decline, or change definition.

In the case of state education in Victoria 1872–1910, the definers and deliverers of ideals were located in Victorian government senior positions of authority and in different levels of the education system: parliamentarians, ministers and directors of education, teacher-trainers, inspectors, lecturers, education authors—and teachers. The rising generations of children were duly educated to meet the different needs and ideals of their leaders and societies at the different times. In 1872, Victorian state school children were educated primarily to meet the needs of life in their colony, albeit influenced significantly by an overarching sense of Empire and, to a lesser extent, a sense of being 'Australian'. But by 1910 they were being educated to participate in, and contribute actively to, life in as many as five interrelated domains—local community, State of

Victoria, Australia, England and British Empire.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of education literature across the period, including parliamentary debates, royal commissions, ministers' reports, teachers' compulsory *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid* readings, recommended textbooks and the compulsory *School Paper* readings for pupils mainly (but also for teachers and families at home), reveals the existence of seven civic and citizenship ideals.<sup>3</sup>

To categorise the ideals under seven headings is, in some respects, an artificial exercise. Most ideals were interrelated, and few educationists, internationally or locally, defined or differentiated clearly between them. Liberal educationists, in particular, rarely defined them: the overall benefits were considered self-apparent. Diverse international (chiefly British, European or American) theories were welcomed, explored and perhaps adapted in the Victorian context, but 'imitation was no crime,' historian Judith Smart has asserted: 'taking advice ... included international experts.'<sup>4</sup> Many of the progressive educators and their reforms belonged to a movement called 'The New Education,' a large discussion in itself.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, despite the melting pot of factors, seven ideals can be identified in the Victorian context: Good Character; Health, Temperance and Fitness; Responsible Democracy; National Identity; National Prosperity; National Defence; and Responsible Stewardship of Nature.<sup>6</sup> The subjects that supported some or all of these ideals, to be discussed in the following, pages, included agriculture, civics, domestic economy, drawing, drill, geography, history, manual training, nature study, physical education, poetry, reading and science.

### **Ideal 1: Good Character**

Elevating public morals and reducing crime had largely been church responsibilities before the Education Act 1872. But, from there, state-sanctioned and often state-written advice to teachers and readings for children took the lead, and few late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century readers would have failed to endorse the qualities that signified good character, be they explicitly expressed or gleaned through fables or other stories, often through the *School Paper*. Honesty, politeness, hard work, obedience, sincerity, thrift, loyalty, respect for authority, self-reliance, modesty, kindness, patience and courage were some of the behaviours foregrounded.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers were required by their teacher-leaders to be ‘character’ role models.<sup>8</sup> *Education Gazette* articles such as ‘Manners’ told them exactly how to inculcate positive values and attitudes in children.<sup>9</sup> ‘Character moulding is the most important part of the teachers’ work,’ the ‘Manners’ author wrote in ‘Character-Forming’ in 1910.<sup>10</sup> His article was followed immediately by another that suggested that education was losing its purpose in the face of the emphasis on national development:

The purpose of education ... is not to enable our citizens to hold their own commercially against the citizens of other lands, but to train boys and girls ... [to] become men and women of the purest lives and highest morals; it is not to train merchants and manufacturers, but souls.<sup>11</sup>

The act of reading across the nineteenth century had largely served as the means by which to learn to spell and to exercise understanding of grammar. After 1872 reading was assigned new roles, especially in subjects called, specifically, ‘Reading’ and ‘Poetry’. Literature was increasingly recommended for literary beauty, but also for worthwhile personal engagement that developed appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours. The worth of Poetry, according to acclaimed international philosopher S.W. Dyde, was, as cited in the *Education Gazette* in 1902: ‘When poetry by the great writers is read to boys and girls, the less need there will be for discipline.’<sup>12</sup> The respected teacher and later inspector, J.T. Saxton, declared that Poetry was ‘essential’ in an education program.<sup>13</sup> And, in 1910, the highly influential and respected editor of the *School Paper* and *Education Gazette*, Charles Long, wrote of Poetry’s ‘ethical result’: ‘From the poets may be learnt lessons of honesty, truth, moral courage, sincerity, self-denial, kindness, politeness and other virtues which make life enjoyable and akin to the divine.’<sup>14</sup>

Victoria’s inaugural Director of Education and a leading figure in Victorian state school education history, Frank Tate, had written in 1906 about the importance of each individual ‘increasing his character weight.’<sup>15</sup> But the ‘weight’ would ultimately be different for boys and girls. Tate believed that both should receive the same education to a point, then each should be trained in accordance with the different social roles they would perform. Long and most members of wider society agreed: the *School Paper* was laden with explicit and subtle gendered messages. Boys were, unquestionably, to become ‘gentlemen’, and to be positively

active and visible community figures. Early readings such as ‘He Would Not Disobey Orders’ and ‘Be Thorough Boys’ were typical in conveying solemn messages, even for reluctant readers who might have noted little more than the titles.<sup>16</sup> Within other items, questions of the readers were a common reflective device. ‘The Little Hero’ asked: ‘Can a boy be a hero? Of course he can. The boy who will stand up for the right, stick to the truth, and suffer rather than do wrong, is a true hero.’<sup>17</sup>

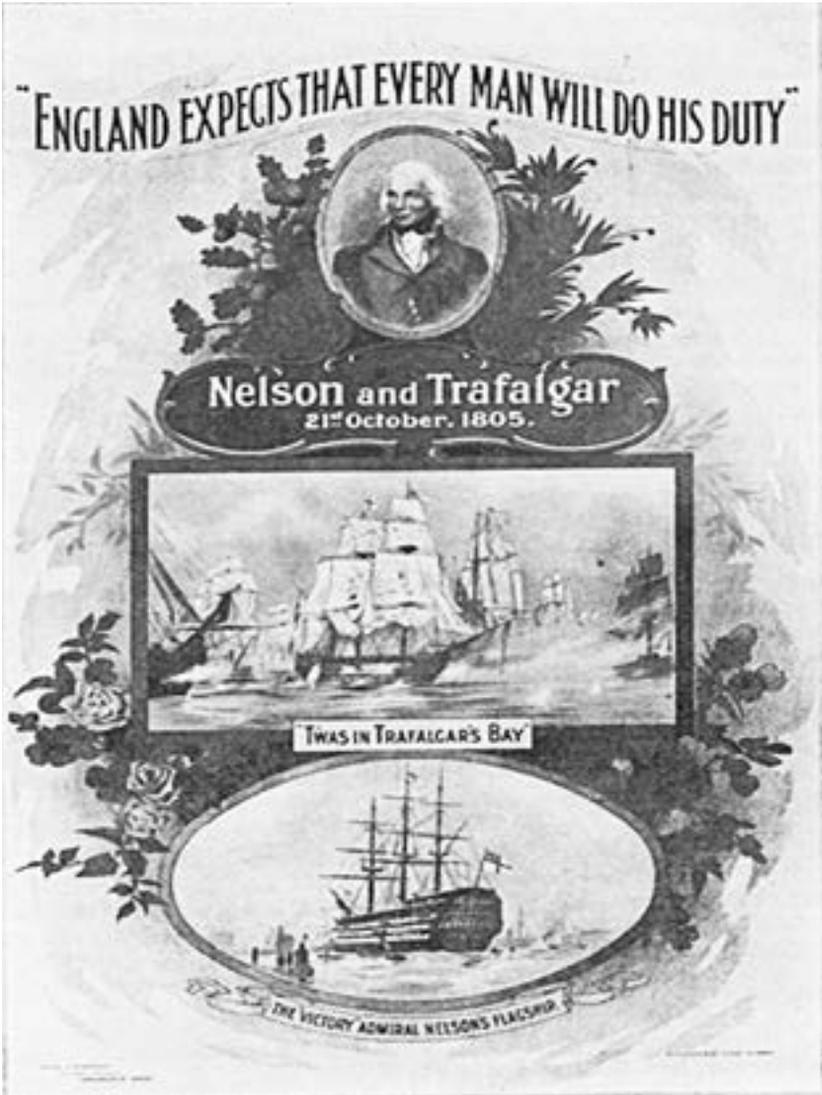
The first *Education Gazette* for 1900 set an enduring tone through to 1910 regarding girls. The Directress of Domestic Economy, Fawcett Story, wrote:

Girls should be trained and educated to fit them for their sphere in the home, the duties of which no woman can neglect without culpability and disgrace; they should be given the instruction for their own benefit, and for that of their family and country.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, she argued that she was not concerned with training domestic servants but, rather, with women managing life in their own homes. Nevertheless, of girls, ‘decorous behaviour was desired and commended at all times.’<sup>19</sup> Readings conveyed subtle messages through scenarios of girls upholding passive virtues of modesty and obedience, and being ‘mother’s helper and support’ before becoming ‘home-makers’, never ‘tomboys’.<sup>20</sup>

The subject of History also played a major role. History had, for many years, been an ‘extra’ subject, before being endorsed as a desirable component of Reading. Its introduction as a separate subject in 1886 had also been hindered through uncertainty about how to teach it without diminishing the ‘3 Rs’ and because British and European histories contained substantial religious content.<sup>21</sup>

But History had ‘long had its advocates ... in training young people in citizenship and developing in them an appreciation of their British heritage.’<sup>22</sup> Once the state system had been operating for over a decade, objections on religious grounds no longer seemed relevant. The emphasis on memorising was not new or unique at this time to the history subject, but History was praised because it trained memory, imagination, reason, judgment, and understanding of cause and effect.<sup>23</sup> Here was an occasion where Long specifically mentioned women in his applause of the subject and its role in character development. Even if women’s roles might be different from men’s:



**'England Expects That Every Man Will Do His Duty', *Education Gazette*, October, 1905, p. 59, celebrated naval achievements and self-sacrifice that had won and would sustain the Empire**

History teaching ... create[s] a desire to read of great personages, the wonderful events ... and to elevate morally the coming man and woman.<sup>24</sup>

## Ideal 2: Health, Temperance and Fitness

Concerns about children's poor health and the inclination of too many to imbibe alcohol and smoke tobacco featured regularly in late nineteenth-century parliamentary debates and royal commissions, summarised by R.J.W. Selleck as the consequence of calls by the social reformers and also the practical educationists.<sup>25</sup> Health, temperance and fitness had not been taught systematically in Victoria's schools, and seem to have been left largely to the whim of individuals gleaning messages from other sources to teach any or all. The formalisation of 'Physical Education' and its support through Tate's courses assisted developments for the health, fitness and temperance of the individual and, ultimately, nation.<sup>26</sup> The Department had a high-ranking supporter. Long, a teetotaler, was powerfully placed in his editorship of the *Education Gazette* and *School Paper* to promote abstinence.<sup>27</sup>

The Education Act 1889 legislated for 'teaching of lessons from some recognised lesson books on the laws of health and from some recognised temperance lesson books'.<sup>28</sup> As a result Thomas Brodribb (a former inspector, President of the Australian Health Society for seventeen years), along with Dr J.W. Springthorpe, eminent physician and a University of Melbourne lecturer on hygiene, produced the widely circulated *Manual of Health and Temperance*.<sup>29</sup> 'Exercise, Rest and Recreation' in Part I encouraged children to participate in 'athletic games' because 'players within the wholesome influence of fresh air, engage their minds in pleasurable occupation, causing friendliness and cheerfulness of disposition'.<sup>30</sup> Part II on temperance warned children of the vice of excessive alcohol consumption:

A victim to this vice loses his vigour, his health, his business, and his self-respect ... a repulsive object, bringing ruin to himself and sorrow and distress to his kinsfolk ... dragged down by his degradation.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, excessive alcohol consumption could bring down a nation more effectively than war: 'It has proved a worse foe to liberty and life

than any ruthless invader or foreign tyrant ... it is a traitor in our very midst ... [It] produces an unceasing crop of misery and crime ... abject poverty and bitter want.<sup>32</sup>

For the few children who did not encounter Brodribb's manual, numerous *School Paper* articles, 1896–1910, would assert that a degraded and unhappy citizen would surely result from sloth and excessive alcohol or tobacco consumption. Of many readings, two make the point: 'Remember how [strong drink] kills men and women wholesale. Some it sends to the grave straightaway ... some through the living grave, the asylum.'<sup>33</sup> And in another, '[Mrs Taylor] knew now what had made Nat sick, and why he had forgotten to do her errands, and why he went to sleep instead of being bright and quick at his lessons. He had begun to smoke.'<sup>34</sup>

Through the *Education Gazette*, teachers were often reminded of the state's position and their role as its servants. The message was particularly clear by 1910:

From the state's point of view, [it] is increasingly [health's] steward ... Every phase of life that can be misused to depreciate the worth of the individual to society, and render him a less valuable national asset, is coming within State jurisdiction.<sup>35</sup>

And a poster that presented 'the desirability of a temperate and industrious life', and which teachers were to display, was published in 1908. Through two different sets of cartoon frames, a young boy contemplated, 'Which path will you take?' One path was academic, sporting and manually industrious, resulting in happy family life and a contented retirement. The other showed a slouching and uninterested scholar becoming involved in gambling, losing money, placing alcohol ahead of family and becoming homeless and alone in old age. Without instruction on how to use the poster, the imagery was considered sufficient to convey the message.<sup>36</sup>

Unsurprisingly, teachers of physical education were the ones particularly advised on the importance to the individual, as well as the nation, of a child's good health. A 1901 *Education Gazette* summarised the thinking that would extend across this period:

Each child possesses physical organs and powers, upon the healthy growth, nutrition and unfolding of which depend, not only his own physical happiness, but his actual value as a factor in the commonwealth.<sup>37</sup>



'Which Path Will You Take', in 'Temperance Teaching', *Education Gazette*, September 1908

### Ideal 3: Responsible Democracy

Education for responsible democracy had been an important element of the commissions and reports mentioned earlier. In particular, leading public figures George Higinbotham and Charles Pearson had realised, as historian Alan Barcan has neatly conveyed, that Australia, 'lacking a hereditary aristocracy and a strong property-owning middle class, was a democracy of a special kind, one in which the working class exercised special power'.<sup>38</sup> That class required education for its special privileges. Civic mindedness and active citizenship thus required more than 'the 3 Rs'. Again, History was assigned a major role. Pearson had remarked earlier on its potential:

History ... seems desirable in the interests of Society that those who will in due course be required to take share in the politics of the Country should have some acquaintance with the main facts

of its History, and should know something of the struggles of our forefathers to obtain our civil rights.<sup>39</sup>

As Minister of Public Instruction, he introduced the subject as aiming ‘to familiarize the scholars with the prominent facts of British and Australian history ... [and] give them an intelligent conception of the constitution under which they live.’<sup>40</sup>

Twenty years later, Tate agreed, explaining expressly in his 1905 ‘Course of Study and Method of Examination’ that:

If this work is carefully done, one of the great results of history teaching in schools, namely the preparation for good citizenship will be secured. It should be the aim to give an intelligent knowledge of, and appreciation for, our leading national institutions, so that they may be consistently maintained, and, if need be, stoutly defended.<sup>41</sup>

Tate’s 1902 and 1905 courses drew largely on British and Australian histories, with political history and civics most prominent in Classes V and VI. Class V of the 1902 course included mainly British topics, such as ‘Magna Carta ... How the Wish of the People Becomes Law ... How the Laws are Carried Out’. Class VI included similar themes, but introduced Australia, with topics such as ‘Federal and State Governments of Australia. Local Government. The Duties of a Citizen.’<sup>42</sup>

Numerous *Education Gazette* articles between 1902 and 1910 advised teachers on how best to teach political histories. One in particular, entitled ‘The Teaching of Civics’, explained how to teach political structures and processes:

Show the children how to become good citizens; give instances of patriotism; lead the children to see that the country governs itself; give them a practical lesson in voting; show how laws must be obeyed; take a case of breaking the law; trace the consequences throughout in order, touching on the crime, accusation, court, lawyers, judge, witnesses, summing up, verdict, and so on.<sup>43</sup>

Tate would, however, later reflect on the teaching and content of History during his Directorship, and declare, surely as a trouble to some but with full confidence in the education system he was creating:

While the knowledge of dates or of events in a given king's reign may have been more accurate in schools ten or twenty years ago, the pupils today have a better idea of the movements which gave us our presentday freedom and the teaching is better designed to make them useful citizens.<sup>44</sup>

#### Ideal 4: National Identity

'Nation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to determine, let alone to analyse,' historian Benedict Anderson declared.<sup>45</sup> If historians have found Australian national identity difficult to define, then Victoria's late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century state school children surely experienced difficulty with its multiple domains previously noted. Possibly they felt a little more comfortable with Australian content after the developments that supported then achieved Federation. Even so, through the overt and subtle messages to express great pride in all spheres, many probably wondered where to direct most energy.

Some writers understood the risk of confusion. The authors of the *Student's Companion History*, 1905, cheerfully explained and coaxed patriotism:

Today the British Empire covers one-fifth of the land surface ... and contains about one-fifth of the population of the world. The various parts of this world embracing Empire are bound to the Motherland by ties of love. We are all inheritors of the 'glorious past', and Britons the wide world over recognize a higher citizenship than that of their country—they are also citizens of the Empire. When the Empire needs her sons, they rally to her call, and colonials are ever ready to prove that they are Britishers also.<sup>46</sup>

Other items were less jolly. Supremacy of Empire was upheld by W.H. Fitchett, who warned in what would become a widely-read book, *Deeds that Won the Empire*, that a child not knowing 'the great names of British story' would be reduced to 'pallid, cold-blooded citizenship'.<sup>47</sup> Children could not have been confused about the desirability of British Empire membership; the expanse of imperial literature circulating in state schools by 1910 would have left no doubt.<sup>48</sup>

Even so, by the 1890s distinctly 'Australian' content was being introduced to a curriculum that had been almost exclusively Anglo-

European for a century. Here was evidence of growing acceptance of, and pride in, ‘things Australian’ and that few Australians could have ignored. It was articulated most forcefully by widely read *Bulletin* authors who largely opposed the over-emphasis on Empire.<sup>49</sup> Few Australians would not have encountered, even if only by name, the new authors, poets and artists capturing the distinctive colours and emotions of Australian bush life. Admiration of Australia’s unique landscape, flora and fauna had grown. Tate summed up the situation well: the perfume of gum smoke was, ‘the sweetest of bush perfumes ... a perfume which would I think bring tears to the eyes of a homesick Australian in a distant land quicker than any scent we know.’<sup>50</sup> Australia’s landscape was shaping a new version of national identity.

Tate’s love for and awareness of this identity, and his commitment to increasing the same in children, was conveyed early in his directorship. A selection of books recommended by him and Long for Reading and Poetry in his first three years reveals the trend: *More Chosen English: Selections from Dryden, Pope, Goldsmith, Keats, Gibbon, and Leigh Hunt*; *Tales from Shakespeare*; and *The Prince Edward Reader* were recommended alongside *Australian Nature Stories for Children*, *Fairy Tales from the Land of the Wattle* and *Mollie’s Bunyip*.<sup>51</sup> Little was left to chance after 1905; the specifications for the first reading book to be produced in Victoria, *The Victorian Reading Book for Class II*, included the instruction that ‘at least one-fourth of the lessons shall deal with Australian subjects.’<sup>52</sup>

History played a major role again. The first *Education Gazette* History article for teachers appeared in January 1901. ‘Explorations in the Southern Seas’ was purely factual and representative of many articles over the years to educate teachers on geographically local topics about which they themselves might not have learned.<sup>53</sup> The trend continued. By 1906, according to Long, History was ‘to communicate pride of race, and to prepare for good citizenship’, both imperial and Australian.<sup>54</sup> Numerous early *School Paper* readings extolled great British deeds.<sup>55</sup> Others offered appropriate blends of Australian and imperial adventure, achievement and pride.<sup>56</sup> By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Long was calling on children to value Australia for its own identity and prosperity.<sup>57</sup> By 1910 this view was especially well developed in what would become his widely used history reader, *Stories of Australian Exploration*.<sup>58</sup>

There was one other identity feature impressed on the minds of Victoria's state school children. It is captured in Robert Birrell's definition where 'members [of a nation] think of themselves as a people sharing certain distinctive characteristics [and] common genetic traits' that not only unify the group but nurture a sense of superiority over others.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the Anglo-Australian 'white race' was presented as superior to races with 'coloured skins'—the peoples of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and Aboriginal people. The message was conveyed subtly and directly to Victoria's state school teachers and children and, along with many topics here, it deserves a number of separate discussions.

However, Tate and Long were beginning to exercise an approach they would use increasingly over time and especially during the Great War: not so much espousing the inferiority of others as asserting the superiority of Britons.<sup>60</sup> Certainly, they and their department introduced confusions to the *School Paper* and *Education Gazette* through the practice of including articles from diverse local and international authors, and recommending texts that contained less subtle sentiments and vacated the high moral ground.<sup>61</sup> But perhaps Long had consciously determined that a definition of good citizenship aligned with national identity might be more neutral if based foremost on a patriotic geography. His and H.O. Arnold Forster's extensively used *The Citizen Reader for the Use of Schools* asked readers in 1906, 'What is meant by being a good citizen?' The answer was a simple combination of location and patriotism, defined in no more complex terms than:

Living in Australia or in any part of the great British Empire.<sup>62</sup>

### **Ideal 5: National Prosperity**

In the opening years of the twentieth century, the interests, prosperities, economies and efficiencies of many nations were in transition globally. Numerous *Education Gazette* articles placed Britain precariously either in first place or in second, conceding in the process that Britain's superiority in all things might be under threat.<sup>63</sup> The fact that Britain was succumbing in industrial supremacy to great rival Germany brought a dual response from many Australians: to uphold their corner of the Empire and to develop its resources.

The 1901 Royal Commission on Technical Education in Victoria offered numerous recommendations to bolster 'national efficiency'. It

asserted that there was ‘urgent necessity for some scheme of continuation schools extending from the State school system ... [to] equip the youth of the country for their future avocations’ and to counter ‘the baneful effects of a State school curriculum, hitherto almost exclusively literary in character.’<sup>64</sup>

The state and ‘education for national prosperity’ were now interrelated. Parliamentarians noted that ‘the obligations resting upon the State in connexion with education [did] not end with the teaching of the three Rs.’ Victorians needed ‘to take up secondary education as they are doing in other parts of the world ... [T]o achieve the chief desire of the people, namely, efficient technical education, we must have that secondary education that leads up to it.’ The Victorian government asserted in 1910 the need for:

a most liberal form of education ... accessible to all ... for a full development of the moral nature of the people without which life is not worth living, of the physiological strength and hygienic knowledge which makes a complete life possible, for the practical knowledge and skill which make life successful, and of the observing, thinking, investigating, and originating mind which leads on to improvement.<sup>65</sup>

This succinctly expressed combination of civic and citizenship ideals resulted in the Education Act 1910, authorising state secondary education.<sup>66</sup>

The arguments for state secondary and technical education found fertile ground among those who had read in their *School Paper* and other approved materials about Britain’s and the colonies’ great prosperity, either before or in spite of the ascent of Germany and others. Curiously, despite claims in numerous of the above that improvements in the subject of science would contribute to long-term national prosperity, there were barely any *Education Gazette* science articles, 1900–10, to help teachers to articulate or act on those claims.<sup>67</sup> ‘Manual Training’ was assigned a new importance, and Belgium’s new drawing methods were lauded for producing draughtsmen conspicuous for ‘rapidity and boldness.’ Their methods were recommended to teachers, and what might have once been a simple woodwork lesson was now deemed a contribution to national efficiency.<sup>68</sup> Physical education would play a major role, too, developing a healthy and well-coordinated future workforce.<sup>69</sup> And geography was

redesigned to give prominence to ‘those countries whose political, social and industrial life bears directly on our own’, meaning ‘the chief British possessions.’<sup>70</sup> By 1910, state school children could be proud of Victoria’s manufacturing contribution to national prosperity:

In past numbers of the *School Paper*, descriptions have been given of factories where eucalyptus oil, biscuits, butter, cement, starch, and other things are prepared ... Victoria is able, not only to provide for the needs of her own people, but to send goods in a highly-finished state across the sea.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, Nature Study would be a contributor. The first Nature Study article on Australia in a 1903 *Education Gazette* focused on the prosperity that could be drawn from a land with ‘soil and climate hitherto unknown ... a wealth in the earth and beneath the surface ... for new industries under new conditions.’<sup>72</sup> And with Nature Study also contributing to all citizens’ good health, the citizens would:

produce for the community a rich harvest of discoveries and inventions.<sup>73</sup>

## **Ideal 6: National Defence**

Historians Pavla Miller and Ian Davey have summarised in visually apt terms how ‘the mid-nineteenth century was the period when most modern nation states were made; parcelled up, warred over and glued together out of hundreds of ethnic groups and contested pieces of territory.’<sup>74</sup> Despite most Australians believing that they would receive Empire support if ever they came under military threat, many had become concerned about their position in the south Pacific, especially after the last British troops left Australia in 1870. When the Russian fleet moored off South Australia in 1882, the forts were reinforced at Port Phillip Bay’s heads; elsewhere, Germany occupied New Guinea in 1884, the French were continuing their expansion in the Pacific, Japan defeated China in 1894. The visiting Major-General Bevan Edwards offered a poor report on the Australian colonies’ defence position in 1889.<sup>75</sup> This coincided with the publication of Pearson’s predictions of invasion from Asia. Too soon afterwards, the fact that the Boer War was not promptly won caused further concern.<sup>76</sup>

Following the departure of the military, state school teachers began to receive encouragement to incorporate drill into their daily work. For example, they were advised in 1877 that ‘the Government had ... a limited number of carbines of old pattern for use in Drill’, and in 1883 they were encouraged to involve boys in inter-school rifle shooting competitions.<sup>77</sup>

The first *Education Gazette* article to assert the relationship between education and defence explained Japan’s success in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904: Russia had 25 per cent of school-age children at school, spending eight cents per capita for its whole population, while Japan had 92 per cent of school-age children at school spending, 34 cents per capita—hence, ‘the wonderful success that has attended the Japanese arms’.<sup>78</sup> And by 1906 teachers no longer needed statistics; they were directed specifically to teach that ‘preparation for the defence of the country in case of an invasion should seriously occupy the minds of Australians’.<sup>79</sup>

Tate did not himself specifically make a point about Australia’s or the Empire’s defence needs until several years into his directorship, although his views on related matters suggest that he supported concern for both. His lectures and writings eventually revealed a conviction about the strong links between national prosperity and defence, at both national and imperial levels. Speaking proudly in 1909 as a member of the British Empire, he argued that:

in our naval supremacy lies our hope of maintaining our widespread Empire ... this naval supremacy can only be maintained by great commercial activity ... The building of Dreadnoughts is a costly business, and a growing trade is necessary if a rapidly-increasing fleet is to be maintained.<sup>80</sup>

A Sydney commentator argued similarly in another article: ‘children in the schools are the first line of future defence. An English consul in Germany writes: “England has more to fear from German schools than from German Dreadnoughts”’.<sup>81</sup> The consensus was that the Empire’s military ranks needed a new generation and type of soldier, particularly with Germany fast developing industrial and military strength. Victoria’s Grade III children received a solemn message directly in 1909: ‘It is right and useful that men should honour and love the flag, and be prepared to lose their lives in defending it’.<sup>82</sup>

Education about ‘military might’ underwent invigoration. Accounts of British war and conquest were recommended in Reading, Poetry and History, with items of Australian historical and contemporary content considered also to bolster national identity, patriotism and local defence.<sup>83</sup> A female author asked, ‘Why need we be always going to the Greeks and Romans and Germans?’ Reminiscent of Pearson, she needed no convincing that:

We have on all sides hungry nations regarding us with covetous eyes, and we would not be doing our children any harm by teaching them that this, the land of their birth, is a country well worth living in, and when the time comes (as it surely will) worth dying for.<sup>84</sup>

History courses and textbooks throughout the period have already been shown to have contained narratives of British and especially English war and conquest.<sup>85</sup> Drill, however, infused as it was with imperial and Australian sentiments, provided the ultimate context for practical development of the defence ideal. Drill’s aims were presumably so clear that, as in earlier decades, none was expressed specifically in the *Education Gazette*, 1900–10. However, Senior-Major George Eddy of the Commonwealth Cadet Force and adviser to the Department was very clear in Long’s *The Aims and Work of the Education Department: The State Schools’ Exhibition, Melbourne, September, 1906, Souvenir Book*. Eddy defined drill precisely:

to train the whole male population to arms, so as to lay the foundation of the largest possible defence force of reserves at the minimum of cost both to the State and to the individual.<sup>86</sup>

### **Ideal 7: Responsible Stewardship of Nature**

Even today, care of the environment, or Nature as it was called at the time, is infrequently accorded a role in formal discussions of citizenship, with citizenship usually anticipating an individual’s positive interactions with their society rather than with the environment. But, as historical geographer Janet Coveney has explained, Australian conservationists in the late nineteenth century were already asking governments to act to protect natural and human-altered environments. Spokespeople included amateur and professional scientists who recognised the Australian

environment's fragility, beauty and uniqueness, as did bushwalkers and holiday makers wishing simply to relax in unspoilt surrounds.<sup>87</sup> Victoria's responsible stewardship of nature was taken up much earlier than might be expected in its state schools.

During Tate's Directorship, the stewardship was taught in two contexts. The first, and pre-eminent, was for profitable, sustained and sustainable agricultural development, and the *Education Gazette* set out expressly to teach the Department's teachers who might not have learned about it or 'Nature' during their education. The *Education Gazette* provided readings and precise lessons on how to grow crops well, and increasingly paid attention to how to improve yields in Australian conditions without irreparably damaging soil.<sup>88</sup>

Agricultural topics were first introduced to science and Nature Study, and not only in rural areas. The approach of each was different.<sup>89</sup> Science taught facts, such as soil types and plant structures. Nature Study, less intent on facts, continued its role as the source of the 'object lesson' where skills, such as observation, and virtues, such as neatness and order, were developed.<sup>90</sup> The reality was that children were working closely with objects collected on Nature Study 'ramblings', or the fruits and vegetables of their labour, meaning that practical understandings of agriculture were close secondary benefits.<sup>91</sup>

The 1903 *Education Gazette* 'Nature Study Supplement' claimed, 'We live in a wonderful and beautiful world ... fatal to misunderstand'. The theme of fatal mistakes with regard to agriculture and Australia's nature was oft repeated by the Department. One author wrote: 'If the study of Nature had from the first been a recognized necessity of school work in a new country, our orchards, for instance, would not be affected as they are.'<sup>92</sup>

*School Paper* articles such as 'The Conquest of the Soil' and "'Penny Wise and Pound Foolish'" promoted responsible farming. In the latter, children read about a farmer who had over-cleared his land resulting in loss of Nature and profits: 'Let us learn, with Mr. Brown, that one may be "penny wise and pound foolish". Even from a business point of view, the scrub along a river or creek is useful.'<sup>93</sup> Agriculture received most coverage between 1908 and 1910, coinciding with the push by Tate and others for national prosperity. It was formally introduced to the curriculum with supportive articles in 1908.<sup>94</sup>

The second objective was the conservation of the Australian landscape in natural condition, or restoration of already damaged locations. This stewardship was supported by lessons and materials in any subjects that espoused, with growing confidence, ‘love of the Australian bush.’<sup>95</sup> Nature Study had originally embraced lessons on imported flora and fauna, but Australia’s native life forms increasingly received attention.<sup>96</sup> *School Paper* readings promoted the bush’s beauty and people’s spirit.<sup>97</sup> The very first item in the first *School Paper* in 1896 was Henry Kendall’s ‘Song of the Cattle Hunters’ which, although referring to introduced livestock, poetically conveyed popular Australian bush and bushman images.<sup>98</sup> Fourteen years later, an extract from A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson’s ‘The Man from Snowy River’ described similar scenery and sentiments.<sup>99</sup> Informational articles, such as ‘The Mallee District’, further popularised bushmen at work, reputedly in harmony with the environment.<sup>100</sup>

Education was moving beyond the classroom. School gardens were the nexus of agricultural and conservation themes in science and Nature Study. Charles Long used his position as departmental editor regularly to showcase attractive examples.<sup>101</sup> The Department encouraged school tree-plantings from mid-1890, distributing 20,000 in that year. Distributions continued over the decade, and teachers were encouraged to organise their own plantings with local resources. In 1901, an ‘Arbor Day’ was promoted to teachers as a worthwhile environmental observance; by 1907, school involvement was expected.<sup>102</sup> Teachers were requested to ‘not rest satisfied till our schools and school-grounds, as well as our homes, possess what will strengthen, elevate and ennoble character’—trees.<sup>103</sup>

Commitment to trees supported interest in their inhabitants. *The Insectivorous Birds of Australia* was distributed to all schools in 1900, but the first *Education Gazette* articles specifically about birds did not appear until the first decade’s final years, likely prompted by Arbor Day’s success in tandem with Victoria’s growing conservation movement.<sup>104</sup> The first official ‘Bird Day’ was held in 1909.<sup>105</sup> This was followed two months later by the introduction of the Gould League of Bird Lovers, named after ‘distinguished ornithologist’ John Gould, to ‘deepen the interest in ... our birds.’<sup>106</sup>

Across his time, Long aspired to ‘a patriotic biology as well as ... geography.’<sup>107</sup> In 1906, in response to a letter in the *Education Gazette* decrying the brutality often shown to Australian animals, he wrote that ‘reading lessons in school books have inculcated kindness to animals,

and the preservation of the lives of those that do no injury to man.' He proudly defended the work of his publication:

Especially has this been so during the period the *School Paper* has been used in schools.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

The 1872–1910 progressive and secular reformers offered logical arguments. Literate individuals of good character and health would be more likely to look after themselves well, and be less likely a burden to the state. Second, those individuals would be more likely to contribute positively to the state: through understanding its democratic processes and responsibly managing their democratic rights; through affection for, and upholding of, local, Victorian, Australian and imperial identities; through contributions to national prosperity and defence; and, through responsible interactions with their environment. That a war was coming was already predicted by the Department by 1910, with as much being said in readings.<sup>109</sup> That war of 1914–18 would test the reformers' ideals, their teachers, pupils, schools and local communities, Victoria, Australia and Empire more substantially and for longer than anyone within and beyond state education could ever have imagined. That vast and tragic experience is a study of its own.

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# School Reading Material: A Window into Society

*Lorraine Ling*

## **Abstract**

*School reading materials provide a window into the social values, moral imperatives and attitudes of their time. In this article, reading materials used in Victorian schools are discussed especially with regard to the social and cultural values they reflect. Before the 1872 Education Act in Victoria the Irish Readers and their successor the Royal Readers were widely used, but the Irish Readers were never fully accepted owing to disputes between Protestants and Catholics over the religious content. Following the 1872 Education Act the Education Department of Victoria was responsible for prescribing the reading curriculum in government schools, resulting in the inclusion of more Australian content but still focused on moral imperatives, attitudes and the specific national values deemed appropriate for the times.*

## **The Earliest Readers**

In the early days of the colony of Victoria the principle of using school readers and prescribed reading material was adopted in order to establish uniform standards in reading and writing. School Readers were also seen as necessary in the early days of the colony because there were many poorly qualified teachers. Exploring the content and spirit of the school reading materials provides us with insights into the moral and social values of the time and the importance placed upon inculcating these values into young people of the day. The struggles and debates that occurred in the selection and introduction of the school reading materials are significant in providing background and context for the final decisions about reading materials made for Victorian schools.

## The Irish Readers

The first standardised readers to be introduced in 1848 in Victoria were known as the 'Irish Readers' and, as D.R. Gibbs notes, 'The adoption of the Irish National books did not come about easily in colonial Australia. It was only after much sectarian wrangling and misunderstanding that they were adopted and used throughout the colonies.'<sup>1</sup> The Irish Readers contained Old Testament stories, poems and stories relating to Ireland and to the British Empire generally, with some mention creeping in about Australia; but they:

consistently foregrounded the imperial dominance and reach of the British Empire. Alongside learning about the gold diggings in Australia, for example, children were also inculcated to believe in an assumed superiority over the 'ignorant savages' of Australia's indigenous population. It is only through a Christian education, write the Irish Commissioners in the *Fourth Book of Lessons* (1859), that 'civilisation will be extended ... into the very heart of this immense country'<sup>2</sup>

In the Irish Readers, anecdotes and stories centred around themes such as honesty ('A good boy does not tell a lie'), love of Empire, brotherly and sisterly love and also regular mentions of death, bravery and military crusades and victories. The seasons and nature were consistent themes, though always from an Irish or British perspective. The lack of Australian content and the inability of Australian children to identify with the stories and themes of the Readers became a concern, and in 1851 we note the first moves towards inclusion of more Australian content in the Irish Readers. Gibbs notes that in many instances those stories that focused on convicts and life in the penal colony in Australia were directed to Irish children to instruct them about life in the colony of Australia. This continued in the 1862 edition of the Third Book where it described Australian Aborigines as 'a race of savages who are amongst the lowest and most degraded that are to be found in the world.'<sup>3</sup>

Despite these concerns, the Irish Readers were widely used in Australia as they were cheap and readily available. They were never really fully accepted owing to ongoing disputes between Protestants and Catholics over religious content. These concerns deepened after the passing of the 1872 Education Act with its provision of free, compulsory and secular education. The passing of the Act was preceded by religious struggle, and educational historian A.G. Austin relates that:

In a statement ordered to be read in all Catholic churches of the Diocese on Sunday, 23 June 1872, the Bishop [Goold] told his flock that the Francis Government ‘boldly and defiantly tell you it is their determination to do away with your schools and substitute them for Godless schools to which they will compel you, under penalty (or imprisonment) to send your children.’<sup>4</sup>

The passing of the Act and the subsequent establishment of the Victorian Education Department meant that the prescription of school reading materials was now in the hands of the new department, and in 1877 the Irish Readers were replaced with the British Royal Readers.

### The Royal Readers

The Royal Readers, published in Edinburgh by Thomas Nelson and Sons beginning in 1877, focused on English literature, history and deeds of courage as well as factual knowledge and social and moral values. Gibbs notes that in the preface of most editions it is stated that: ‘The more young people read, they will read the more fluently, intelligently and gracefully ... young people cannot be expected to dwell long on any one class of subjects.’<sup>5</sup> The Royal Readers were less to entertain young readers and more to assist to educate and skill them in reading. In the absence of highly trained and competent teachers, the Readers often became the major source of teaching. Themes included stories about children and animals, and Gibbs calls them ‘sentimental and didactic in tone.’<sup>6</sup> There was a great focus on good behaviour, piety, and motherhood as well as on bravery, plants and geography. Cleanliness, Godliness, exercise and diet were regular themes, as well as a variety of poems, usually with a moral sting in the tail. For example, in the Fifth Book of The Royal Readers, the first of nine verses of a poem reads:

A Mother’s Love!—how sweet the name!  
 What *is* a Mother’s Love?  
 A noble, pure, and tender flame,  
 Enkindled from above,  
 To bless a heart of earthly mould;  
 The warmest love that *can* grow cold:  
 This is a Mother’s Love.<sup>7</sup>

There are also sections in the Fifth Royal Reader headed ‘Useful Knowledge’, ‘The Founding of Victoria’ and ‘Word Lessons’. These Readers appeared to cover many areas of the curriculum, including grammar, and formed the main method of instruction used by most teachers at that time. Gibbs notes that ‘The inspectors of the time welcomed the new series of readers. They all expressed concern about the poor state of literacy in the schools, with inadequate teaching and insufficient supply of suitable reading material.’<sup>8</sup> There were strong moral and value-laden themes throughout the Royal Reader series, and in analysing them Gibbs observes that:

The first two books of the series each contained over fifty items, mostly anecdotal about animals and children. They were sentimental and didactic in tone. Victorian social and cultural values were clearly at work here. Children were portrayed as pious, loving and conforming readily to the adult will ... One theme emerging in the Third and Fourth books concerns a macabre preoccupation with death. In the Third book we find Edward Farmer’s poem ‘Little Jim’ where a mother weeps over her dying son and with great grief offers up a humble prayer.<sup>9</sup>

### **The School Paper**

The Royal Readers were used up until the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1896 the monthly *School Paper* came into existence following ongoing debate and concern about the lack of Australian and local content and topics in school reading materials.

The Minister of Public Instruction at the time, the Hon. Alexander Peacock, was instrumental in instructing the Board of Education to address the matter of Australian reading materials in a less book-oriented manner, and the monthly *School Paper* came into being under the editorship of Charles Long. Along with Frank Tate, Charles Long was extremely influential in Victorian education and attempted to make reading in school more entertaining, not as heavy and turgid, and more interesting and topical. As well as articles about plants, animals, current affairs, and extracts from the classics, poems and prose, original material submitted by teachers was included in the *School Paper*. Long wrote messages to the children reading the *School Paper*, which gave a personal touch that children and teachers appreciated, especially when contrasted

with the formality and ponderous tone of the previous school readers. There was still moral and religious content in the *School Paper* as well as stories of war and courage. Gibbs notes that, 'Although the *School Papers* were predominantly British in tone and express a royalist and militaristic view, there is as noted, a strong and developing sense of Australian identity, certainly much stronger than found in earlier reading books.'<sup>10</sup>

Following the demise of the *School Paper* in 1969, three new publications in a similar vein were published. These were entitled *Orbit*, which was issued from 1969 to 1971, *Meteor* (1960–71) and *Pursuit* (1960–98). These later publications were accompanied by teachers' notes to provide resources and guidance for teachers using these materials in class. Rather than being classed as 'School Papers' they were referred to as 'magazines' and included factual articles, fiction, plays, poems and activities meant to be entertaining as well as instructive. The teachers' materials allowed for these magazines to be used across a variety of curriculum areas.

### Victorian Readers

As a result of agitation in the press around 1923 for a set of standardised and graded Victorian School Readers to replace or at least supplement the *School Paper*, Charles Long was called upon to develop a set of graded School Readers. This was partly to overcome difficulty in obtaining suitable reading material for schools and also the rising cost of supplying books. In country areas in Victoria it was difficult to obtain reading material, and the lack of a standard set of School Readers meant that there was an assortment of texts, making the choice difficult for teachers. Gibbs notes that 'the authors of books were often senior officers [of the Department of Education] benefiting from royalties and that a strong monopoly had been established by department officials for the Melbourne publishing firm of Whitcombe and Tombs.'<sup>11</sup>

Charles Long worked on completing a set of Victorian Readers between 1926 and 1928, and by 1930 had completed the full set of eight. Parents purchased the Victorian Readers for between fourpence and sixpence for the lower grades, and between 1 shilling and 1s 3d for the higher grade Victorian Readers. If parents demonstrated that they were unable to purchase the books, these were supplied to the children concerned at no cost. The militaristic tone and stories of loyalty to the British Empire were largely replaced with Australian content. There were

still stories pertaining to the Empire, Europe and America and Australia's relationship with them although the Australian flavour was strong throughout the series. Gibbs notes that there were 'The same conservative social and ethical values as their nineteenth-century predecessors ... Certainly the Eighth book set the pattern for the rest of the series; it reflects a high moral and literary tone in combination with a strong sense of Australian nationalism.'<sup>12</sup>

In the preface to the Victorian Readers it was stated that: 'The inculcation of sound morality was always to be kept in view and support given to the creation of a feeling against international strife and to the implanting of a desire for world-wide toleration.'<sup>13</sup> However, there were obvious efforts on the part of the editor to lighten the tone of these Readers, and nonsense poems such as Edward Lear's 'The Owl and the Pussycat' were included to make reading not only interesting but entertaining for the child readers.

There are also fantasy stories, some of which were potentially frightening for young children, notably 'The Hobyahs' which was included in the Second Book in the Victorian Readers series. 'The Hobyahs', as it appeared in the Reader was a rewritten Australianised version of an old Scottish fairy tale and involved creatures called the Hobyahs that would creep out of their gloomy gullies by night and run amongst the gum trees crying 'Pull down the hut, eat up the little old man, and carry off the little old woman'. Each night this would happen, but the little dog Dingo, who belonged to the little old man and woman, would bark ferociously and frighten the Hobyahs away. But the barking wakes up the little old man who becomes annoyed—and each night this occurs, he cuts off another piece of the dog: first his tail, then his legs, and finally his head, so that he stops barking. This allows the Hobyahs to come in and carry off the little old woman. But as the little old man has stowed Dingo's body parts under the bed, he is able to put him back together again and little dog Dingo eats the Hobyahs, and all live happily ever after! Robert Drewe, writing in the *Age* in 2008, said "'The Hobyahs" could necessitate a night-light for an entire childhood. A woman writer I know is still having Hobyah nightmares 45 years later.'<sup>14</sup>

Revisions of the Victorian Readers were undertaken in 1940 and these were used in schools well into the 1950s. Throughout the series there is an element of class structure in the articles, for example C.F. Alexander's Victorian-era hymn, which includes the verse 'The rich man

## SECOND BOOK.

57

Skip, skip, skipping on the ends  
of their toes ran the hobyahs.

And the hobyahs cried, "Pull  
down the hut, eat up the little old  
man, carry off the little old woman."



Then yellow dog Dingo ran out,  
barking loudly. The hobyahs were  
afraid.

They ran home as fast as they  
could go.

**The Hobyahs, for Victorian school children**

Elsie Jean McKissock, illustrator (Source: The Victorian Readers,  
Second Book, 1930)

in his castle,/ The poor man at his gate,/ God made them high and lowly,  
And ordered their estate'.<sup>15</sup> Gibbs notes that the Australian historian  
Charles Edward Woodrow Bean (1879–1968) expressed the view that  
'Australian history began in 1788 with white settlement' and that Bean  
writes in his stories and poems of the time prior to 1788 as being 'before  
Australian history began', and the British Empire is praised for its civilising  
influence on Australia. Gibbs concludes that, 'Overall, the moral tone of  
the series reflects, understandably, the conservative social values of the  
middle-class, white Anglo-Saxon with vested interests in a stable social  
and economic structure'.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the series there was a strong literary theme, with Australian writers together with poets being featured and a message of nationalism, love of Australia and its culture, and an attempt to give readers a sense of identity as Australians.

With the introduction of *John and Betty*, *Playmates* and *Holidays*, at a time of significant revision of the Victorian school curriculum in 1954, the Victorian Readers were finally phased out. Some of the principles underpinning the revision of the curriculum were that reading especially should be more interesting and based upon real life with which children could identify. There was also an element of choice, where teachers were able to select from a range of reading materials to provide variety for the children. At this point, 'readers' came to be understood more as those who read rather than as books to be read.

It is interesting to note that the Victorian Readers were so popular with the adults who were children of the era and had a sentimental attachment to them that a facsimile boxed set version of all eight books was produced by the Ministry of Education in Victoria in 1985.

### ***John and Betty, Playmates and Holidays***

In the 1950s the Education Department of Victoria introduced a new series of Readers, the first of which was *John and Betty*. This was referred to as 'The Earliest Reader for the Little Ones' and became extremely popular from the 1950s in Victorian schools. Published by the Education Department of Victoria and illustrated by Marjorie Howden, it related, in repetitive text, the life and doings of a brother and sister, John and Betty. In terms of the moral and social values portrayed in this first reading book for children, it reinforced stereotypical values about gender roles in the society of the times, and emphasised social roles and expectations. Betty played with a doll whilst John played with a truck. John had a drum and went 'bang, bang, bang' whilst Betty put her doll in a pram and went 'rock, rock, rock'. In the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2014, novelist Anson Cameron, recalling his school days and reading *John and Betty*, writes,

I quickly became disgusted at their goodness and pliability as they frolicked with their happy, yappy dog Spot. Illustrations showed Spot never had four legs on the ground at once, which bespoke a limitless capacity to be amusing. John, or Betty, or both, also owned a witlessly personable cat named Fluff ... John made me gag with abhorrence. He sported the invulnerable happiness of a

Labrador or a sitcom housemaid. John and Betty were supposed to awaken an appetite for reading in us. They awakened an appetite for throwing John and Betty down a well in me.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Cameron, many children of the day, now adults, recall with some pleasure reading the ‘little book with the orange cover’ as one of their earliest reading experiences. Soon after *John and Betty* the First Grade reader *Playmates* emerged. It was written by Betty Somerville and illustrated by Marjorie Howden, who also illustrated *John and Betty*, and was published in 1952.

*Playmates* is an elaborated version, with 72 pages of text, of *John and Betty* and is based on the same characters along with their mother and father and a baby who remains nameless in the text. In *Playmates* Betty still has a doll and a pram but has added a kite to her repertoire, whilst John still has a truck and a drum but has acquired a spade. Baby is allowed to play with both John’s drum and Betty’s doll. John is now big enough to help his father and Betty is big enough to help her mother water the garden with her ‘little can’. John also has a spinning top. The family goes for a walk with baby in the pram and comes upon a horse with a ‘baby horse’ and a bird with a ‘baby bird’. John and Betty then go to school and make friends, and we follow the family through various activities and events culminating in Christmas celebrations.

The Victorian Second Book, *Holidays*, was published in 1953 and continues the adventures of John and Betty, who are going to the beach with the whole family including Scottie and Fluff. This book has a story line with ingredients modelling the use of various elements of a plot and building on the beginnings of this element of reading that was introduced in both *John and Betty* and *Playmates*. For example, there is an element of suspense when, having reached the beach house where they are staying, Scottie runs after some rabbits and disappears; but Father is confident that he will come back, and he does. They engage in a variety of holiday activities with the emphasis on being together as a family. We note that Father and John went fishing but Betty did not go and we are not told how she filled her time. The idea of chapters is introduced with contained stories demarcated by a row of star signs at the bottom of the page that end each ‘chapter’. We follow the family through occasions such as the baby’s birthday, going to Sunday School and then going for a Sunday afternoon drive in the hills, and the children are allowed to ask a friend

each. We follow some of the activities of their friends whose Aunt and Uncle are going ‘on a long holiday in a big ship’. We follow John and Betty and their friends and families through a range of holiday activities and, as with the previous book, *Holidays* ends with Christmas approaching.

In all three books the emphasis in terms of social values is on families and friends and relationships as well as gender roles and expectations. These books increase in difficulty and complexity to introduce young readers to the elements of story writing, and the language becomes increasingly advanced.

## Conclusion

It can be seen from this overview of school reading materials from the early days of education in the colony of Victoria through to more recent times that there are distinct phases. Gibbs states that:

We can analyse the changing social content and use of school books in Victoria during three distinct periods: the Irish monopoly, 1848–1877, the British phase, 1877–1896 and the Australian national phase, 1896–1948. Significant changes were made to the books during each phase, and new books introduced, often the result of a revised curriculum or from community pressure groups, reflecting the existing social tensions and the desire for new curriculum ideas to be inserted into the realm of public education.<sup>18</sup>

We can also trace major changes in education in general in Victoria back to the ground-breaking 1872 Education Act. With the establishment of the Department of Education, we see a lessening of dependence on materials from the British Empire, often referred to as ‘the motherland’. Another major change as a result of setting up the Department was the training of teachers and the development of materials specifically tailored to the Australian context. The 1872 Education Act marks a watershed event, not only in Victorian education but in education worldwide, as it was subsequently taken as a model for education systems in many other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally. The creation of bespoke reading materials for Victorian schools not only introduced a predominance of Australian content into schools, but also altered the focus of school reading by making it more entertaining, yet more obviously underpinned by sound educational theory. Rather than reading

being focused on inculcating social expectations in young readers, although that was still clearly present, reading was about the acquisition and practice of specific skills associated with reading, comprehension, thinking, creating and critiquing. Reading could be instructive as well as enjoyable and stimulating.

By examining reading materials both prior to and after the 1872 Education Act we gain valuable insights into the society of the times and to the stereotypes, attitudes, social mores, expectations and prejudices associated with various eras in history. The extent to which schools should convey moral values is always a topic for discussion, but it is clear that schools always have and always will choose the values they wish to convey, based upon a multitude of influences both external and internal to the school context. It is also clear that there will always be struggles and tensions over which values and attitudes prevail, especially when we live in a pluralistic society with a plethora of different expectations, cultural values and attitudes, all existing simultaneously. At a time when the notion of ‘text’ includes such a diversity of different types apart from books, school ‘reading’ materials are diverse and eclectic, which in many ways reflect the diversity and eclecticism of society itself. In Albert Einstein’s words, ‘We must not only learn to tolerate our differences. We must welcome them as the richness and diversity which can lead to true intelligence.’

## Notes

- 1 D.R. Gibbs, ‘Victorian School Books: A Study of the Changing Social Content and Use of School Books in Victoria, 1848–1948, with Particular Reference to School Readers’. PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1987, p. 15.
- 2 Gibbs, quoting Blackie’s *Irish Readers*, 1901.
- 3 Gibbs, p. 59.
- 4 A.G. Austin, *Australian Education 1788–1900: Church, State and Public Education in Colonial Australia*, Melbourne, Pitman, 1965, p. 205.
- 5 Gibbs, p. 126.
- 6 Gibbs, p. 127.
- 7 Gibbs, p. 47. The poem is by Scottish poet and hymn writer, James Montgomery (1771–1854).
- 8 Gibbs, p. 132.
- 9 Gibbs, p. 135.
- 10 Gibbs, p. 200.
- 11 Gibbs, p. 212.
- 12 Gibbs, p. 216.

- 13 Victoria Education Department, *Victorian Reader*, Eighth Book, 1928, p. vi.
- 14 Robert Drewe, 'Forget Hobyahs—Worry about Bare-Bummed Gumnuts!,' *Age*, 26 April 2008.
- 15 C.F. Alexander, 'All Things Bright and Beautiful', 1848.
- 16 Gibbs, pp. 227, 231.
- 17 Anson Cameron, 'For Huck's Sake, John and Betty had it Coming,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September 2014.
- 18 Gibbs, p. 260.

# Bendigo School of Domestic Arts: The Nomadic Experience 1916–2016

*Michele Matthews*

## **Birth of a School**

This conference allowed light to shine on a unique and innovative non-metropolitan educational institution, the Bendigo School of Domestic Arts, henceforward to be referred to as the DA school, for brevity. As the first Domestic Arts School to be established outside Melbourne, this local entity had an auspicious beginning in 1916, followed by lean years fighting for its very survival, and a nomadic journey that saw the school relocate twice in the first four decades of its existence, from its original Olinda Street site to Rosalind Park, before finally settling into its third home in the Bendigo suburb of Flora Hill, where it still proudly stands today.

One local journalist took great delight in describing the school's educational philosophy and curriculum, just days after classes first commenced. He said:

[Girls] will be able to learn at the Domestic Arts School everything connected with the work of a house and will fit themselves for that grand female profession—the oldest and the best and women's true vocation and life work—the care of a husband and a home ... they [local girls] will prove prizes in the matrimonial lottery for the happy men fortunate enough to secure them as wives.<sup>1</sup>

This Domestic Arts school was indeed established in an era when it was deemed essential for girls to be taught skills they would need to draw upon as future Australian wives and mothers.

In an interview published in April 1916, the Victorian Director of Education, Frank Tate, spoke of visiting the new Bendigo DA school site. He explained exactly how the school was to operate: 'Girls from the elementary schools will be enrolled in classes ... and will spend two

full days a week in the institution. The other three days they will spend in the elementary schools [doing] a modified curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

Between Tate's official statement in April and classes actually commencing on Monday 31 July 1916 there was a decision made *not* to introduce this divided structure into this DA school; instead, it was to function as 'a self-contained institution' where the girls were to attend all five days of the school week at Olinda Street. Two days were to be allocated to the study of 'domestic arts' subjects and three days to the 'elementary school' subjects.<sup>3</sup> The two curriculum streams being delivered at the one location was a first in Victorian domestic arts school history. It appears local pressure contributed to this decision.

## Curriculum

The curriculum set for the first cohort of 165 Grade 7 and Grade 8 girls, studying towards their Qualifying and Merit certificates, was defined in *Vision and Realisation* as having an 'emphasis on the practice of domestic skills such as cookery, needlework, machinery and home management, in addition to literary subjects'.<sup>4</sup> Tate pointed out that: 'All of the household work connected with the school will be done by the pupils as practice connected with their theory work'.<sup>5</sup> Public-servant speak for saving money!

Tate's comment was enacted, judging by the amusingly bizarre description given of the class work of one group of students, shortly after the school commenced: 'I saw many small girls perched on ladders and cleaning away at the windows. Those that had been done were quite spotless, and their polish was very good, and the young workers found window cleaning a pleasant task'.<sup>6</sup>

Another local journalist recorded the details of the school's twofold curriculum set for 1916. The girls' 'domestic arts' course consisted of 'cookery, laundry, sewing and needlework, and housewifery, hygiene, home nursing, care of children, first aid etc.' Their other three days were the 'elementary school' subjects: 'English, arithmetic, history, geography, elementary science, drawing and physical training'. In their second year, 'dressmaking, millinery, and the art of home decoration and furnishing will be added'.<sup>7</sup>

The hands-on aspects of 'home decoration' and 'laundry' were undertaken in the cottage erected on the Olinda Street site, the home of the school's headmistress from June 1918.<sup>8</sup>

One practical way for the girls to learn and improve their cookery skills was through the preparation and catering of dinner meals for the public, also commented upon by local media: ‘For the cost of one shilling, any person can at lunch ... obtain a three course meal consisting of a choice of two soups, three meals, and five sweets.’ These meals were offered ‘since the inception of the school, [and have] been exceptionally well patronised ... Patrons have returned day after day.’<sup>9</sup> The school’s dining room could seat 24 people.<sup>10</sup>

The 1916 enrolments were double that of the 80 girls for which the school was originally designed. It was decided that ‘the cookery demonstration and the sewing rooms will have to be used temporarily for the elementary school classes.’<sup>11</sup> This first overcrowding problem, one of many in the school’s 100-year history, was solved in an unusual way: ‘a large pavilion is being fitted up in the school grounds which, when completed, will relieve the strain in that respect.’<sup>12</sup> This structure was described as ‘an open air room’ located in the grounds.<sup>13</sup> What a charming solution—to conduct classes in a temporary outdoor classroom during the last month of the 1916 Bendigo winter!

From the early 1920s, the school added the third-year Proficiency Certificate of study, which was composed of a syllabus, according to the Minister of Public Instruction’s report to parliament, featuring ‘more advanced work in English, household accountancy, home management, home decoration ... home nursing, and mothercraft.’<sup>14</sup>

Mothercraft as a subject was entrusted to an external expert. The Bendigo Council’s Health Centre sister visited the school on Wednesdays to teach the girls all aspects of caring for a baby. In her 1926 report to Council, Sister Davies noted her strong suspicion that ‘The lectures given each week ... appear to be appreciated by the mothers through the children.’<sup>15</sup>

In 1948–49, one group of students undertook a two-year Pre-Nursing Certificate, with the blessing of Doris Taysom (headmistress 1944–53). These ten girls studied biology, anatomy and physiology, all with the legendary teacher Miss Mary McGawley, who had been one of the first six staff appointed in 1916. She taught at the school until her retirement in 1955!<sup>16</sup> Mary held the staff-longevity record until Nena Harris clocked up 42 years from 1974 to 2015. Three of these pre-nursing students went on to have long, successful careers.<sup>17</sup>



**Class photograph 1922: Bendigo School of Domestic Arts at Olinda Street**  
(Courtesy of Libby Luke)

This was in the seventh year of the school's operation. The school moved to Rosalind Park, Bendigo in 1937. It has been renamed Bendigo Girls' School, 1932.



**Class photograph 1974: Form 1C, Flora Hill High School** (Courtesy of the author)

Co-education became a reality from February 1974, when eight boys were distinctly outnumbered by 25 girls in each of the four Form 1 classes that year.' FHHS was the fifth name for the school that had begun as Bendigo School of Domestic Arts (1916), becoming Bendigo Girls' School (1938), Bendigo Girls' Secondary School (1949) and Bendigo Girls' High School (1966). FHHS was subsequently renamed Flora Hill Secondary College (1991), becoming Bendigo South East Secondary College in 2009.

The Form Five Leaving year was offered from 1952, while Matriculation was first offered in 1964. The matriculation (later HSC) class never exceeded nineteen girls. Limited subjects were offered, often having to be studied by correspondence, but matriculation level survived until 1974.<sup>18</sup> A more successful strand of study was the commercial course—typing, shorthand and bookkeeping—which was offered from the late 1950s. Girls were being trained to work in the city’s professional offices and businesses, a big step away from their predecessors being readied solely for marriage and motherhood. Society had changed its emphasis, and this school’s curriculum began to change to reflect that wider shift.

### **Secular and Free?**

The two earliest volumes of pupils’ registers recorded the name of the elementary school each girl had previously attended before being enrolled at the Bendigo DA school. As well as the expected names of the many Bendigo and Eaglehawk elementary schools, surprisingly, local Catholic education providers lost girls to the new institution in its early years. But their attendance was often short-lived.<sup>19</sup> I wonder whether irate Catholic priests preached on Sundays against this move, fearing it would jeopardise attendance numbers at the local Catholic St Mary’s girls’ school. Or did the Australian conscription plebiscites of 1916 and 1917 come into play? Definitely the secular issue was at work here.

‘Free education’ was also questionable in this case. While no fees were charged, uniforms were the expected mode of dress, judging by class photos from the early 1930s. Tunics, blazers, jumpers and berets were expensive pieces of school wardrobe. Numerous accounts of uniforms being handed down within families were noted in past students’ questionnaires for my research. Many girls lived in outlying Bendigo suburbs and Eaglehawk township, so daily tram fares would also have been an extra expense for parents.

In a mining community with an ever-declining mining industry, even before the full impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s, it was not surprising that the school’s enrolment numbers dropped perilously in the years from 1919 to 1933.<sup>20</sup> The 1916 high watermark enrolment figure was not achieved again until 1934. The year 1919, for example, saw only 90 new enrolments.<sup>21</sup>

To counterbalance this local economic and social catastrophe, women were offered night classes, paying a fee of 2s 6d for a ten-week term, studying two subjects from a choice of cookery, dressmaking, and millinery. In the year to 30 June 1918, 267 local women availed themselves of this opportunity.<sup>22</sup>

## Nomadic Students

One puzzling feature of the early pupils' registers was the inclusion of home addresses such as Drummartin and Elmore, both about 50 kilometres north of Bendigo. There is a strong probability that girls from there boarded in Bendigo in order to attend the DA school. The home address, rather than the boarding address, is what had to be specified in the registers, so the early nomadic history of some students became hidden.

Hazel Agnes Hopper's story supports this theory. She attended Terrick South School, east of Mitiamo, where she completed Grade 8. In 1924, Hazel studied at Bendigo DA school to undertake Grade 9, her Proficiency Certificate year. She boarded at the Bendigo YWCA.<sup>23</sup> The register has 'YWCA' written in pencil above her home address, and shows us that she was only thirteen years old when she moved from home to Bendigo to study at the DA school.<sup>24</sup>

There were other late-1930s students like Hazel. One of these nomadic girls, Joan Whinfield, told me that she, her cousin Joyce, and four other girls, all boarded at the city's YWCA. They went home only for term holidays, by train, to northern Victorian and southern New South Wales country towns. Joan said her parents made this decision because 'Friends and relatives in Bendigo spoke [well] of the Girls' School'.<sup>25</sup>

After the country bus system was established in 1944 to serve the Bendigo region, girls used this mode of travel daily, some travelling up to an hour each way from numerous country areas surrounding Bendigo.<sup>26</sup>

## First Headmistress

The school was fortunate to be led by intelligent, well-trained, successful women, from its inception right through to the seventh and last headmistress, Una Trahair (1966–71).

Violet Leadbeater had the distinction of being appointed the school's first, a position she held for eight years from July 1916 until September 1924.<sup>27</sup> Violet must be given the credit for establishing the fledgling DA

school, keeping it viable during local economic trials, promoting it within the wider district it served, and leading her small team of six female staff to implement the Victorian government's regional push for what one historian termed 'scientific housewifery'.<sup>28</sup>

Violet's Victorian teaching record entry survives, holding the key to understanding the abilities and personality of the school's founding leader. Born in July 1876, she had her first appointment as a head teacher in 1901, when she was only 25 years old. Violet's 1906 report described her: '[She] shows power, energy, intelligence ... [She] has a good influence over her scholars.'

It was on 17 July 1916, only two weeks before the Bendigo school actually opened, that Violet was appointed 'Temp. H.T.', a belated 40<sup>th</sup> birthday present.<sup>29</sup> The fact that her appointment as head teacher was initially temporary is of importance to this narrative. Was the Education Department hedging its bets in case the school, or Violet, or both, proved a disastrous regional experiment?

Violet was under pressure to prove herself. Her first assessment report in June 1917, eleven months after she had been given the helm, described her as a 'very capable teacher'.<sup>30</sup> This statement implies she was undertaking both teaching and head teacher duties at the DA school in its first years. By November 1918, Violet was acknowledged as 'A very good disciplinarian and organizer, commands respect & cooperation of staff. Has a very good grip of progress and very good personal influence on pupils.' With this glowing report and a near-perfect score, it was not surprising that the next entry in Violet's teaching record stated: 'Appt. made permanent from 1 March 1919'.<sup>31</sup>

A contemporary journalist, not looking with a school inspector's critical gaze, described Violet Leadbeater as 'the right woman in the right place ... [She] not only has a thorough knowledge and grip of her work ... but she is an enthusiast in the teaching of domestic art, and a great success from this latest ... enterprise may therefore be safely assured'.<sup>32</sup>

## Second Home

By 1935 the school's early difficulties were becoming a dim memory. Instead, the Olinda Street site was bursting at the seams. The decision was made that the entire school was to be relocated to classrooms at the city's Rosalind Park, on a site formerly used by the then fledgling Bendigo Teachers' College. The neighbouring former Supreme Court building was

now used for school assemblies and speech nights. From the later war years, prefabricated buildings were used as classrooms.<sup>33</sup>

Imagine the logistics of shifting twenty years of accumulated furniture, sewing machines, laundry apparatus and kitchen paraphernalia, ready for the 1937 academic year. The school now had a most unusual neighbour—the Bendigo gaol! The Rosalind Park site remained home to thousands of girls for two decades until 1958, when it also became too small for its 470 students and 24 staff.<sup>34</sup>

The two decades after the renamed Bendigo Girls' School (BGS) was relocated to the Rosalind Park site were historically significant. Students had to cope with the effects of the Second World War: absentee fathers, food coupons for cookery classes, and the construction of trenches around the perimeter of the classrooms were mentioned by past students. The school adopted its third name in 1949: Bendigo Girls' Secondary School (BGSS). This label survived until 1966.

Four women served diligently in the position of headmistress during these years. Frances Higgins (Head, 1924–39) went on to become a school inspector from 1947.<sup>35</sup> She was followed by Doris Aubrey (1939–44), Doris Taysom (1944–53), and Mary Lazarus (1954–59). The last two women in particular were remembered fondly by many past students.

The school's enrolments nearly doubled over these two decades, from 250 to 470 girls. Two national factors—post Second World War immigration and an increase in the Australian birth rate—contributed to the growth.<sup>36</sup> The resultant overcrowding of the Rosalind Park site can be attributed chiefly to the latter, with the first of the baby boomer generation born in 1945–46 reaching secondary school age in 1957–58. Overcrowding was the key impetus for the school's second relocation to its Flora Hill site in 1959. Nomads again!

### **Third and Final Home**

The Education Department purchased about ten acres of former farming land, situated about four kilometres away from the CBD, in the newer Bendigo suburb of Flora Hill. While all the planning for this second shift must have been undertaken by Mary Lazarus, it fell to the sixth headmistress, Dorothy Steel (1959–66), to transition 516 students and 26 staff into their new home.<sup>37</sup> A capable local woman who had excelled as a student herself, winning the coveted Waverley essay prize at Bendigo High

School, Dorothy did a sterling job establishing BGSS in its third home. (She donated her prize of Sir Walter Scott's complete set of leather-bound volumes to the BGSS library.)

Reminiscing in 1964, members of the first matriculation class, who were the surviving members of the Form 1 class of 1959, wrote a description of the school's physical appearance, as they saw it when they first arrived:

The school then looked as if it had just been placed on a clear patch of land in the middle of the bush, for there were no made paths, gardens or lawns. But luckily there were tall, shady gum trees, luxuriant grass, and the water race, almost entirely surrounding the school, and of course, being so unusual in a school ground, gained much attention from the girls. All girls enjoyed eating their lunches under the pine trees, but some seemed to enjoy falling into the race, either by trying to jump across it or going very unsteadily across a pipe and splashing into the water.<sup>38</sup>

Local horses, goats and dogs must have missed the message that this new school site was out of bounds to them. Past students' recollections include girls riding horses at lunchtime, to the annoyance of yard-duty teachers, and the infamous goat that had to be escorted along the corridors by a flustered senior teacher!<sup>39</sup>

The final school site expanded from an initial two parallel corridors of classrooms, connected by a covered way in 1959, to substantial sports ovals, tennis and netball courts, gardens, canteen, shelter sheds, a school hall (1974), and a sea of portable classrooms from the 1980s. By the 1990s, calls were being made by teachers, the school council and the wider community for a new school—or, at the very least, for major renovations of the existing classrooms, already past their use-by date.

The last woman who held the title of headmistress was Una Trahair (1966–71). During her 2015 interview, Una said her six years at the then BGHS were rewarding. Surviving documents showed she experienced numerous professional tribulations: a shortage of staff—'so many staff changes'—a difficult student clientele, an inability to fulfil her dream of building a school assembly hall, and declining enrolments.<sup>40</sup> Student numbers plummeted from 799 in 1966 to 584 in 1971 when Una retired.

New enrolment numbers were probably even lower; Una stopped including them in her annual speech night reports.

The 1960s world sexual and freedom revolution had reached Bendigo. In Una's own words: 'Discipline was becoming very much more difficult ... I had to go and rescue girls from [a local] cafe ... Those sorts of things are unpleasant.'<sup>41</sup>

In her final report to the school community in 1971, Una stated she agreed with the idea that 'moral standards are deteriorating.' She noted the enormous vandalism in classrooms and buildings, the high truancy rate, 'rudeness from students,' and 'deliberate efforts to disturb the smooth working of the class-room' had all taken up much of her time during that year. She even appealed to parents to assist their daughters' development by imposing restrictions on them at home.<sup>42</sup> This speech made the *Bendigo Advertiser* the following day, quoted word for word.<sup>43</sup>

Una remembered she lobbied hard with Education Department authorities for BGHS to become co-educational to counterbalance social issues and to eliminate poaching of female students by the nearby co-educational Golden Square High.<sup>44</sup> Something drastic had to be done if the school was to survive as a viable entity. The move to co-education was the logical and necessary means of saving BGHS, even if it meant turning the school's founding ethos on its head.

Co-education became a reality from February 1974, when eight boys were distinctly outnumbered by 25 girls in each of the four Form 1 classes that year. By 1977, the sex ratio was 50–50. That was the first year when the school catered only for Forms 1 to 4, a turning back of the clock in one sense. On a technicality, the school sign still read 'Bendigo Girls' High School' the day co-education commenced. The *Government Gazette* did not print the official name change to Flora Hill High School (FHHS) until 13 February!<sup>45</sup> This was the school's fifth name. The new title, Principal, was given to Mary Cahill in 1972. After her retirement in 1977, the five principals who followed her were all male.

The Education Department's 21<sup>st</sup> century Bendigo Education Plan saw the closure of one secondary school locally, and the construction of four new schools, including the renamed Flora Hill Secondary College (FHSC). All the 1959 buildings were demolished, but Una's dream assembly hall, completed in 1974, was spared. Construction of the new school took from 2008 to 2011, with all students and staff transferring into their new classrooms in 2012.



**The view from the school magazine *Cooinda*, 1972**

The first male teacher joins the staff two years before the school became co-educational.

## Conclusion

The school—from 2009 called Bendigo South East Secondary College (BSE), its seventh name—was again bursting out of its new classrooms, originally designed for 1200 students, with nearly 1600 enrolled by 2016, the centenary year. I am waiting to see what happens next. No evolution will surprise me, after the three locations, seven name incarnations, the ideological shift to co-education, and countless curriculum innovations in this school's 100- year existence. But this local institution has established strong traditions, weathering demographic, economic, social, and political changes, instilling a deep love of this school and of learning among its past alumni and staff, creating strong friendships among the alumni, and nurturing the talents of thousands of successful individuals over its century and more of service to Bendigo and district: an impressive resume after a rocky, nomadic history.

## Acknowledgement

I was always proud to be associated, both as a student and a teacher, with Victorian government schools. I gratefully thank the hundreds of past students and staff who shared their memories, photographs and artefacts with me through questionnaires, emails, phone conversations and interviews. The school alumni made their centenary book rich in reminiscences and imagery. This paper is based on the book I researched and wrote for the centenary history of this school: Michele Matthews, *Honour the Work: Bendigo School of Domestic Arts to Bendigo South East College 1916–2016*, Bendigo, Bendigo Modern Press, 2016.

## Notes

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- 3 *Bendigonian*, 3 August 1916, p. 24.
- 4 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol. 2, Melbourne, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, p. 592.
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- 6 *Bendigo Independent*, 19 August 1916, p. 10.
- 7 *Bendigonian*, 3 August 1916, p. 24.
- 8 *Bendigonian*, 13 June 1918, p. 16.
- 9 *Bendigo Independent*, 19 August 1916, p. 8.
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- 39 Questionnaire 75, Margaret Crawford; Questionnaire 3, Dorothy Harris; cartoon, *Cooinda*, 1959.
- 40 Author's interview with Una Trahair, 6 April 2015; 'Head Mistress / Principal's Report', *Cooinda*, 1966–1971; Principal's Report at Speech Afternoon, 1966–67, 1969–1971, Una Trahair Archives, Bendigo.
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# Women's Community Leadership: Mothers' Clubs in the Twentieth Century

*Deborah Towns*

## **Introduction**

Community and parent involvement in government schooling helped build and develop Victorian schools up to 1872. After the passing of the Education Act 1872, the government decided not only to make education 'free, compulsory and secular' but to 'finance, establish and maintain its schools.'<sup>1</sup> Different from the USA and the United Kingdom, which had local community-run school boards or local education authorities, this created a highly centralised system. According to educationist Gwyneth Dow, the government of Victoria prior to the Act encouraged local communities to form networks of schools similar to the English model, but the locals did not always take up the role.<sup>2</sup> Since that time there has been gradual support from schools and the government for greater parental participation, beyond fund-raising. Today, Parents Victoria (PV) and the Victorian Council of State School Organisations (VICSSO) are community organisations that support government schools.

## **Mothers' Clubs and the Victorian Federation of Mothers' Clubs**

Since 1925, PV and its precursors have been 'instrumental in acting as a mouthpiece for parents to voice their views to the government of the day, as well as assisting parents to understand changes to government policy as they arise.'<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 1925, the Victorian Federation of Mothers' Clubs (VFMC) brought together primary, secondary and mothers' clubs and auxiliaries that had developed in schools since 1919. For decades, women teachers working in classrooms or 'retired' (because married) were members and often took up leadership roles. Infant Mistress Lillian Horner and Emmaline Pye, the Melbourne Teachers' College Infant Method Lecturer, established Victoria's first 'mothers' club' at Princes Hill State School. It began as the Princes Hill Story Telling Club in 1916; soon mothers observed the school's need for resources,

including readers, books and maintenance, and they began fund raising.<sup>4</sup> Emmaline Pye knew mothers' clubs were successful in the USA. Other schools quickly established theirs. The feminist teacher Florence Johnson and her colleague Ida Body, leaders of the Victorian Women's Teachers Association (VWTA), saw a political opportunity and federated the clubs. Was it a coincidence that Johnson stood for parliament in 1925?

Members of the VFMC and the VWTA were well informed about education as they communicated with local, interstate and overseas women's and education organisations, attended regular meetings with local activist women and worked in overseas schools. Beginning in 1920 with Lucy Thomas—a Hawthorn State School teacher, Australia's first exchange teacher—hundreds of primary teachers exchanged with UK teachers through the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers. The program consisted of a year when the 'exchangees' taught and were hosted in schools, organisations and homes in Victoria and other states, and vice versa in the UK.<sup>5</sup> They were mainly single women because the need to pay travel costs prevented most men who had families from travelling. This added to women teachers' awareness of international educational developments, shared at meetings and in *The Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*, read by parents and teachers. Johnson was also a member of the National Council of Women of Victoria's Education Standing Committee. At the first VFMC meeting in 1925, Ida Body was the first president and Johnson drafted the first constitution. The VFMC chose the logo 'We Serve the Children' on the membership badge.

### **1930s Depression and the Second World War**

The 1930s Depression and the Second World War overshadowed the 1930s and 1940s and brought severe government cuts to education spending. The Victorian Federation of Mothers' Clubs had early concerns about lack of government funding to schools, but in the 1930s this shortage increased VFMC activism, and its membership. The Federation continued raising funds for students' needs, and lobbying the government. However, mothers' clubs—which were in most government schools by then—were unable to make decisions about how the funds they raised were spent; their funds went into the male-dominated school council's bank account. Even though many hundreds of women were raising funds for hundreds of government schools, the Education Department formally recognised only one parent association in each school, and that was the

school council. The VFMC, which raised the funds and volunteered in schools, lobbied the government about this discrimination for decades. Anecdotal stories pointed out that the male-dominated councils would have had no funds on which to pontificate if the women had not done the work. It was 1966 before mothers' clubs were recognised as separate school organisations so they could administer their own hard-won funds. Throughout, unperturbed, they continued to raise funds, provide school lunches, support the free milk program and State Schools Relief and provide other voluntary support. They regularly brought their concerns to the attention of the government regarding dilapidated school buildings (which the government acted upon in part), large classes and secondary school fees.<sup>6</sup> The government cuts led to an ever-expanding membership of local mothers' clubs, and the VFMC's activities increased. A district council structure was established, based upon the many new regional clubs. Funding cuts to education affected every state, so parent organisations' membership numbers grew Australia wide. Concerned parents in school councils and mothers' clubs met and formed a national pressure group, with the first interstate conference of state school organisations held in 1937. This meeting established the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) that continues today.

Throughout this era Minnie McNaughton, Florence Johnson's sister, was a member of the VFMC and its president from 1934 to 1940. A teacher before she married, she was feisty like her feminist sister, and she developed a public profile. She was well informed about educational matters and confident and articulate. She was prepared to make such claims as: 'We are often told what good financiers we are, yet we are never given an opportunity to show the Government how education should be financed.'<sup>7</sup> She voiced VFMC views in refusing to accept that the government was justified in making cuts to education because of the war effort. At the same time, many clubs withdrew from their regular school fund-raising activities to focus on the patriotic war effort.

The VFMC was involved in other activities including the pioneering School Girls' Tours. This project was designed for girls aged from fourteen to eighteen, to encourage secondary-level girls to stay at school longer and to expand their subject choices to include maths and science. It was led by the VFMC, which paid travel costs and hosted interstate or regionally based girls. They organised for them to visit parliament, meet with community leaders and learn about a wide range of careers.

## Postwar Activism and the Victorian Federation of State Schools Mothers' Clubs

The post-Second World War period saw increased financial pressure on state governments to provide a quality education for all students. There was an urgent need for more schools and for more teachers to be trained to meet the burgeoning economy's need for many skilled workers, the baby boomer generation beginning school, and immigrant families. In particular, qualified secondary teachers were urgently required in classrooms after governments encouraged students to continue their schooling by ceasing secondary student fees in 1944. The deficiency of secondary teachers was created by governments not training any during the Depression and Second World War era. The continuing shortfall in funding led the VFMC to join with teacher unions and the Victorian Council of State School Organisations to form the Victorian Parent-Teacher Education Council. Together with interstate organisations they called for federal governments to fund government schools, as state governments seemed unable to fund them adequately. Classes had up to 60 children with one teacher; too many schools had dirty toilets and crowded classrooms. Overflow classes were routinely held in freezing shelter sheds and corridors, and mothers were worried about their children's health and education.

During the 1950s, VFMC's meetings and members were monitored by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).<sup>8</sup> Some of the members belonged to other organisations such as the Union of Australian Women (UAW). As shown earlier, such members were well informed. The more outspoken women had personal ASIO files.<sup>9</sup> As they were publicly vocal, wrote to the newspapers, and held public meetings about the poor conditions in public schools, this was put together with their criticism of the state and federal government's lack of funding to schools. Their activities were scrutinised, reported upon and filed away by ASIO.

In 1959, the VFMC changed its name to the Victorian Federation of State Schools Mothers' Clubs (VFSSMC) so as not to be confused with new mothers' clubs emerging in non-government schools. The first National Education Conference was held in Sydney in 1961, and 81 mothers paid their way from across Victoria representing VFSSMC. They joined with representatives from the Victorian Council of State School Organisations, the teachers' unions and interstate organisations.

They lobbied the federal government for funds to support all schooling needs, and focused on disadvantaged students and rural schools. Their priority continued to be raising funds locally, and they initiated and supported a multitude of school-based activities. For a few years they presented a radio program devoted to education and children's needs. School canteens in every public school were run by thousands of volunteer mothers for decades, and profits enabled schools to build tennis courts and assembly halls, to pay for gardeners and for caretakers' houses, for security, libraries, books, televisions, computers and much more. State and local newspapers regularly reported their meetings and advertised their community and school activities: these included providing student awards, organising school fetes, sponsoring sports days and raising funds in numerous ways. Their relentless networking included local businesses and community organisations.

### **The Commonwealth Schools Commission and National and Local Activism and Co-operation**

The 1970s saw successes for the Victorian Federation of State Schools Mothers' Clubs. In 1973, in the department's centenary year, VFSSMC and VICCSO were described together as 'having membership of hundreds of clubs representing tens of thousands of members [which] have become potent forces in the state and local fields of education.'<sup>10</sup> The Federation announced that education was the number one priority issue of the 1972 federal election, reflecting the efforts of parent and teacher organisations to increase the profile of education.<sup>11</sup> With a change of government, they supported the Whitlam government's creation of the Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC), which provided education funding based on need. That was consistent with their long-standing policy.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that VFSSMC members, who were always concerned about disadvantaged conditions in rural schools, visited their local conservative Country Party members in 1973, convincing them to support the innovative CSC. This body planned to provide (among other targeted groups) new funds to improve rural schooling throughout Australia. In the 1970s the realistic Country Party (later the National Party) were not called 'agrarian socialists' for nothing. Notably, and for the first time, government funding guidelines stated that parents should be included in the preparation and implementation of school funding grants and programs. 'Mothers' were on local, state and the national CSC innovations committees.

The influential Commonwealth Schools Commission set a precedent by appointing a parent representative as a commission member. It was the impressive ‘mother’, Joan Kirner, who was this pioneering parent. She was already on the national education stage, as she influenced the new ALP government as the first woman president of the Australian Council of State School Organisations. As a former Victorian technical teacher and VFSSMC president, she was informed, articulate and had a feisty, engaging and charming presence. For example, in her talks she often referred to the days when her secondary teacher husband Ron was on strike and she resorted to cooking sausages ‘many ways’ to feed their family. She spoke of her son in Grade 6 being judged about whether he was good with his hands or good with his head and making choices between techs and high schools.

In Victoria, a system of direct annual grants to schools was introduced by the state government in 1970; this was also VFSSMC policy. In 1972, the Federation received its first government grant for administration support and, jointly with VICSSO, pioneered parent in-service programs. Department committees formally included parent members for the first time. The Commonwealth Schools Commission ‘placed a strong emphasis on the role of parents in the improvement of education, especially for disadvantaged groups’, as a former president of the Victorian Council of School Organisations, Wendy Morris, explained.<sup>12</sup> Educationist, Hedley Beare, who went on to be Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne, made a landmark speech at the 1974 Australian Council of State Schools Organisations conference. Calling his speech ‘Lay Participation in Education’, he stated that parents had a right to be part of the process of education and he explained the difference between parental involvement and parent participation.<sup>13</sup>

When Kirner was president, there was another name change—to Victorian Federation of State School Parents’ Clubs (VFSSPC). This was 1975, their Jubilee Year and International Women’s Year, and it enabled men to join. Until then the Federation was exclusively a women’s organisation. This was in stark contrast to VICCSO, which was mainly run by men. When a Liberal government won the subsequent federal election, there was concern about the future support for public schooling. As ACSSO’s president, supported by others, Kirner organised E-Day in 1976, which brought together 2000 parents and teachers from across Australia to Canberra to rally against government cutbacks.<sup>14</sup>

Continuing its longstanding concern about girls restricting their subject choices and considering a narrow range of careers, the VFSSPC employed Rosalie Hussey as their project officer to encourage non-sexist schooling in 1977. It was CSC funding that paid her salary and travel costs to visit schools and parents' clubs and school council meetings throughout Victoria. Hussey organised 'Are Our Daughters Disadvantaged?'—a state-wide conference in late 1977—to address the question and to develop strategies to broaden girls' horizons.<sup>15</sup> The speakers were Jan McKenzie, President of the VFSSPC; Dr Shirley Sampson, Chair of the Premier's Equal Opportunity in Schools Advisory Committee; and Pam Cahir, National Consultants for the Education of Women and Girls. Panellists were Pam Weir from the Vocational Orientation Centre; myself, Deborah Towns, the Department's Elimination of Sexism Officer; Sylvie Shaw the employment and union officer at the Working Women's Centre; Anita McCallum, a lecturer at Whitehorse Technical College; and Yolanda Klempfner, the Victorian Premier's Women's Adviser. More than 200 parents, teachers and community representatives attended.

### **State Government, and the Victorian Federation of State School Parents' Clubs**

The Education Department revolutionised its relationship with the VFSSPC and the Victorian Council of State School Organisations in the 1980s. The reformist state Labor government, like the federal Whitlam government of the 1970s, made education a priority. VFSSPC and VICSSO were represented on the State Board of Education and other influential state and regional bodies. Kirner was a new parliamentarian; she would later be Minister for Education and subsequently Victoria's first woman premier. In 1982, she led Minister Robert Fordham's Ministerial Committee on School Councils, which developed guidelines for the devolution of decision making to schools. The VFSSPC saw its policies inform long-sought-after departmental changes. Along with teachers' unions, it developed the seven-year confinement-leave policy for women, a policy that was adopted by the Department. It helped develop the School Improvement Plan. In line with VFSSPC's long-held policies, corporal punishment in schools was abolished. School council selection of principals was adopted, the integration of disabled children into local schools was introduced, and the Federation participated in the development and promotion of the Victorian Certificate of Education

(VCE). Wendy Morris recalled, ‘Eventually participation rates in the post compulsory years jumped and a broader range of post school options including tertiary study were much more widely discussed and attained.’<sup>16</sup> VICCSO and VFSSPC both supported the establishment of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which Kirner was determined to bring about. Her vast state-wide networks, based upon her leadership of VFSSMC and ACCSO, assisted her to gain acceptance of the VCE by parents and the community.<sup>17</sup>

The next decade proved to be a severe period for government schooling again. There were cuts to both state and federal education budgets in the 1990s, as Australia entered a recession. Numerous state schools were closed and sold, and teachers sacked. In 1993 the state Liberal government stopped financial support to the VFSSPC. Its memberships in influential state and regional committees were discontinued. Despite this, the VFSSPC continued to support government schools and it encouraged parents to be more involved in local schooling. It remained innovative and influential in the Victorian community. It launched the Parents’ Club Information Kit and initiated a strong campaign for 40 kilometres-per-hour speed zones around schools, which was implemented throughout Victoria in 2003. Along with VICCSO and teachers’ unions, it led community rallies in support of public education. The new millennium began with VFSSPC streamlining its name to Parents Victoria (PV), launched at Princes Hill Primary School where the first mothers’ club was formed.

### **Parents Victoria and Its Future**

After almost a decade without government funding, Parents Victoria obtained a funding agreement that has continued ever since, despite changes in government. Since 2000, PV has continued as a peak body supporting public education. It continues to be innovative and adaptive so it can enable parents to understand educational developments and have a voice in government developments and in local schools. It conducts parent forums across Victoria and was represented on state government consultative committees that released the government’s vision for education over the next decades: ‘Public Education: The Next Generation’ in 2002. Parents Victoria and the Education Department jointly released ‘Together We Can Work It Out’, a resource for parents and schools on resolving difficult situations and disputes related to education.

In 2006 it participated in the significant review of the new Education and Training Reform Act; this updated and for the first time incorporated twelve separate and historical Education Acts including school council legislation. Gail McHardy, PV's executive officer, has represented parents on many government and community organisations and appears in the media.

Parents Victoria, since it began in 1925, has been active, both informally and formally, in educational developments and in designing policy at local, state and national levels. To enable this participation to continue, recent innovations have led to flexible opportunities for members to gain relevant information and to be more directly involved in the activities of their local schools. Many parents work full time or part time and are unable to attend meetings as mothers could do in the past. PV has had an informative website since the 1990s. Headed with an updated logo, 'Our Children, Our Concern', it enables parents to access information when it suits them, and can print off kits and other resources. Facebook keeps everyone up to date with issues and enables feedback. The *Parents Voice* newsletter is available, while press releases are regularly posted and other current information is available online. There are guidelines for raising school funds. Part-time staff administer PV but it relies, as it always has, on generous volunteers. There are membership opportunities for parents on government committees but it is not always easy to fill them as parents are in paid work; PV's membership has declined since the mid-twentieth century when it claimed to be the largest women's organisation in the Victorian community. However, its online conferences and professional learning activities are popular. The Minister of Education always attends its annual conferences.

In 2025, Parents Victoria will celebrate its centenary. As the PV history, *Our Children, Our Concern 1925–2012*, concluded: 'There will always be need for such a body to ensure that parents continue to have a voice in the education of their children. There will always be improvements to be sought and battles to be fought'.<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

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- 15 Rosalie Hussey (ed.), 'Are Our Daughters Disadvantaged?' conference program, VFSSPC, Uniting Church Centre, 9 November 1977.
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# Making a Difference: Victorian Teachers as Social Activists in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

*Cheryl Griffin*



## Introduction

Does this woman look like a dangerous revolutionary to you? This is Doris McRae, secondary school teacher and woman Vice President of the Victorian Teachers' Union (VTU) for most of the 1940s.

This is the woman who instilled in former Frankston High School student Professor John Mulvaney an 'abiding interest in history': a much-admired teacher who, he said, 'encouraged one, and seemed to have a human sympathy.'

This 'human sympathy' drove all aspects of her long life, yet by the mid-1940s she had been named in parliament as a communist, and for the rest of the decade was subjected to a relentless anti-communist campaign.

Ousted from her high-profile position in the VTU, targeted by fellow unionist Frank McManus and the Catholic press, spoken of disparagingly within her own family as ‘Pinko Doris’, she left teaching in 1950, bowed by the tremendous pressure placed on her after the findings of the Lowe Royal Commission into Communism were made public.

Doris McRae and her fellow teacher activists committed themselves to many important causes during a volatile period in which two world wars, a global depression and the Cold War transformed the social fabric of Australia. They acted as members of the teaching profession, as unionists and as private citizens. There are too many causes to mention here, so I will concentrate on just two: developing a world view, and democratising schools.

### **Developing a World View, and the Role of Teacher Exchanges**

The ‘ties of empire’ were promoted enthusiastically in schools in the early years of the twentieth century. Open any issue of *The School Paper* and Australia’s place in the British Empire cannot be ignored.

Teachers became more mobile with the advent of overseas teaching exchanges in 1921. Although Esperanto and other world-wide movements gained some purchase as a means of promoting the notion of the global citizen, most of the movement of teachers was between the countries of the Empire, English-speaking and where adherence to the mother country created a perceived bond, particularly after the shared experiences of the First World War.

Teacher exchanges took Victorian teachers to Great Britain and Canada. In their place came British and Canadian teachers, in the hope that this cross-pollination of ideas would promote a less parochial world view. Most exchange teachers were women. They stayed one year and, when they returned home, they not only brought back new educational ideas and perspectives but they bore witness to the changes taking place in the world, especially in Europe—changes such as the effects of the peace settlements at the end of the war, the devastation created by the 1930s Depression, and the rise of fascism. So disturbing were the conditions they witnessed that many returning teachers developed a strong sense of the urgent need to preserve world peace. They joined with others at home who had long been concerned with issues of social justice, of the betterment of Australian society and of the need for peace.

One such teacher was Doris McRae, a secondary school teacher, whose first teacher mentor was William Fearn Wannan, father of folklorist Bill Wannan, with whom she taught at Bairnsdale and about whom she said that he ‘stood alone against conscription in that very conservative town’. Doris greatly admired Fearn Wannan, who, she said, taught her the ‘rudiments of socialism’. It was through him that she joined the Free Religious Fellowship where she was introduced to individuals such as Vance and Nettie Palmer, Maurice and Doris Blackburn, Louis Esson and Hilda Bull. Of this ‘lively bunch of young people’, as she described them, she said: ‘We discussed socialist ideas and entertained each other with plays, music, poetry and drama.’

When Doris went on exchange to Scotland in 1929, she had already developed a strong sense of social justice. During her year away it intensified. She visited Europe and saw at first hand the effects of war. She was distressed by the depressed state of Germany where she witnessed demonstrations by starving people. Such experiences intensified her social conscience and on her return to her teaching post at Horsham she was further disturbed by the local activities of the White Army.

In the 1930s, many teachers were drawn to the League of Nations Union (LNU). One of its aims was to lessen cultural differences and emphasise the things that tie different countries together, to develop an ‘international attitude’. In December 1934 the Victorian Branch established a Schools Committee, which attracted representatives from across the education sector, including Edward Sweetman of the Teachers’ College, Gwenda Lloyd of Melbourne Girls Grammar and Dorothy Ross, also of Melbourne Girls Grammar but representing there the Associated Teachers’ Training Institute. Others are less well known today, but they included state school teachers such as Hetty Gilbert, representing the Victorian Teachers’ Union. Despite his initial reluctance, Doris McRae’s uncle James McRae, then Director of Education, was persuaded to allow a League of Nations Day in schools, which was held on 9 August 1935. It was a packed meeting and Doris commented that her uncle was ‘crawfished’ by the response. ‘I never thought it would be like this,’ he said.

The same concerns played out in two other related groups—the VTU’s Social Questions Committee and the Teachers’ Peace Movement. The VTU, formed in 1926 as an amalgamation of a number of different teacher organisations, was a conservative body.

Yet within its ranks were individuals who pushed the organisation beyond its narrow focus.

At its January 1935 conference the Teachers' Union resolved that a Social Questions Committee be established to widen the social perspective of teachers. The driving force behind its introduction was Anton Vroland, an Elsternwick primary school teacher, former VTU vice president and founder of the State School Relief Fund. Keenly interested in the role educators and schools could play in improving the world, he and his second wife Anna were inspired by Dr Charles Strong and his Australian Church. The maxim 'Love thy neighbour' played out in the Vrolands' advocacy of a fully developed democratic society—and where better than schools to provide the training for future citizens? From the first, the Social Questions Committee turned its attention to a wide range of issues: social welfare matters such as malnutrition, childcare and poverty in the inner suburbs; the introduction of nourishing school lunches and free milk for school children; and the need for world peace. They campaigned against the introduction of cadet corps in high schools and, as war approached, they opposed conscription.

Many of these same teachers also campaigned for peace. Doris McRae was one who joined the International Peace Campaign and the Teachers' Peace Movement (TPM). Here she joined forces again with individuals such as writers Vance and Nettie Palmer and their daughters Helen and Aileen. The Palmers were strong voices during the Spanish Civil War, and Doris attempted, with limited success, to bring that cause to the attention of the Victorian Teachers' Union, of which she was by then a prominent member. She also wanted her students to think widely about world issues and, as the senior woman at Frankston High School, invited Dorothy Gibson (teacher and wife of communist, Ralph Gibson) to speak about school life in Russia. Nettie Palmer also addressed the students on the Spanish Civil War.

When the Teachers' Peace Movement was established in Victoria in 1935, hundreds of teachers from private and government schools joined. When the Australian Peace Congress was held in Melbourne in September 1937, the Teachers' Peace Movement was in attendance. It was as a delegate of the TPM that Doris McRae attended the 1937 Pan Pacific Women's Conference in Vancouver. There is no space here to write about the Pan Pacific Women's Association, except to note that it was an important vehicle in the reimagining of Australia's place in the world in

the interwar period. Australia's educators were well represented at the conferences, under the leadership of Dr Georgina Sweet of Melbourne University as inaugural president from 1930 to 1934.

### Democratising Schools

In 1921 progressive educationists established the New Education Fellowship (NEF), with a focus on child-centred education, democracy, world citizenship and international understanding through the promotion of world peace. A Victorian section was established in 1938 with Anton Vroland as its secretary-treasurer, later its president. Wide ranging in its concerns, the NEF had at its core the belief that better education led to a better society.

Conferences were held in Europe and Britain from the late 1920s, putting them beyond the reach of most Australian teachers. But in 1937 the conference came to Melbourne. So important was the event that, for the 1946 conference, the Victorian Education Department encouraged teachers to attend, offering leave with pay.

Out of these conferences came much rethinking about the role of schools. Within the VTU, the democratising of schools was debated and promoted, particularly by members of the High Schools Branch. As a consequence, activities that would enable the greatest number to play an active part in the organisation of schools were approved, such as democratic decision-making that included all teachers and students through Student Representative Councils.

The idea of schools as community centres was promoted, with adult education just one means of making the fullest use of school buildings and equipment. Parental involvement was to be encouraged through Parent-Citizens Associations and Mothers' Clubs, they argued.

By the 1940s, the teaching of citizenship had been around for decades. In 1917, Alice Hoy and Ida Marshall, both gone from the education scene by the period in question, together wrote the *Australasian Textbook of Civics* and Hoy wrote another, *Civics for Australian Schools*, in 1925.

The advent of the Second World War, and the Cold War that followed, moved the focus as a new generation of educators emerged. One such, Mary Lazarus, wrote text books—*The Australian Community*, with Mollie Bayne (1940) and *The Making of the Modern World* with Marjorie Coppel (1960). Lazarus inspired one of her Mac.Robertson

Girls' High School students, Amirah Inglis, to write: 'Only our revered history teacher, Mary Lazarus, revealed truly human qualities: she talked of the books she had read and recommended that we also read them, she made her views on the Spanish Civil War evident to us and let us know that she was a Labor voter.'

In the private school sector, Gwenda Lloyd, a member of the New Education Fellowship, promoted civics education, education that would prepare students for their role as future citizens. She fought for the introduction of social studies as a matriculation subject and at her school, Melbourne Girls Grammar, worked with the principal, Dorothy Ross, to put democratic principles to work within the school.

### **Doris McRae**

The teaching of social studies and civics as a means of promoting citizenship became a fraught area for some such as Doris McRae, who in her own social studies classroom asked her students to consider their world through different eyes, to question the reasons for the current housing shortage and poor living conditions that they knew only too well. Doris McRae paid a huge price for her world view and activism.

In presenting this paper, I have turned to the person whose story I know most deeply to illustrate the work of so many teachers during this period. Doris McRae was headmistress of Flemington Girls School during the 1940s. Her commitment to a better life for all people did not end with the school system. She was an enthusiastic activist in her local community, concerning herself with the everyday welfare of her students and their families. She encouraged parents and the local community to be part of the school community. During the war, when there was a huge American army camp at nearby Camp Pell, she was concerned about how her students used their leisure time, so she mobilised local action, and a youth recreation centre was established at the Kensington Town Hall. She also helped form the Flemington–Kensington Progress Association. It was individuals such as Doris McRae and others in the High Schools Branch who were prime movers in the VTU's transformation into a more industrial, more militant body in the 1940s. When a Teachers' Tribunal was introduced in 1946, Doris, then VTU vice president, put her name forward as teachers' representative, the only woman of five candidates. Despite her outstanding record as a union activist and her successful teaching career, she was eliminated from selection in the first round. It was the beginning of the end for her.

Doris McRae was not alone in being targeted for her activism. Other members of the High Schools Branch were named in parliament as communists. Then there were other left-wing VTU members including Mary Lazarus, history teacher and vice-president of the High Schools Branch (who later joined the RHSV Council); Blanche Chidzey (later Blanche Merz), a young maths and science teacher who was later a member of the University of Melbourne staff; Ruth Crow and Alvie Booth, both secondary school teachers, both CPA members and active in many causes through their membership of the Union of Australian Women and other organisations; and Kenneth Kenafick, a pacifist who stood as an Independent Labor candidate for Maribyrnong on an anti-conscription platform at the 1943 election. These individuals represent just a few of the many who had a vision for Australia's future and acted on that vision in their working lives and beyond.

There is no space here to elaborate, but I could not finish this paper without mentioning the issue of equal pay. A photograph in the *Weekly Times*, February 1947, indicates how important women's issues were, yet it was another 20 years before equal pay was phased in. But that's another story—for another conference.<sup>1</sup>

## Notes

- 1 This paper is based on Cheryl Griffin, 'A Biography of Doris McRae, 1893–1988', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2005, which contains a full bibliography: internet version, <http://hdl.handle.net/11343/39035>. See also Cheryl Griffin, 'McRae, Doris Mary (1893–1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 18, 2012, at <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcrae-doris-mary-15052>. Photo of Doris McRae supplied by the author.



# Laying the Foundation: The 1872 Education Act and Universal Secondary Education

*Richard Teese*

## **Abstract**

*The 1872 Education Act enabled Victorian families to capitalise on the long-term demographic trend to having fewer but better educated children and to better their material wellbeing. The Act created a platform of universal elementary schooling on which secondary education was to grow rapidly in the post-Second World War decades. There was a tenfold increase in the proportion of young people reaching the final year of school. Over the same period, however, the democratic vision of the 1872 Act has been checked by social and political forces, including the rising demand for selective schooling.*

## **Foundations of State Secondary Education**

The creation of a mass system of secondary education after the Second World War had a profound impact on the Victorian community. This was owing in no small measure to the system-building Education Act of 1872. The general system of elementary schooling established by the Act provided the basis on which, in the years to follow, the whole of the population would have access to what was once called ‘higher education’—that is, secondary and university education. In turn, the take-up of these opportunities would modernise the economy of Victoria, lift the skill levels of the workforce and the aspirations of families, and increase the participation of women in the wage economy.

State secondary education was the most important vehicle of these changes. This was true not only in overall terms—relative to non-government schooling—but in the promotion of equity—the distribution of the social benefits of a prolonged schooling. None of this would have been possible without the foundation put in place by the Act which, beyond the basics, also made provision for more academic studies.<sup>1</sup>

To lay this foundation required, in the words of James Stephen when introducing the bill, a ‘general uniform system of State schools over the whole country’.<sup>2</sup> These would have to bear the weight of marked cultural and economic differences in educational readiness. To make a difference, they would have to be accessible and attractive to the full range of the population. How far the 1872 Act succeeded in fulfilling this promise is a matter of debate. But the history of state secondary education in Victoria presents us with positive evidence, though with limitations reflecting the wider institutional framework of education.

### **The Importance of the 1872 Education Act**

We can see how much was at stake in the success of the 1872 endeavour by turning our focus to long-term changes in family economic strategies. The coming of secular, free and compulsory education took place in a context of far-reaching demographic change. It is this that endows the Education Act with its particular significance. Late colonial times saw fertility falling. The crude birth rate fell from 43 per thousand of the population in 1860 to 25 per thousand at Federation.<sup>3</sup> This contraction in family size was due largely to improvements in infant mortality.<sup>4</sup> In 1860, the number of children dying before their first birthday was 13 in 100 live births—about every seventh baby.<sup>5</sup> Public health measures underpinned the fall in infant mortality (brought down to 4 per cent by the early 1930s and 2 per cent today).<sup>6</sup> High fertility had previously acted as an insurance policy. The high risk of early death favoured a reaction of over-compensation in the form of continuous procreation. With fewer children, family economic strategy shifted from biological to cultural reproduction. It was a shift from having many but poorly schooled children to better schooled but fewer offspring. This substitution strategy hinged on public authority measures of an education kind—whence the importance of the 1872 Act.

### **The Unevenness of the Platform of Universal Provision**

By the 1920s, there were 2600 elementary schools in operation.<sup>7</sup> This enabled families everywhere to capitalise on the freedom that came from reduced fertility. But here there was a social pattern. Family size fell least in rural districts, faster amongst urban working classes, and fastest of all in urban middle-class families. The poor could not simply withdraw their children from the workforce (paid or unpaid) or spare them domestic labour. When they did, they were also the most vulnerable to

poor conditions in schools. In the mid-1920s, class sizes of 50 to 60 were common.<sup>8</sup> There could be no intensive support for children who struggled with schoolwork. While a general system reaching all communities had indeed been created, every fourth child was at least one year behind and many were even further behind.<sup>9</sup> Under-achievers found the gate to secondary education shut. Even in the late 1940s as many as one in four had no place in state secondary or technical education.<sup>10</sup> The unevenness of the platform of primary school reduced the access to secondary school, or plagued it with failure carried over and deposited in junior technical schools, where age-for-grade tables tell the story.

### **Growth of State Secondary Education—the First Wave**

The greatest challenge facing the ‘general system’ of schools created by the 1872 Education Act was how to make them work *consistently well*, that is, for all communities. The importance of this challenge was underlined once secondary education for all became a widely accepted objective and once, as a result, primary schools became a preparatory rather than terminal stage of education. Quality of schooling became more critical because an increasing proportion of families had come to depend economically on at least the lower stages of secondary education. There, success remained elusive. In the late 1940s, as many as 36 per cent of candidates failed at the Intermediate exams.<sup>11</sup>

Failure was always the risk of having fewer but better educated children. If schools did not work well, where would that leave parents? To mitigate the risk, government expanded secondary education in a hierarchical fashion. In essence, it ranked students and split the provision by rank. Junior technical schools, as we have noted, for many years operated as a relegation stream, despite successive upgrading and broader curriculum change. In this way they protected the more rapidly developing high school sector from full exposure to the population. Relieved of many demanding students, the high schools nevertheless streamed those whom they did admit.

To enter a high school, or a junior technical school instead, depended formally on parental preference. In practice, judgments were made on the basis of success in primary school. As if to settle the argument, the Department built more technical schools in poorer urban areas. Secondary education for all was not a general system of uniform provision but a hierarchical structure. Social aspirations were moderated

or dampened by segmenting opportunity in line with what was considered suitable and justified on the unimpeachable grounds of parental will.

Segmenting opportunity not only protected high schools from the full range of the population, it protected socially advantaged families from competition. This was because it withheld access to more demanding parts of the secondary curriculum instead of exposing the curriculum to the challenge of diversity. The tensions accompanying this policy of divided provision would ultimately overwhelm it. The teaching force of state technical and high schools was radicalised. Resources were spread too thinly, classes were too large, teachers were poorly prepared and the school curriculum, though relaxed somewhat by removal of the lower-order exams, was too narrow. This was a fatal combination of factors that would erupt in mounting militancy.

When retention began to fall (1976), the whole institutional framework was exposed, including the power of universities as a conservative force, the curriculum, the dismal state of teacher education, and the re-emergence of private schooling as a counterforce to comprehensive state education. The crisis of the 70s confirmed the belief that, to be meaningful, growth had to be based on equity, not substituting for it.

### **Growth of State Secondary Education—the Second Wave**

A second great wave of growth began in the late 1970s. Retention rates rose from 32 per cent in 1979 to 81 per cent in 1992 (at the height of recession), where they remained for the next decade. The rising proportion of young people completing school depended on the creation of more space within the curriculum. This was achieved through alternative certificates to the mainstream Higher School Certificate (HSC); this meant STC, TOP, T12 and HSC Group 2 subjects, and, in this, high and technical schools played a leading role. Of great interest to historians is the question whether the public system delivered significant improvements in participation and achievement in upper secondary education. A balanced view must take into account not only success but limitations in this second phase of growth.

Capturing the achievements of the public system as distinct from the impact of secondary education as a whole—including the non-government sector—is a real challenge. From the time when there were only eleven state high schools serving Melbourne (where 60 per cent

of the population lived) to a mass system of over 300 establishments today, the public system has accounted for over half the growth in the educational level of the population.<sup>12</sup> It has profoundly modified social inequalities in upper secondary participation across this period. Within this, state high schools have enlarged social access to academic studies once the preserve of middle-class families, for example chemistry and preparatory maths. Flowing from these achievements, social differences in transition to higher education and to diploma-level vocational training have been narrowed. But there remains a large gap in transition to university between students from state high schools (47 per cent) and those from non-government schools (63 per cent).<sup>13</sup>

It is important to view these gains in the context of family economic strategies and more particularly the challenges created by the changing labour market which these strategies have had to address. From the late 70s to the end of the century, full-time jobs for teenagers fell from 80 per cent of all employment to 35 per cent.<sup>14</sup> Girls lost two-thirds of all full-time jobs and boys lost half.<sup>15</sup> This contraction in employment options was accompanied by continuing social differences in educational achievement under the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), despite long-term improvements. Early leaving continues to be a problem, despite long-term rises in school completion rates. Low achievement has not disappeared from the scene and continues to weaken access to tertiary education.

These limitations have particular relevance to state secondary education. State high schools enrol the great majority of socially disadvantaged students, those most vulnerable to the discriminating effects of the academic curriculum and most at risk from vanishing opportunities for work. Unequal outcomes remind us that state secondary education operates within a wider framework of institutions and that these are driven, not by the democratic ideal of the Education Act, but by the competing principle of differential and selective schooling. This competing history reaches back to colonial times, to the superior private schools which would eventually benefit from the return of State Aid. Differentiation and selection are today widely installed in public high schools, as these seek to redress the flow-on effects of market choice and funding policies. But persistent inequality should not blind us to the gains that have been made through the creation of a system in which, to quote G.W. Rusden in 1849, ‘all can combine to receive’.<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

- 1 *Victoria Parliamentary Debates*, 1872, p. 1354.
- 2 *VPD*, 1872, p. 1352.
- 3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics 2019*, no. 3105.0.65.001: T 4.3.
- 4 Tim Dyson, *Population and Development: The Demographic Transition*, London, Zed Books, 2010, pp. 18–19.
- 5 *Victoria Year Book 1903*, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1903, p. 206.
- 6 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019: T 5.4.
- 7 *VPD*, 1924–25, p. 10.
- 8 *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid*, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1926, no. 2, p. 130.
- 9 Richard Teese, *For the Common Weal: The Public High School in Victoria 1910–2010*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2014, pp. 33–4.
- 10 Teese, p. 51.
- 11 *Victoria Year Book 1948–9*, p. 456.
- 12 Teese, pp. 285–6.
- 13 Department of Education and Training, *On Track Snapshot*, 2019, p. 9.
- 14 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Australia 1978–1995*, no. 6204.0, Canberra, ABS, 1996.
- 15 Peter Kirby, *Ministerial Review of Post-Compulsory Education and Training Pathways, Final Report*, Melbourne, Department of Education and Training, 2000, p. 49.
- 16 In A.G. Austin, *George William Rusden and National Education in Australia 1849–1862*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1958, p. 132.

# The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, 1953–1995

*Rosemary Francis*

## Introduction

On 5 September 1953, the *Age* newspaper reported that: ‘Women teachers will now be admitted to the Victorian Secondary Masters’ Association ... It had been formed to advance the interests of secondary education, but at present, it only spoke for men, although women’s interests and problems were identical to those of the men.’<sup>1</sup> The new organisation, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (VSTA, customarily spelt adjectively, without the possessive apostrophe), aimed ‘to improve secondary education in Victoria and to further the interests of secondary teachers in the Victorian Education Department by seeking salaries commensurate with professional qualifications, training and responsibilities and by improving working conditions in the secondary sector.’<sup>2</sup> VSTA members intended to retain their Victorian Teachers Union (VTU) membership. The VTU had represented Victorian state school teachers since 1926, but primary school teachers formed the majority of the membership and increasingly secondary school teachers felt their concerns were overlooked.

This paper demonstrates how the VSTA evolved from a small male-dominated union with aspirations to an elite professional status into a broadly based secondary teachers’ organisation prepared to support a feminist agenda. It gained a reputation for militancy through its strike action over reform of the Teachers’ Tribunal in 1965, advocated strongly for qualified teachers to staff secondary schools, for improved conditions and for curriculum reform. An increase in female membership with a feminist perspective in the late 1960s and 1970s led to the formation of the Open Subcommittee on Women (OSCW) in 1974, with issues such as family leave, permanent part-time work, child care and the gender inclusive curriculum on the VSTA agenda. By 1994 it had a female president and half the council was female.

This paper, which arises out of my PhD thesis, entitled ‘Of Secondary Concern? Women in the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, 1953–1995’, which I completed in 2000 at the University of Melbourne, offers a gendered perspective on the formation and function of the VSTA. It builds on the work of Bob Bessant, Andrew Spaul, Jan Bassett and Claire Kelly, who wrote histories of the VSTA from different perspectives. Bessant and Spaul included the VSTA with the VTU and the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria (TTAV) in the publication, *Teachers in Conflict*, placing it in an industrial relations context and referring to the inferior status of women teachers.<sup>3</sup> Bassett offered a chronological, detailed, comprehensive analysis from 1948 until 1992, focusing on its campaigns and tactics, and tracing its transition from an association to a union, with minimal reference to the impact of women in the organisation. Claire Kelly focused on the work of the Open Subcommittee on Women in its efforts to make the VSTA a more inclusive organisation.

My primary sources included the VSTA records, housed in the Australian Education Union (AEU) offices in Trenerry Crescent, Abbotsford, and those of the VTU at the Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, Canberra.<sup>4</sup> My oral sources included former members of the VTU High Schools branch and members and office bearers of the VSTA.

### **Gender and the Teaching Profession**

Although both men and women were employed as teachers in the Victorian Education Department, the state teaching service was organised on the basis of gender. Masculine privilege was accepted as normal in Australian society. As sociologist Claire Williams described it, an internal labour market operated.<sup>5</sup> Educational historian, Marjorie Theobald, has argued that the patriarchal model of the nineteenth-century middle-class family was translated into the teaching profession through the 1883 Public Service Act with the policy that a woman must not be placed in authority over a man.<sup>6</sup> Male administrators determined women teachers to be incapable of controlling male staff and unsuitable to teach older boys, lacking the ‘economic and political punch characteristic of the public authority of men.’<sup>7</sup> Male teachers earned more than their female colleagues even though they performed the same job; separate promotion rolls existed, with female teachers ineligible to be heads of co-educational schools, although they could hold such positions in girls’ high or secondary schools when these were established. These policies

remained in place up until the middle of the twentieth century, when the VSTA was established, despite the efforts of female teachers to achieve equal pay from 1885, with the formation of the Victorian Lady Teachers Association.<sup>8</sup>

### **Function of VSTA During the 1950s and 1960s**

The VSTA constitution was democratic, with its governance residing in its financial members or branch representatives acting together in general meetings. The general meeting had the power to override any committee decision.<sup>9</sup> The committee was authorised to ascertain membership opinion by circulating to all financial members ballot papers or questionnaires between general meetings. Elections for committee members were held annually. Any secondary school was eligible to form a branch with six financial members.

Although Mary Cronin, senior mistress at Shepparton High School, was at the forefront of efforts to form the VSTA by admitting female members to the Victorian Secondary Masters Professional Association, many secondary women teachers resisted joining this new association. Active members of the VTU High Schools branch, which represented high school teachers in the metropolitan area, such as Nan Gallagher and Win McDonnell, remained loyal to the VTU, not wishing to fragment teachers' organisations.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, high school teachers such as Hilary Gill and Nancy Baxter, early VSTA members who worked in country schools, did not have that option; they had to join their local VTU women's branch and felt they were just ignored.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of 1953 membership comprised 791, including 82 women, 10 per cent of the membership.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the first elected committee of the VSTA included four women, a healthy 25 per cent, compared with the overall membership. All were permanent, classified teachers. Mary Cronin, aged 53, who had transferred from Shepparton High to University High, was elected to the joint vice-president position. Elizabeth Stainforth (aged 35, Footscray High), Helen Gordon (aged 33, Williamstown High) and Phyllis Lever, (aged 35, University High), completed the four.<sup>13</sup>

The VSTA was formed when the Victorian Education Department was faced with a large increase in the secondary school population, which presented staffing and building challenges. Between 1950 and 1954, the percentage of students over fourteen years remaining at school increased

from 59 to 69 per cent and, in 1956, the Victorian Minister for Education, John Bloomfield, declared, 'it is now accepted that our schools should make provision for secondary education for all'.<sup>14</sup> In the ten years from 1954 to 1963, 23 high schools and seven technical schools opened to serve the eastern suburbs.<sup>15</sup>

Historian Jan Bassett argued the major focus of the VSTA from 1955 to 1965, was its survival as a viable organisation. The VTU offered no support when the Teachers' Tribunal, the body that determined teachers' salaries and conditions, denied its attempt to make a separate salary claim. The VSTA then unsuccessfully lobbied the Bolte government to train more teachers and to pay higher salaries to attract more graduates to the profession. In June 1957, its membership stood at 1540.<sup>16</sup>

The Teachers' Tribunal's intransigence in refusing to recognise the serious problem of inadequate staffing in secondary schools frustrated the VSTA. Doug Brown, the (VTU) teachers' representative on the Teachers' Tribunal was originally opposed to the secondary teachers margin, but by 1961, in acknowledgement of the ongoing problem, changed his attitude.<sup>17</sup> In a conciliatory gesture, Ted Johnson, VSTA president, 1958–60, indicated that the VSTA was prepared to co-operate with the VTU where their policies coincided.<sup>18</sup>

The VSTA made no attempt to seek the support of the trade union movement until 1975, when it affiliated with the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).<sup>19</sup> In 1961, it did affiliate with the white-collar union peak body, the Australasian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations (ACSPA).<sup>20</sup> White-collar unions were becoming more vocal in their attempts to improve pay and working conditions for their members.

### **Appointment of a Full-time Secretary**

January 1963, when Brian Conway was appointed as full-time secretary, marked a new phase in the VSTA's existence. A graduate in commerce and education, he had taught in Victoria and overseas, and worked as an industrial relations officer in the oil industry in Melbourne.<sup>21</sup> The VSTA established an office at Curtin House, 252 Swanston Street, Melbourne, with a full-time secretary, Mrs E. Wilson. The Metropolitan Group, established in 1962 with Bruce McBurney an office bearer, brought a new radical approach to the implementation of VSTA policy. It declared that from the beginning of 1964 it would enforce, if necessary by strike action,

the policy that only qualified and trained teachers were to be employed, and they would receive a time allowance for additional organisational duties.<sup>22</sup> As evidence of this new approach to industrial relations, VSTA members took direct action by refusing to sign the time-book, regarding it as an unprofessional requirement. Some members disagreed with the tactics used, which affected membership numbers—3085 in 1964, which represented 49 per cent of the state's secondary teachers. Despite this setback, by 1966 teachers were exempted from signing the time-book.<sup>23</sup>

### **Campaign for Tribunal Reform**

Noel Belfrage, a member of the VSTA from 1959 and on the central committee from 1961, typified the increasing frustration and anger that qualified secondary teachers felt at the erosion of their working conditions and the status of their profession. From Noel Belfrage's perspective, the Teachers' Tribunal became 'an object of ridicule and scorn'. The structure discriminated against the secondary sector with the teachers' representative consistently from the primary sector. The government appointed the chairperson, which in Belfrage's view was 'unfair' as he claimed the government would always appoint 'the sort of person who will give you the decisions you'd like to get. That incensed us.'<sup>24</sup> Noel Belfrage seconded the first strike motion, yet he recalled that 'taking strike action was one of the big decisions of my life.'<sup>25</sup>

On 2 July 1965, the VSTA took stopwork action over the issue, cementing its image as a militant organisation. Three thousand secondary teachers stopped work for half a day. It was only the second teachers' strike in Australia's history; the first was in Western Australia in 1920. Many of the striking teachers attended a meeting in Ormond Hall at 10 a.m., where they resolved to seek an immediate rehearing and reconstitution of the tribunal to include direct representation of secondary teachers and the appointment of a judge as chairman. John Rossiter, Assistant Minister for Education, described the VSTA as 'militant and representative of a minority in the teaching profession that should be ashamed of the way it acts.'<sup>26</sup> It took two further stopworks and mass meetings before meaningful negotiations began: one on 8 October at the Myer Music Bowl with an attendance of more than 2000 secondary teachers, and the other on 25 March 1966, with 3000 present. Negotiations continued until November 1967, when the Teaching Service (Teachers Tribunal) Act 1967 was passed.<sup>27</sup>

During this period, in January 1967, the High Schools Branch of the VTU dissolved itself and advised its members to join the VSTA, while the technical teachers established their own organisation, the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria (TTAV), in February 1967.<sup>28</sup>

### **Women in the VSTA**

Although its male members continued to dominate the VSTA, the female central committee representatives contributed to the development and implementation of VSTA policy, while attempting to raise the concerns of the female membership. Although the women in the High Schools Branch of the VTU had taken the initiative on issues such as permanency after marriage and equal pay, VSTA women played their part. The original female members of the central committee had left by the end of 1956, except Elizabeth Stainforth, who was elected female vice-president. Ruby Tout, principal of Brunswick Girls Secondary School, was a central committee member from 1961 to 1966. Jean Mee, who joined the central committee in 1961, and Margot Green, who joined in 1966, were the major activists in the equal pay campaign.<sup>29</sup> Victorian teachers gained equal pay in 1967, to be phased in over three years. Nonetheless, the number of women on the central committee declined throughout the 1960s.

Union leadership did not fit the profile of many women teachers who would describe themselves as middle class; they expected others to act on their behalf. Hilary Gill, a former central committee member during the late 1950s, believed that many female teachers, particularly senior women, viewed union activism with mild disdain, feeling it was not genteel to take strike action.<sup>20</sup> Jean Mee revealed that her female colleagues did not support her in the equal pay struggle.<sup>21</sup>

By 1973, women comprised 45 per cent of VSTA membership.<sup>30</sup> This was not reflected in the composition of the central committee, with only four women out of 36, and none on the eight-member executive. In 1974, Geoff Reid had been president for three years and before that vice-president in 1970. Vic Colvin had been vice-president for three years, since 1971, with Bernie Blood, who had been a member of the VSTA central committee since 1961, as the second vice-president. Up until 1971, the second vice-president's position had been reserved for a female. Once the requirement ceased on the adoption of the common roll, no female sat on the executive for at least seven years. The male executive

members gained a reputation for arrogance with a taste for confrontation in their approach to industrial relations.<sup>31</sup> During the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, the VSTA fought successful campaigns over control of entry and conditions.

The influx of younger politicised members with a left-wing perspective into the VSTA in the early 1970s surprised the leaders. These young activists, intent on changing the world, were attracted to the VSTA because of its reputation for militancy. Described by teacher and cartoonist Joan Rosser as ‘the youth and beards’, the Left faction, as opposed to the ‘houndstooth and ties’ of the Right, challenged the entrenched male leadership to broaden the union’s agenda to include issues that affected female members, such as family leave and permanent part-time work, as well as other social issues. In 1971, the *Age* newspaper’s Geoffrey Barker described the VSTA as ‘no place for the tame teacher.’<sup>32</sup>

At the same time as the VSTA was attracting the new generation of young, politically aware teachers, it lost members who found it difficult to negotiate what they perceived as the arrogance of the VSTA leadership, its propensity to call frequent strikes and its policy on tertiary entrance. Lucy Meo, a teacher at Syndal High School, opposed the VSTA policy of a random ballot for the selection of students for tertiary institutions if quotas for tertiary places remained the policy. She led the Anti-Ballot Committee, which succeeded in calling a Special General Meeting on 1 December 1974 that voted to overturn the policy. She eventually left the VSTA to form the Victorian Association of Teachers (VAT) in 1976, after a member of the VSTA executive invited her to form her own union if she disagreed with VSTA policy.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the influx of these radical young teachers, the VSTA found itself unable to defend satisfactorily the rights of two young teachers, Helen Garner, aged 30, a temporary teacher, in 1972, and Helen Rawicki, 23, a permanent teacher, in 1975. The Director of Secondary Education, Bert Schrum, dismissed Garner ‘out of hand’ on 14 December 1972 for using ‘four letter words in front of form 1 students to describe the sexual organs and the sex act.’<sup>34</sup> The Teachers’ Tribunal dismissed Rawicki in December 1975 for refusing a directive from the school principal.<sup>35</sup>

Failing to gain the support of its members, the VSTA made unsuccessful attempts to protect the rights of these two teachers and to have them reinstated. The teachers’ actions were controversial, as many thought that their actions transgressed accepted ‘norms’ of female behaviour in the teaching profession.<sup>36</sup>

## Open Subcommittee on Women 1974

The new young female members, exposed to feminist ideas, were alerted to the second-class status of women in Australian society and saw this reflected in the VSTA structure where they believed women's interests were ignored, or dismissed.<sup>37</sup> Their solution was to be elected to the central committee and to agitate for an open women's subcommittee. In 1973 Ruth Fowler stood for election to the central committee and was successful.<sup>38</sup>

The VSTA leadership regarded the proposal to establish a women's subcommittee as 'lightweight'. Geoff Reid and Bruce McBurney considered existing ones such as the teachers' rights subcommittee could deal with the matters the women wanted raised.<sup>39</sup> The men on the executive believed the women's concerns were not the prime focus of union activity, 'not the nuts and bolts of industrial stuff', and opposed a formal structure dedicated to pursuing issues of interest and concern to women members.<sup>40</sup>

The proposal to form an open women's subcommittee challenged the VSTA mode of operation. Membership of the thirteen existing subcommittees, which covered salaries, conditions and curriculum, was open only to central committee members.<sup>41</sup> The establishment of open subcommittees was part of the left's agenda to make the union more democratic, according to Tess Lee Ack, a member of that grouping within the VSTA and a student member of the central committee in 1974.<sup>42</sup> Supporters of the open subcommittee system believed that more members, particularly women, would take the opportunity to participate in the policy-making process.

Faced with strong resistance from the male executive to the idea, the proposers of the subcommittee presented a motion 'to develop detailed policy in areas where women were disadvantaged' at the 1974 Annual General Meeting, where it was passed. This subcommittee presented a report of its meeting to the central committee, which had to debate any policy proposals. The subcommittee made it clear that issues that affected women members were union issues, and the union was supposed to represent the interests of all its members.<sup>43</sup> By the end of 1975, Ruth Fowler was elected as convenor of the OSCW.

Writing in 1986, Ruth Fowler offered her assessment of the significance of the formation of the OSCW:

The formation of the OSCW represented a watershed period for women in the union. It provided a supportive forum within the male cultural ambience characteristic of all trade unions, where women could discuss the issues which affected them as unionists and teachers and decide on possible policy. Whilst women were lone voices their concerns could be and were largely ignored.<sup>44</sup>

Women such as Tess Lee Ack, Ruth Fowler, Mary Bluett, Claire Kelly, Susan Hopgood, Bernice Kelly and Shelley Lavender were activists in the VSTA at different stages from 1973 until 1995. All except Shelley Lavender were elected members of the VSTA central committee (renamed council in 1984) during that period. Shelley Lavender, the first female employed on the VSTA staff, in 1974, eventually became the VSTA's first female secretary in 1988. Of the six elected central committee members, four became members of the VSTA executive from 1978.

These women had to contend with different strategies the dominant male leadership used in their attempts to sideline their attempts to make the VSTA a more inclusive association. They ultimately succeeded by alerting the wider membership of the union to the issues and using its democratic structures strategically.

In 1975, International Women's Year, the OSCW made a submission to the Victorian Committee on the Status of Women on the legislation to amend the Superannuation Act, pointing out the main areas of discrimination against married women teachers. It also liaised with the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria's (TTUV) women's subcommittee to form a Teachers Federation of Victoria subcommittee.<sup>45</sup>

The OSCW focused on the issues that affected women and girls in the education system. The Abolition of Sexism in Schools policy was adopted in 1976. It set out to influence the choice of curriculum materials in schools and to urge branches to ensure that a curriculum discussion day critically examined sexism in their school. Later the Homosexuality Subcommittee was formed by amending an AGM policy.<sup>46</sup> In 1977, Deborah Towns was appointed the Education Department's Coordinator for the Elimination of Sexism in Schools and Jude Munro was appointed as the Three Unions Coordinator for the Elimination of Sexism in Education. The ACTU Working Women's Charter (with input from the Women's subcommittee, which had actively participated in ACSPA's Australian Working Women's Centre and the Trades Hall Council's Working Women's Charter Committee), was proposed as VSTA policy at the 1980 AGM.

## **Affirmative Action**

The new leadership team elected at the end of 1981, to take office in 1982, preceded the election of the Cain government in April, the first Labor government in 27 years, with a reform agenda. Brian Henderson as president and Claire Kelly as vice-president, later Mary Bluett together with Bernice Kelly, worked to have the Affirmative Action policy adopted in 1984 and then implemented. This led to the Action Plans for Women in the Teaching Service.

In 1985, in order to implement the Affirmative Action policy, the VSTA appointed Susan Hopgood as Women's Officer. She offered suggestions to VSTA branches to examine carefully the structure of their branches.<sup>47</sup> In Susan Hopgood's view, the VSTA, in co-operation with the FTUV and the VTU, initiated change. They conducted research into women's position for the first time, and they had developed policies before the government took action. The unions negotiated in partnership with the Education Department, but the push came from the teacher unions.<sup>48</sup>

During this period state and federal legislation ensured that the issues of discrimination against women would be redressed. The Australian Sex Discrimination Act was passed in 1984, the same year as the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act.

## **Effects of Election of the Kennett Government in Victoria**

The election of the Kennett government on 3 October 1992 meant that the VSTA was confronted with a new, hostile government. In December 1992 the government ceased to allow union subscriptions to be deducted from teachers' salaries, with the result that VSTA membership declined almost overnight from 14,500 to 4,000. From October 1992 until June 1995, the VSTA was involved in industrial action to protest against the cuts to education and to avoid the new state government's industrial legislation, which abolished awards, by applying to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for a federal award that would safeguard Victorian teachers' hard-won industrial conditions. In March 1993, the VSTA Council called for the Australian Teachers Union (ATU) to establish a single branch to represent kindergarten, primary, secondary and TAFE teachers in Victoria. In 1994, Mary Bluett was elected president of the VSTA, leading it into amalgamation with the other sectors to become the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union on 1 July 1995.

## Conclusion

Brian Henderson's acknowledgement of women's contribution to the VSTA, and in particular Mary Bluett's capacity for leadership, demonstrated his acceptance of his female colleagues as equal participants in the decision-making structures of the union. The VSTA, in its aim to represent secondary teachers in their attempts to secure decent salaries and working conditions, initially used traditional methods to achieve success. When these methods proved unsuccessful, it adopted more militant tactics to achieve its goals. Although it alienated some existing members, by the late 1960s and 1970s it had attracted a new cohort of teachers in who had experienced overcrowded class rooms and unqualified teachers in their own schooling, so they were prepared to become activists in their own union. The young feminists exposed the unrepresentative nature of the union, with its relegation of so-called women's issues—and, through the strategic use of the VSTA's democratic structure, succeeded in making the union representative of all its members.

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# Teaching Studentships, Student Hostels and Alan Ramsay House

*Marilyn Bowler*

## Introduction

The following discussion of teacher hostels and of Alan Ramsay House is based partly on my Master of Arts thesis, *'how lucky my generation was'* (the lower-case title, as a quotation, was intentional), and partly on the recollections of former residents 60 years after their stay, researched as part of a larger educational history that looks at studentships and teacher hostels and the role they played in the lives of the young men who received them and lived in them.<sup>1</sup> Like all oral history, this reflects how the interviewees perceived events and situations and what these experiences meant to them. As Graham M, one of the contributors, has intimated, memories can and do change over time and often become more benign. The reintroduction of secondary teaching studentships in 1950 gave opportunities for a tertiary education to those who were previously unable to afford one. By providing accommodation in student hostels, the Education Department of Victoria enabled country students to take advantage of this opportunity.

## Postwar Educational Changes

In 1950, the Education Department reintroduced secondary teaching studentships and provided hostel accommodation for recipients from regional Victoria. This policy not only changed the lives of recipients, but also changed Victorian education and Australian society.

After the Second World War, school populations soared in Victoria as a result of the baby boom, postwar migration and higher school retention rates. This resulted in overcrowded classes because of the shortage of qualified teachers and the need for new schools. In 1948, only 46 per cent of teachers in Victorian high schools were fully qualified. The Director of Education, Alan Ramsay (appointed in late 1948), embarked on a fact-finding mission to the United Kingdom to study the administration of its 1944 Education Act. Amongst other

educational issues, his subsequent report discussed teacher training. As a result, to meet the teacher demand, increased numbers of primary teaching studentships were made available, and secondary studentships, which had been discontinued in the 1930s, were reintroduced. These studentships were offered until 1978, when declining school populations and the availability of free university education reduced the need for them. Over the lifetime of the scheme there were over 22,000 secondary studentship holders.

A secondary studentship enabled recipients to undertake a three-year degree and a postgraduate Diploma of Education. Mostly these were separate and consecutive, but later Bachelor of Education courses combined teacher training with subject studies. As well, studentships to become arts and craft or domestic science teachers could be either three or four years. Initially, secondary teacher colleges were developed to support and monitor studentship holders as they undertook their degrees. These also provided alternative training for those who began university courses but failed subjects during their studies. These students then undertook a combination of university and teacher college subjects. Later, colleges provided alternative teacher training venues for those who obtained a secondary studentship but failed to obtain a university place—a result of university quotas being introduced as participation rates grew.

Studentships provided trainees with both paid tuition and a living allowance, in return for which they were ‘bonded’ to teach for the Education Department for three years after training. Female teachers who married had to teach for only one year. If studentship recipients failed to complete their training or did not complete the three years teaching, the bond had to be repaid either by the recipients or their guarantors, usually their parents; trainee teachers generally commenced at 17 or 18 years while the legal age of adulthood was 21.<sup>2</sup> Teaching studentships—unbelievably to later generations of students struggling with part-time work or fees debt—provided teacher training free. As well, those on a teaching studentship received a weekly wage for the entire year. How much the studentship paid is difficult to estimate, as the amount increased year by year as recipients progressed through their courses, and the levels increased over the 28 years that studentships were offered. According to Graham M’s personal records, at the beginning of 1962, the first-year gross allowance for secondary studentship holders was £458 (\$916), including the living-away-from-home allowance of £26 (\$52). Tax was then taken out. According to his tax return for 1964–65, the third- and fourth-year

allowance (including the living-away-from-home allowance) was £657 0s 6d (\$1314.05) with tax of £45 12s (\$91.20) paid on this. Not a princely sum, but enough for students to live away from their rural homes.

Studentships gave those from working- and lower middle-class backgrounds, women, and those from migrant and rural origins, opportunities to gain a tertiary education that they would generally not have been able to afford. As well as the state-funded teaching studentships, the federal government offered a limited number of non-bonded Commonwealth Scholarships. As many former Alan Ramsay residents have noted, the latter covered university fees but failed to provide the money needed for country students to undertake tertiary studies in Melbourne, where Victoria's only universities were located until the opening of Deakin University in 1978. By funding teacher studentships, the Victorian government produced a generation of teachers whose views were often opposed to conservative values. Those interviewed for my thesis on teaching studentships compared their political and social ideas to those of their parents, portraying themselves as more left-wing, more liberal and more aware of political nuances. Many attributed this to their university experiences. For example, one said: 'I started university as a conservative and left as a laborite'. This change was true across the entire period for which studentships were offered and for both men and women.

Studentships changed the composition of the teacher workforce and brought educational change. Victoria gained teachers with a background that made them sympathetic to the difficulties faced by their students at school. Through union activity, they helped bring about more rapid changes in schools than might have otherwise occurred under conservative governments. From the mid-1960s, teacher militancy increased, particularly in secondary and technical schools, with action over everything from preventing unqualified teachers joining the Department to reducing class sizes and getting rid of the inspectorial system for promotion. In this way, free teaching studentships not only affected the lives of recipients but helped change Victorian education.

### **Alan Ramsay House**

If studentships provided educational opportunities for those who would otherwise have been unable to afford them, hostels enabled them to take up those opportunities. Scholarships were important to rural students, who comprised a third of all trainee teachers. Male and female teaching hostels in Melbourne and in rural towns provided

cheaper, and supervised, accommodation, so rural recipients could live away from home while studying. Alan Ramsay House, which opened in Queens Road, Albert Park, in February 1959, was a hostel for male student teachers initially studying at university, though some switched to a combination of university and secondary teacher college subjects if their university results were unsatisfactory. The former students who contributed to the book on which this article is based were hostel residents in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Until Monash University opened in 1961, all were students at Melbourne University.

Hostels supplied trainee teachers from the country with emotional, social and academic support—and assuaged parental anxiety. In the 1950s and 1960s, country life was more isolated than it is now. Studentship recipients may have had little experience or even understanding of city life. Many former Alan Ramsay House (ARH) residents commented on how infrequently they had visited Melbourne and how little they knew about city life prior to coming to the hostel. Ross C commented: ‘I spent three valued years at ARH and am grateful for the orientation program where we gained city navigational skills and much more’.

Both the Education Department and the students’ parents viewed 17-year-olds as children in need of protection. Ramsay’s report that led to the reintroduction of secondary studentships indicated clearly that student teachers needed supervision. This idea was embodied in the hostel regulations. Hostel accommodation also allowed the parents of country students to feel more comfortable about their children attending university in the city. Lionel W, who went to secondary school in Murtoa, Yallourn and Kyneton (his father was a high school principal), commented that for his family ‘staying in a hostel was important for them from the point of view of security for their kids’.

In 1963, for *The Ramsay Report* (the hostel annual journal), Graham M interviewed Miss Isobel Haining from the Secondary Teachers College (STC) to gain ‘officialdom’s view of the role of the S.T.C. hostel’. Miss Haining had overall responsibility for all the hostels. She was a lecturer–tutor at the STC and a supervisor at Frank Tate House, a hostel for women in Dandenong Road. Student teacher hostels were under the control of the Education Department through the STC Principal, and students were overseen by supervisors and matrons in the hostels. In her 1963 interview, Miss Haining stated that the aim of the hostels was to ‘provide comfortable and cheap accommodation for country students’. She reiterated that ‘our

most important function ... is helping the first-year student fresh from the country to adjust himself to Melbourne and University life'. She stated that though all first-year students had been accommodated in 1963, applications outweighed available accommodation and consequently fewer third- and fourth-year students could be given places. Thirty men had had to look elsewhere in the past two years. However, those who were part of the ARH student committee indicated that, while everyone could apply to return to the hostel, some made the cut while others missed out, and it was never clear why. Some former residents suspected that questioning hostel regulations or challenging the STC's control may have seen them unable to return. At this distance in time and with Education Department records difficult to access, it is impossible to determine how much, or even if, the STC interfered in the running of the hostel, but the comments reflect the preparedness of some residents to challenge authority and the concerns that other bonded student teachers had about being controlled by the Department—a control confirmed by research for my thesis. Ruth C, at the University of Melbourne from 1959 till 1962, commented: 'We, with the studentship, didn't have the same sort of lifestyle that the rest of the university students did because we were owned, body and soul. They were paying the piper, I guess, so they could call the tune.'

Given that many former residents mentioned sharing flats with other ARH residents in their later years, the hostel provided the opportunity for them to establish friendships and then share rental costs.

### **The Staff, the Supervisors, and the House Committee**

While former hostel residents saw hostel life as supportive, some saw it as restrictive. Some of these restrictions were imposed through hostel regulations. Terri E considered hostels 'very strict, actually stricter than at home'.

The organisation and rules that governed Alan Ramsay House reflect the Education Department's and parental belief that the young male teachers needed to be supervised. Apart from Isobel Haining from the STC, the hostel itself had staff members, supervisors, student heads and deputies. The number varied over the years. According to the 1964 *Ramsay Report*, there was a matron, four supervisors (also called House Masters) and a House Committee drawn from the residents. This consisted of a Head Student (also called Head Boy) and two deputies

drawn from fourth-year (and fifth-year if they had done Honours) students and two representatives each from the other three years, making a total committee of nine.

Ideas about how this committee was formed (and how democratic it was) vary, with some comments suggesting more Education Department control. According to the STC's instructions, the committee's composition was to be *suggested* by the senior students and the supervisors, then agreed to by the student body. One contributor thought they were all elected by their respective year levels, except the Head and the two deputies, who were elected by the whole student body. Others recall this group as being largely made up of volunteers, with no real election contests. Graham E, who was on the House Committee for four years, including two as Head Student, doesn't recall any contested elections, more a question of rounding up good representative members. The practice may have been for the Head Student to be appointed by the supervisors, as happened in his case. However, Graham M, who was a Deputy Head Student from a later intake, remembers an election for Head Student in 1965, though he also suggested that elections may have only been a matter of rounding people up. He remembers the committee as meeting once a month, mainly arranging sporting fixtures and hostel parties, with young women being invited from the women's hostels.

Graham E remembers the committee organising the occasional beach party or snow trip. According to the STC's instructions, a fund to cover social activities was created from a student levy. The House Committee would also raise issues about hostel life, such as the quality of the meals, with the supervisors. How democratic the House Committee was and whether it was influential beyond day-to-day issues is debatable.

Supervisors were responsible to the matron for the general organisation and discipline within the hostel and for 'maintaining good standards of behaviour and for establishing good tone and suitable conditions for study', for allocating rooms and for certain clerical duties such as keeping detailed records of all students in the hostel. Supervisors were also expected to provide any necessary assistance to senior students in the organisation of duty rosters, running of social events and conduct of student committee meetings. They were required to ensure at least one supervisor was present each evening and weekend and at each meal. Graham E saw the hostel as being lightly regulated given that it was home to over 100 male university students, with fewer incidents than might

have been expected or that required calling residents together. Serious issues were taken up directly with the students involved. The supervisors occasionally asked him (with the House Committee) to sound out how students felt about services such as meals, car parking and laundry.

The matron, to whom the supervisors were responsible, lived upstairs in the front of the old building and oversaw the domestic staff, the meals, and student health. As one supervisor recalled: ‘As supervisors, we were provided with free accommodation—our own room, bathroom and a shared lounge room. There was no payment and we were required to ensure at least one of us was on the property every evening and weekend. We were required to conduct evening meals.’

### **Living at Alan Ramsay House**

Hostel and hostel regulations were very much reflections of their era but, to many of the students, Alan Ramsay House itself was an introduction to a wider world than that of their rural upbringing. Though all the residents at ARH came from country backgrounds, they were a diverse group. While most were from Anglo-Saxon-Celtic families, others had migrated from overseas with their families. Some came from farms, many from rural towns. Some had gone to one-teacher rural primary schools with few pupils, others to town primary or secondary high schools, and still others to private secondary colleges. Some were heavily involved in university and other political groups, or in teacher unionism. As student teachers, they studied different courses: arts, science, commerce, agricultural science and physical education. Some had played high school football; others gave up local football to help on the family farm. Others participated in Gilbert and Sullivan musicals staged by the STC. Some remained close to those from their home regions; some formed friendships with those doing the same courses.

What many former ARH residents remember about arriving at ARH is either meeting their roommates or being awed by the Art Deco architecture. Kevin H spoke of ARH as a ‘mansion’, yet other recollections suggest that the accommodation was basic. Most students shared rooms, so whether it was easy to study depended on your roommates or the noise levels of those whose rooms were nearby. The heating was an issue in winter for some students, though others just rugged up. Common rooms had gas fires, but few bedrooms did. Electric heaters were banned, perhaps to do with the wiring, though some suspected that it was to do

with Education Department parsimony. After arrival came the initiation. Phillip H remembers:

All new residents at ARH went through an “Introduction to ARH procedure”. This was pretty painless, but did instil a togetherness through the group. It consisted of a requirement that the newcomers learn about the history of the hostel and a lot of pointless facts about the Education Department which they were to be tested on. They also had to take part in the physical activities ... after all a “healthy mind comes from a healthy body”. This meant that they were woken early and led on runs around Albert Park and down to the beach where they were taken through lots of physical jerks by some of the senior residents.

After their ‘Test’ at the end of the week, there was a good nosh-up and everybody laughed about the activities and planned something for next year’s intake, according to Phillip H. These initiation rituals were not the only pranks that ARH dwellers might encounter during their residence. Barry R recalled:

On occasions, water fights around the hostel erupted—mainly in the courtyard, but corridors also got a soaking. These events were mainly after examinations and I can’t recall any damage to property or students. One of the students owned a magnificent motor bike, which was his pride and joy. On one occasion, when he was out without the bike, his friends managed to carry it up the rear steps and instal it in the back corridor.

Another group tried to load an unfortunate student in a laundry basket onto a city-bound tram, but he was saved by the tram conductor. However, Jim S mentioned that £17 of the hostel’s funds was spent on broken windows, so perhaps some pranks caused damage.

While some remembered these activities as pranks, others viewed them more harshly. One former resident saw the hostel culture as dominated by football. Others would dispute this, arguing that a resident like David H, who was no ‘football jock’, but rather a political activist, influenced many fellow residents.

Alan Ramsay House provided residents with breakfast and dinner, though it was possible to take fruit and bread from the breakfast table

and economise on lunch. On the weekends, lunch was also provided. Ross C recalled:

We were fortunate to have cooked breakfasts, weekly T-bone steaks and roasts and plenty of fruit, the 'sinker' pudding being the exception! I am sure that my habit of eating food rather quickly is attributable to the hostel experience, where eating quickly gave you first dibs at seconds or leftovers!

The 'sinker' pudding rated a mention in many residents' memoirs and Bill C remembered 'there were those meals when people took time to count the weevils on their plate, but I remember the food was generally quite good.'

Evening meals and Sunday lunches were formal and supervised. They began with the saying of Grace. At Sunday lunch, students and the supervisors wore jackets and ties, and supervisors wore academic gowns, as well as at the nightly dinner table for at least the first six years of the hostel's existence. Coffee was served to everyone in the student lounge after the meal. After the examinations, a formal valedictory dinner was conducted, so that those who had completed their studies could be farewelled. The Head Student spoke on the year's highlights, though there was occasionally a guest speaker.

There was an expectation that a quiet, studious atmosphere prevailed at night with no distractions or noise. 'Quietness is to be observed in the hostel during study hours i.e. from 7 p.m. onwards on week nights,' according to hostel rules. Supervisors were responsible for imposing this if necessary. One supervisor considered that there were times when a stern voice was needed, but generally good study conditions were provided and maintained. Student noise late at night was an issue when students returned from a night out and decided to have loud discussions on the upstairs walkway. Unlike those living in the women's hostels, former residents of ARH do not remember a curfew. The rules governing all hostels stated that late leave had to be granted by the Resident Supervisor, as did permission to be absent 'during the weekend or overnight ... and particulars entered in the weekend or overnight leave book'. Nevertheless, the rule about late leave does include 'in accordance with the rules laid down for each hostel,' so perhaps men's hostels were less strict about curfews.

The same rules also stated that students absent of an evening needed to record their destinations and times leaving and returning. Those who were going to be late for or absent from meals had to record this in the meal book. Students were also expected to have left the hostel by a certain hour in the morning and this was monitored. Smoking was permitted, but alcohol was forbidden. There were some breaches of this rule and students who were involved were spoken to at the College, but one supervisor cannot remember any further action being taken, though hostel information says that breaching this rule could be 'sufficient grounds for excluding a student from the hostel'. Women were not allowed in student rooms, though they were allowed to visit in the public areas. Being caught with a woman in your room was a serious issue and could possibly result in rejection from hostel accommodation. The motto, according to one former student teacher, was 'Don't get caught!'

While cleaning and some laundry were undertaken by hostel staff, residents were responsible for their personal laundry. Some used the hostel laundry; others took their dirty clothes home on weekends. They also had to make their beds, tidy their rooms each day and be out of their rooms by 9 a.m. so the cleaning staff could do their work. The costs of hostel residence were deducted from the students' fortnightly cheque. During Jim S's time as a supervisor (1961–64), this was £3 5s a week (\$6.50).

Hostels might be restrictive: hostel residents tended to socialise together, limiting their involvement in university activities. Many former hostel residents mentioned the 'hostel' table in the Melbourne University caf. But, in her interview for *The Ramsay Report*, Isobel Haining argued that only an extremely small minority of the general student population engaged in university activities anyway, so that the level of participation by hostel residents was not that different. Since students could not afford to miss meals and it was at least a 30-minute trip to and from the hostel, this, combined with a heavy university workload, allowed limited time to be involved outside the hostel. Research for my thesis indicated that university student newspapers at the time criticised student apathy, supporting the idea that hostel residents were not all that different from the general student population in that respect. As well, residents remembered that the hostel itself provided time to debate religious beliefs, social and political views and daily events, and the experiences and challenges they faced as young men. The salary paid to teacher

trainees, though it enabled them to live away from home to study, still gave residents a limited income, and, unsurprisingly, other discussions centred on how to save money, avoid tram fares and get into the South Yarra cinema half-price.

Overall, the memories of former residents about their time spent at ARH are positive; the hostel gave naïve young men fresh from the country the support needed to adapt to city and university life. It helped them cope with their studies and the pressure of examinations at a time where one final exam could determine success or failure in a subject for the whole year. Given the different personalities, the diversity of political and religious beliefs, the varied social backgrounds and sexual experience, hostel life encouraged young men to learn to live together and to learn tolerance. It also provided lifelong bonds when former residents encountered each other during their teaching careers or beyond. Graham M considered that ARH residents were very lucky to be in a humane hostel for teachers where there was a great deal of freedom with none of the stupidity, sense of entitlement and occasional cruelty that has been reported about other educational institutions.

After they left ARH, residents were bonded to teach for three years. As evident from the individual contributions in the ARH history and the interviews for my thesis, many had long teaching careers, finishing in senior teaching positions, and shaping the lives of many young Australians. Others joined the Education Department administration and shaped policy and its implementation. Still others left the teaching service and were successful in varied careers, contributing to Australian life in areas such as the public service, the mining industry and the Transport Accident Commission.

### **Acknowledgement**

With acknowledgement of information provided by former Alan Ramsay Hostel residents, including material from *The Ramsay Report* 1963 and 1964, and from all the contributors to the history of Alan Ramsay House and its residents.

## Notes

- 1 Marilyn Bowler (ed.), *Transforming Lives: Alan Ramsay House Secondary Men's Teachers Hostel*, Melbourne, Penfolk Publishing, 2023.
- 2 The legal age of adulthood was 21 years until the Whitlam government lowered it to 18 in 1973.

## From Migrant to Multicultural Education

*Georgina Tsolidis*

Education has been called upon to enact shifting policy emphases related to migration and settlement. Over the years, education policy has reflected broader policies of assimilation, integration, multiculturalism and, more recently, debates about citizenship and values. The emphasis in this paper is on the 1970s and 1980s because during this period there was a relatively dramatic shift, which took us from assimilationism to multiculturalism.

The success of managing the rapid demographic changes, which occurred after the Second World War, has been attributed to multicultural policy. This has been distinguished from the explicitly assimilationist policies that characterised the immediate postwar period of mass migration. Assimilationist policies assumed that social cohesion would result if migrants were taught to be Australian. Being Australian was linked to a particular vision of being blond, athletic, Christian and aligned as closely as possible to a British heritage. It was on this basis that a hierarchy of desirability was established that saw would-be British migrants coaxed with monetary incentives. The so-called 'beautiful Balts' were also deemed desirable. It was not until migration targets remained unmet that the government began to consider those from Southern Mediterranean countries including Italy, Greece and the former Yugoslavia. The large number of arrivals from these countries during the 1960s resulted in a dramatic demographic shift within Australia.

Despite the stated aim of early government policy to assimilate migrants, by the 1970s it became evident that some migrant communities were becoming earmarked by low incomes, poor housing, lack of English language skills and limited career opportunities. Inadequate and inappropriate services, including those within education, were recreating similar circumstances for the children of such migrants, the so-called second generation. There was increasing concern about 'ethnic ghettos' forming in cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, where migrants were concentrated. It was becoming more obvious that professional services including health and welfare agencies were not equipped to deal with

these expanding needs. Teachers were facing classrooms with increasing numbers of students with limited English language skills. Through their unions, teachers began to seek government recognition that their work with ethnic minority students needed additional support.

### **Migrant Education**

During the early postwar period the notion of culture clash was influential in shaping debate about the education of migrant children. Through this framework, the emphasis was placed on a perceived need for migrant groups to change—particularly those deemed least compatible with Australian values and lifestyle. It was argued that the children of migrants faced the burden of having to reconcile their family values with those of mainstream society. It was deemed that in order for these students to improve academically, they needed mechanisms that could minimise the effects of this culture clash. This reinforced the dichotomy between ‘Australian’ and ‘ethnic minority’. The emphasis was placed on models that sought to help minorities counter their ‘un-Australianness’. Within this framework education was constructed as pivotal.

In the 1970s the election of the Whitlam Labor Government led to a number of significant shifts in policy emphasis. Arguably these shifts were aligned with the social movements that had characterised the 1960s and 1970s, including those concerned with ethnic rights. A changing political environment was evolving to include larger ethnic minority representation within peak bodies. Events such as the 1973 Ford factory strike at Broadmeadows had made more obvious the working conditions faced by migrant workers. Within some ethnic communities, there was support for the Labor Party, seen by many as a way of improving the well-being and opportunities of ethnic minorities. The ethnic rights movement contributed to the evolution of an alternative policy orientation that sought to broaden mainstream conceptions of ‘Australianness’ and challenge deficit images of minority cultures.

### **The Schools Commission**

The Labor Government emphasised the role that education could play spearheading social reform, and to this end the Schools Commission was formed. It was tasked with recommending related priorities and accompanying funding strategies. The Karmel Report, tabled in 1973, foreshadowed that the education of ethnic minorities required special

attention. This recommendation was taken up in more detail in the first Schools Commission Triennium Report, tabled in 1975.

The Schools Commission framed the issue with the statement that it was the right of ethnic minorities to maintain 'dual cultural identity within a framework of Australian allegiance and to keep this possibility open for their children'.<sup>1</sup> In the report was outlined the responsibility of schooling to assist with the maintenance of the first language and culture of students from ethnic minorities. Also stressed was the need for English language competence to enable all students to access the full range of opportunities within Australian society. In relation to the teaching of English as a Second Language, the Schools Commission emphasised the role of specialist language teachers in providing classes for newly arrived, non-English-speaking students and their role in assisting with the professional development of their colleagues. Such professional development would enable schools to provide a language across the curriculum approach. This approach, it was argued, would benefit all students who had literacy problems, including ethnic minority students born in Australia and also anglophone Australians. The Schools Commission emphasised that schooling had the responsibility to provide ethnic minority students with cultural reinforcement and also acquaint mainstream students with the multicultural nature of Australian society.

In its first Triennium Report, the Schools Commission extended what had hitherto been known as 'migrant education' beyond the teaching of English to non-English speakers. It highlighted the need for mother-tongue and cultural maintenance and recognised the important role these played reinforcing the self-esteem and learning of students. It recognised the need for a two-way process, which required the education of both majority and minority students. It also challenged the understandings that had dominated previous English as a Second Language programs. Rather than specialist staff withdrawing minority students into separate programs and separate rooms to learn English, there were references to:

- bilingual programs;
- professional development programs for non-specialist staff so that they could take some responsibility for these students' acquisition of English; and
- the provision of resources so that specialist and non-specialist staff could work together on the development of language-appropriate curriculum.

In these ways the education of ethnic minority students had the potential to become integrated into the mainstream life of a school. These changes as advocated were a significant shift away from compensatory models of teaching and learning previously in practice. It had been common for migrant students to be withdrawn from classes and isolated in peripheral locations, including those not intended for teaching. These were makeshift arrangements in schools where it had been assumed that all students were native speakers of English. It was not uncommon for students learning English to be deemed to have learning difficulties and placed in the care of Remedial English teachers. In this context, allowing students into the mainstream classroom, where they received some additional support to develop English language skills more naturally, was welcome. This approach allowed immersion into an English language environment and enabled students to access learning in other curriculum areas. It also encouraged all teachers to develop strategies that brought language awareness into their teaching, regardless of the subject taught.

### **The Galbally Review**

In 1977 the Australian Commonwealth Government appointed a committee to review services available to ethnic minority communities. Its report, tabled in 1978, provided an assessment of the appropriateness of both government and non-government services in education, health and law.<sup>2</sup> Chaired by Frank Galbally, and known as the Galbally review, it recommended the Multicultural Education Program, through which \$5 million would be allocated to assist with the development of multicultural curriculum. The allocation of funding was intended to stimulate a range of initiatives related to:

- the teaching of community languages and cultures,
- bilingual approaches to language acquisition,
- multicultural perspectives programs,
- related teacher professional development,
- relevant materials development,
- parent and community involvement, and
- research.

The Galbally review also recommended that a committee of educators with relevant expertise draw up guidelines for the allocation of the \$5 million and that policies and programs in related areas be co-ordinated through formal structures established at the Commonwealth level. Two committees were established: the Committee on Multicultural Education, and the Commonwealth Education Portfolio Group.

The Committee on Multicultural Education advised on the allocation of the \$5 million and defined some key terms. It stated a preference for the phrase ‘education for a multicultural society’ because it indicated a ‘philosophy which permeates the total work of the school’ rather than a strand of education that was implicit in the term ‘multicultural education.’<sup>3</sup> Education for a multicultural society was intended for the whole community, not just for schools with large percentages of ethnic minority students. Three areas of work were identified as significant:

- the relationships between schools and homes and students and teachers;
- the curriculum, particularly multicultural perspectives and language teaching and learning; and
- support mechanisms including training, research and communication of information.

The Schools Commission recommendations need to be considered in the context of the prevailing discourses at the time. Commonly, what had been ‘migrant education’ stressed ‘culture clash.’ The school represented the mainstream way of operating. The family represented the ways of the parents’ homeland, often assumed to be backward looking, thus having the potential to inhibit the academic and social achievement of the students. The emphasis had been placed on reconciling students with the dominant culture as a way of eliminating the contradictions assumed to exist between the cultures of their home and school. The Schools Commission had begun to challenge this model, but practice at the school level did not necessarily reflect a shift.

The Galbally review advocated communication between homes and schools, and associated funding meant that newsletters and reports could be translated. Interpreters were employed so that teachers could communicate with parents. Ethnic Teacher Aides, who came from relevant communities, facilitated the involvement of families in the

mainstream running of schools. They often ran informal groups at the school for non-English-speaking parents. These were ethno-specific and became important conduits for bringing parental expectations into schools. Most often, mother-tongue maintenance was a priority. Minority parents became visible in schools and, in many cases, this became a means of breaking down stereotypes about them and their communities.

The second committee, the Commonwealth Education Portfolio Group, was the first stage of implementing the Galbally recommendation to establish formal structures dealing with multiculturalism at the Commonwealth level. The aim was to set down the major issues to be discussed towards the creation of a Commonwealth policy on multicultural education. In the discussion paper titled *Education in a Multicultural Australia*, published in 1979, the term ‘multicultural education’ was clarified. The Portfolio Group stressed cohesion through diversity. Several elements were identified as critical to social cohesion:

- the place of institutions such as parliament and the legal system;
- English as the *lingua franca*; and
- shared values, primarily those of democracy and egalitarianism.

Multicultural curriculum developed at the state and national level through a range of committees that included representatives from key ethnic minority organisations. This move reinforced a view of multiculturalism that stressed:

- liaison between schools and minority communities;
- mother tongue maintenance;
- bilingual education; and
- multicultural perspectives across all curriculum areas.

The aim was to provide minority students with an opportunity to retain their cultures, acquire those skills necessary to function fully in Australian society and where possible to support bilingual learning approaches. Curricula that would encourage all students to acquire a second language and understand the importance of cultural difference within Australian society was also developed. Much of this work was framed under the rubric of inclusive curriculum—the idea that schooling

should value the cultures and perspectives students brought with them to the classroom, and that this would be done in meaningful ways. Their existing knowledge and experience would be a basis for assessment and for further learning. School communities would be charged with the responsibility of mediating broad curriculum guidelines against local needs and expectations. In the area of language learning, for example, all students would be introduced to a second language but the choice of which one would be decided locally.

Multiculturalism remained an amorphous concept. Until as late as 1987, government reports still had as a stated aim the need to define multiculturalism and its implications for educational practice.<sup>4</sup> Despite the attempts of a number of committees and reviews, established during both Liberal Coalition and Labor governments, this situation continued—so much so that in 1983, the newly-elected Hawke Labor government, through its Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Susan Ryan, appointed the first national advisory body for multicultural education. One of its tasks was to provide a rationale for policy in multicultural education. This rationale was provided in 1987 (NACCME 1987) but was never developed into policy.<sup>5</sup>

### **International Education**

It would be reasonable to describe the 1970s and 1980s as the high point for multicultural education. National funding initiated extensive work in various states, notably Victoria, where innovative policy, curriculum and professional development initiatives were undertaken. However, such initiatives, by and large, assumed cultural diversity as bounded by nation and were premised on the perspectives and priorities of those groups associated with postwar migration. Increasingly this became limiting given the growing debates about Australia's place in the Asia-Pacific region. The emphasis shifted to international education, reflecting the burgeoning economic relations with Asia. The number of students from the Asian region studying in Australia, including in secondary schools, was growing rapidly. Schools began to teach the languages and cultures of the Asia-Pacific region, and patterns of migration were also reflecting this new emphasis.

International education, like multicultural education, was interpreted in different ways. Some understood it as a response to globalisation whereby teaching to cultural difference transcended

national borders and became responsive to flows of people, capital and production, rather than migration and settlement. Through this lens, it was associated with wider social justice agendas, including those related to post-colonialism. Alternatively, international education was shaped as teaching and learning about specific countries in our region, a type of cultural exchange program that facilitated understanding and economic relations.

### Values Education

In 2003 the Australian Commonwealth Government released a three-year policy aimed at updating the 1999 strategic directions for the implementation of multiculturalism. This discussion of multiculturalism was situated within the context of conflict, including the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York and the bombings in Bali. This policy stressed the importance of nation building and social cohesion. Multicultural policy was understood as imperative to shaping this social cohesion through the promulgation of shared values. The Department of Education, Science and Training released *The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* in 2005. The government allocated \$29.7 million to be spent over four years. This would support schools and communities with the teaching of values. Nine core values were advanced. The last one was entitled ‘Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion’ and was explained with reference to awareness of others and their cultures and respect for diversity in the context of a democratic society. This elicited public debate about the nature of Australian values and the processes through which these were determined. The debate occurred at the same time that the government was initiating citizenship tests for would-be migrants and more aggressive border protection. There were also more strident government interventions within education, including a Prime Ministerial summit on the teaching of Australian history.

In essence, education policy debates, whether about multiculturalism, integration, internationalising the curriculum or values and citizenship education, are about the nature of Australianness—how it is envisaged, what are its critical elements and who gets to decide what these are. This debate continues.

## Conclusion

As a formal policy, multiculturalism is associated with the social reform movements that began in the 1970s and were consolidated into a range of policies in the 1980s. Traditionally the policy has had bipartisan government support. However, there have been marked differences of emphasis over time between various governments. Nonetheless, a major plank of Australian multiculturalism has been schooling and the belief that citizens can be educated for cultural difference and that this will sustain social cohesion through respect and opportunity. In summary:

- The most progressive forms of multicultural education policy have emphasised that all students need to learn to speak, read and write English through appropriate pedagogies.
- Bilingual approaches to teaching and learning should be included.
- Students need to learn languages other than English for reasons of cultural maintenance.
- Monolingual English speakers need to learn a second language so they can be inducted into other cultures.
- Multicultural perspectives need to be included across the curriculum, not just in classes or schools which enrol minority students.
- Minority parents and their communities need to be actively invited into the schools and provided with appropriate resources so they can participate meaningfully in decision-making.

Multicultural policy has been critiqued as Janus-faced: encouraging diversity on issues of little significance while firmly maintaining structures that reward dominant knowledges. Perhaps its benefits are more variegated than this. Regardless of this debate, multicultural education policy did have some symbolic and strategic worth as a policy framework that allowed movement away from assimilation. This worth became more evident during the so-called culture war and its precipitation of more strident political posturing about ‘stranger danger’. There exists a sense that a lot of the ground-breaking work in these areas has not been consolidated and may have been lost altogether. This has been because

of shifting policy and funding priorities, and a sense amongst educators and others that multiculturalism is no longer relevant. In part, this is because of its long-standing association with postwar migration. Current thinking has moved away from understandings of migration as simply a response to 'push-pull' factors, and instead new approaches have given priority to globalisation.

Globalisation has severely challenged the underpinning assumption of previous renditions of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been evaluated in relation to intra-national social cohesion. However, the rapid movement of people, capital and production between national boundaries in response to globalisation makes it necessary to re-evaluate multiculturalism. With the relatively easy flow of people, capital and production, and the development of technology and its relevance to enterprise, our students are not limited by national boundaries. Instead, it is important to engage meaningfully with transnational cultural difference and hybridisation. As educators, we need to account for this in our teaching. This is the new challenge—to learn from and successfully reinterpret and extend beyond the nation the strategies that have characterised multicultural education.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Schools Commission, *Report for the Triennium 1976–1978*, AGPS, Canberra 1975, p. 88.
- 2 Committee of Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants (Frank Galbally, Chairman), 'Report of the Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants', Canberra. AGPS, 1978.
- 3 Committee on Multicultural Education, *Education for a Multicultural Society*, Report to the Schools Commission, Canberra. AGPS, 1979, p.10.
- 4 Committee on Multicultural Education 1979; Commonwealth Education Portfolio Group 1979.
- 5 National Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Multicultural Education, (NACCCME), 'Education in and for a Multicultural Society: Issues and Strategies for Policy Making', Canberra. AGPS, 1987.
- 6 See also Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Government, 'National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools Commonwealth of Australia', Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005.

## Education and Democracy: Ancient and Modern

*Adrian Jones*

Free, Compulsory, Secular—the 1870s in Europe and Australasia. More accurately, perhaps: Free, Compulsory, Non-Denominational. Most of the papers delivered at the RHSV Conference, naturally, examine colonial perspectives on Victoria's education legislation of 1872. This contribution focuses on two other aspects: older and further afield than the 1870s in Victoria, much older indeed than the nineteenth century.

My first 'other aspect' discusses the link between the onset of democracy and the onset of public-funded compulsory mass education. I suggest later in this essay—introducing European contrasts to Victoria's Education Act of 1872—that the relationship applied even when democracy was a matter of public discussion but not receiving official support.

My second 'other aspect' discusses a less obvious, but associated, change in emphasis. When democracy was seen to be coming, or threatening to come, traditional polarities between 'Heart' (i.e. hot ardour) and 'Mind' (i.e. cool reason) in models of teaching and learning shifted.<sup>1</sup> The prospect of mass education based on Free, Compulsory, Secular altered the customary, indeed archaic, balance between Orality and Literacy in education.

The change to democracy preferred reading to reciting. It shifted the understanding of the mission of readers and reading.<sup>2</sup> At one end of a spectrum of understanding, the habitual end, the mission for the reader and reading—indeed the purpose of teaching it—was recitation. Learning was conceived as elusive, conservative and mnemonic.<sup>3</sup> At this 'conservative' end of the spectrum, the aesthetics of handwriting were also esteemed, though the texts themselves were viewed more as a kind of *aide-mémoire*.<sup>4</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, the 'democratic' end, the mission of the reader and reading—and the purpose of teaching—was reconceived as a fixed, or fixable, 'formal rationality'.<sup>5</sup> The reader and reading were now conceived of as management material. Reading and writing became tools of self- and community fulfilment.<sup>6</sup> They existed to help construe and process, to contend and question, constructively.



**'Mental Arithmetic in a Village School run by Rachinskii' (1895), artist Nikolai Petrovich Bogdanov-Bel'skii (1868–1945)**

Influenced by Russian Populism, which combined a form of rural socialism with liberalism, having also read Tolstoy, Sergei Alexandrovich Rachinskii (1833–1902) returned to his native village, Tat'evo, in 1872, simply to set up a school.

(Source: State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow)

Try the sum on Rachinskii's board:

$$(10^2 + 11^2 + 12^2 + 13^2 + 14^2 \div 365 = ?).$$

The teacher now became the modern era's reformer-redeemer such as we encounter in Xenophon's and Plato's separate defences of Socrates, the persecuted teacher they revered. The ideal of reformer-redeemer was also revered in the mid to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australian world of those who drafted the Education Act of 1872, and of the many teacher-readers of the *Bulletin*, who also joined the Australian Natives' Association and who admired Henry Lawson, Banjo Patterson, Steele Rudd and C.J. Dennis. As a mid-primary schooler in suburban Glenroy in the early 1960s, I was cajoled into reading by poetry-spouting nationalist old 'blokes' like these. I wrote about some of these sorts of Victorian teachers in my history of Essendon State School.<sup>7</sup>

Democracy craves education. As soon as democracy was seen as coming, the mass education of citizens (howsoever 'citizens' and 'education' were defined) was always an issue. Models of education involved choices between notions of how best to balance dialogue, reading and writing in teaching and learning. Some received notions favoured closed dialogue instead.<sup>8</sup> They emphasised rote oralities of the 'heart':<sup>9</sup> 'Learn this by heart, children. Chant your times' tables.' While this learning by heart was not always as passive as modern pedagogues and pedagogies might suggest, the model of learning was tightly teacher-scripted. Everyone who believed in closed dialogue also knew that selectivity was crucial in any system of education, mass education included: some students—and some families—just did not 'have their heart in it'. The expectation was that the unmotivated and the incapable would drop out soon enough, and that was seen not to matter much. Others favoured open dialogue. They emphasised Socratic forensics of first principles of the 'Mind' in matters of teaching and learning, wanting critical literacy and discovery.

Both forms of dialogue were as old as literacy itself, even if the relative values of speaking and writing were contested in each society. The Code of Hammurabi of Babylon, 1750s BCE, written in stone in Akkadian, makes the link between dialogue and literacy clear:

Let any oppressed man who has a cause  
 Come into the presence of the statue of me, the king of justice,  
 And then read carefully my inscribed *stela* [i.e. this law code in  
 etched in stone]  
 And give heed to my precious words,

And may my *stela* make the case clear to him;  
 May he understand his cause;  
 May he set his mind at ease!<sup>10</sup>

This sophisticated ancient Babylonian bully knew a lot about education and reading. Reading gives readers a ruler-writer's instruction: closed dialogue, teaching-as-ruling. 'Give heed to my precious words.' Know you might have a cause. Yet the author knows his subjects are thinkers with some residual sovereignty. Hammurabi recognises that his act of ruling-by-writing also enables the inner dialogue of the reader's thinking; open dialogue: teaching-as-enabling. 'May he understand his cause. May he set his mind at ease!'

Key studies of some of the earliest examples of writing also show that, while writing never displaced orality from its top spot in ancient communication,<sup>11</sup> it did enable its ruled-readers to voice burlesque subversions, to express irony, to claim ownership, and even to envisage permanency.<sup>12</sup> It is no surprise that the reality-based disciplines of mathematics, history, medicine, philosophy, and theatre—all premised on writing—emerged in ancient Greece around 600 BCE, well after oral feats of epic and poetry were established.<sup>13</sup>

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Free, Compulsory, Secular. This essay develops this age-old thinking about the relationships between speaking, reading and writing, on the one hand, and mass education on the other, by comparing key concerns of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE with concerns in other societies in Europe from the era of the French Revolution to the mid to late nineteenth century. The comparison may seem strange at first, because there is such a long lag in time. But is it not so strange if one considers that these eras had something rare in common. These were the only two moments in history when dreams and realities of democracy intersected with educational discussion.

There is also a revealing and important difference in the outcomes in this *pas-de-deux* between Free, Compulsory, Secular and threats and onsets of democracy. Whereas the 1870s model of Free, Compulsory, Secular gradually rejected closed models of political and educational dialogue and replaced them with more open models, among the Ancient

Athenians the pattern went the other way: from open to closed. Athens in the fourth century BCE was disillusioned with the democracy of the previous century, drawing educational conclusions favouring treatises, lessons and scripted model orations over earlier impromptu Socratic and Sophistic open dialogue, and preferring the politics of oligarchy and monarchy over democracy.<sup>14</sup>

Consider the evidence in three examples. The first is from Xenophon's *Memoir of Socrates*, written during the brief hegemony of Thebes, between 371 and 362 BCE. Xenophon was a near contemporary of Plato. Plato's *Republic* (written c. 375) famously preferred rule by 'philosopher kings'. Xenophon supported the Athenian oligarchs of 404–03, and later preferred to live under Spartan protection. Xenophon's Socrates criticised the Sophist practice of collecting fees for educating students, thereby implicitly restricting education to the well-heeled, excluding the footloose and keen. Xenophon's Socrates regarded democrats and democracies as proud and impetuous, concluding democrats were likelier to be uninformed or under-informed.<sup>15</sup> The implicit link between open dialogue and at least the potential for mass education was now scorned.

None of this means that Socrates himself wanted to subvert Athenian democracy, as the charges laid by Athenian Democrats suggested in 399. The link between open dialogue and mass education still seems to have been live, in part, in Socrates' prime. While Socrates clearly preferred rule by the open minded and better informed, his public actions suggest he still valued the freedoms Athenian democracy afforded, thinking anyone could educate themselves if they joined in open dialogue. Socrates often held discussions in public in Athenian streets and shops, as well in elite male (and often licentious) *Symposia*. Socrates believed in open dialogue. Nor did he seem to accept limits on who could be educated, if we allow for the typical Greek citizen's big blind spots regarding women, aliens and slaves!<sup>16</sup> Other evidence for this can be found in the earlier work of Xenophon and Plato, who eventually scorned mass education and democracy in the fourth century BCE. Their different *Apologias* wholly persuade in showing the prosecution of Socrates by Athenian democrats for treason and subversion as a travesty of democracy and for democracy.<sup>17</sup>

A second example: from the late fifth and fourth century BCE, historical writing in Athens, and then Rome, also came to doubt the value of open dialogue.<sup>18</sup> Herodotus had never doubted its value, showing the

artful Athenian democrat, Themistocles, engineering Greek success via collaboration. But Thucydides developed doubts. He chronicled how popular demagogues, like Kleon and Alcibiades, doomed Athens to failure, suggesting that the Athenian Assembly ought to have heeded the measured oratory of Pericles and Nicias—even quoting a Spartan who could not fathom the Athenians' faith in speechifying.<sup>19</sup> Thucydides composed one incomparable dialogue in his sober history of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) to show the tragic hollowness of dialogue! Arrogant Athenians afforded the pro-Spartan oligarchs ruling Melos a futile chance to speak before every Melian was deported and enslaved, in accordance with the Athenian commanders' standing orders, issued from the big Athenian-led fleet anchored off their island in the Cyclades.<sup>20</sup> Open dialogue in the late fifth century BCE was no longer based on the kind of fellowship or equity that Herodotus and Socrates had celebrated. Actions were seen as speaking louder than words, and immune from cross-examination.<sup>21</sup>

The third example. It intrigues because it points to slippages between orality and literacy in education, between learning by 'Heart' and by 'Mind'. Plato pondered Socrates' critique of writing, and the harm Socrates thought it caused to open dialogue. We can be sure Socrates could read,<sup>22</sup> unlike Homer over three centuries earlier, who referred once to writing as 'murderous symbols inscribed on a folding tablet'.<sup>23</sup> Yet we know Socrates always preferred to link learning with meeting and talking with others<sup>24</sup>—and without charging a fee—the better to make a friend, esteemed by Socrates more than money. Plato's Socrates emphasised dialectical orality over learner obedience and passivity.<sup>25</sup> Learner gullibility seemed to Plato's Socrates to arise from uncritical reading of whatever was received and instructed, rather than from first-hand experiences owned and reflected upon. Plato's Socrates considered that only open dialogue could educate freely; it took things back to first principles; it did not peddle flawed, pre-fabricated meanings.<sup>26</sup>

Ironies abound here. Our Free, Compulsory, Secular placed great faith in passive reading and elegant copying and handwriting. Our Free, Compulsory, Secular also tried to close dialogue as much as possible. Its business was nation-building. It was also all about assimilation.<sup>27</sup> Australian colonial classrooms had world maps of the British Empire with 'British' territories designated red. Adherents of Free, Compulsory, Secular often built their nations on colonialism and nationalism, routinely

disparaging threatening foreigners and discriminating against their own language dialects and racial and linguistic minorities. The proponents of our version of Free, Compulsory, Secular were highly likely to defend a White Australia Policy.<sup>28</sup> Yet our Free, Compulsory, Secular was also associated, depending on standpoints, with the rise of democracy, or with the spectre of democracy.

Hindsight matters here, and so do these ironies. We know, and the proponents of Free, Compulsory, Secular knew too, that Socrates' combining of education with open dialogue ended badly for him. Put on trial and sentenced to death by Athenian democracy for corrupting the minds of the young, Socrates suicided. The irony is that we know about all this only because Plato, Xenophon (and Aristophanes, and all so differently!)<sup>29</sup> defied their deceased mentor and chose to write about their beloved Socrates.<sup>30</sup> Aristophanes was the exception, writing while Socrates was alive, and lampooning him. We also know that writing quickly took the ascendancy in fourth century BCE elite education.<sup>31</sup> Henceforth, it never seemed possible to separate learning, as Plato's Socrates had averred, from the reading and writing that grounded 'performance.'<sup>32</sup> The change was assisted, ironically, by Plato's, Xenophon's and their Sophist contemporaries' decision to write, not just to speak, which also meant that, henceforth, fewer and fewer dialogues were spoken or written.<sup>33</sup> Aristotle's and later Isocrates' decisions to open Academies helped kill these Socratic oral-only, collaborative-inquiry models of learning. The Academies counter-entrenched their notions of learning as driven by reading and writing, with orality relegated to assessment and to subordinate roles as *aide-mémoire* and catechism.

Contributors to this volume will probably doubt Socrates' doubts about the promise of reading and writing. Socrates thought that writing and reading threatened the open dialogue that underpinned democracy. Yet Socrates felt obliged to suicide because his oral ways of encouraging limitless inquiry were seen as subverting Athenian democracy.

We now differ, I think. We honour the Free, Compulsory, Secular reformers of the 1870s and their successors, those who framed the teacher as a social redeemer and who emphasised how important it was for the masses to be able to read, write and think. And we will not abandon democracy, though contemporary trends in the USA and regarding social media sap confidence. Our current pedagogic preferences for inquiry-based learning and for teaching that starts by exploring student

suppositions and prior knowledge, owe a great deal to Socrates, even if we don't share his suspicion of reading and writing. We are unlikely to look favourably on the educators for the past two millennia following on from the Academies founded by Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates, the ones preceding Free, Compulsory, Secular: the chastisers, the elitists, the perfunctory catechisers.<sup>34</sup>

Free, Compulsory, Secular: the triad reflected a new faith, buried—so I have argued here—since Socrates. The new faith developed a mobilising mission for teachers and teaching, mass-mobilising since the 1870s. Free, Compulsory, Secular redefined the state as an entity ready now to shoulder burdens of funding and licensing what the masses would learn, something the French revolutionaries, before 1795, had hoped to achieve, but could never accomplish.<sup>35</sup> Ancient Athenians preferred to focus solely on male citizen-youths. Free, Compulsory, Secular now forced reading and writing for all. How else could mass democracy mass mobilise?

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I have suggested affinities between fifth- and fourth-century BCE and nineteenth-century public hopes and fears of democracy. Both eras prompted touchy discussions about how best to enable, fund and model the necessary corollary of democracy: better public education. Onsets of democracy require socio-denominators that are explicit and in common. Socrates's open-dialogue model foundered on Athenian democrats' anxieties about his disrespect for the Panathenaic values and rituals of *nomos*: specific civic pieties of temple, family, community.<sup>36</sup> The secular bit in Free, Compulsory, Secular was the key obstacle in the 1870s and well after, as even the compromise formula of 'non-denominational' was contentious.

New rounds of burlesque subversions of piety followed. In Gabriel Chevalier's beloved *Clochemerle* (1936), set in his native Vaux-en-Beaujolais, M. le Maire and his ally the state schoolmaster would both thwart and respect the local priest.<sup>37</sup> In *Il Mondo Piccolo* of Giovannino Guareschi's beloved stories (1945–48) set in a high Lombard village, Fr Don Camillo is forever jousting with a nemesis he yet respects, the communist mayor, 'Big Joe' Peppone. Teacher-led secular nationalisms, *Clochemerle*-like, are still likely to be endorsed, *sotto voce*, in most Victorian state school staff rooms, I venture. State school teachers had

been the backbone of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (1902–18), the most popular party in Russia's un-gerrymandered national elections held in November 1917. Along with army officers, state school teachers were prominent supporters of the Ottoman irredentist nationalist movement known as the 'Young Turks' (1908–18).

Both Secular and Non-Denominational carried the baggage of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1791 in France, and of the militant and violent French Republicanism in 1792–95, recast in *la République sociale* of June 1848, and in the dream factories of the Paris Commune of 1871, and among the intelligentsia in Imperial Russia. This heritage was upgraded when two Republican Freemasons, dedicated imperialists, Jules Ferry and Émile Combes, implemented school *laïcité* reforms, mostly in 1881–83 and 1901–05.<sup>38</sup> The new and enduring mood in France, which shaped the *Parti Radical* dominating the Third Republic, is best summed up by a leftist French songster-poet, Gaston Montéhus (1872–1952):

La République a fondé des écoles,      *The Republic has founded schools*

Aussi maintenant le peuple sait  
compter      *So now the people know how to  
count*

Le peuple ne veut plus qu'on lui  
donne un obole      *The people will no longer be fobbed  
off with tuppence*

Il veut son compte et non la charité.      *They want to take charge them-  
selves, not get charity.*

For Montéhus, state schooling was all about enabling the poor and oppressed to begin to believe in their own voice. He was not wrong—provided we recognise this was only an emerging consumers' eventual point of view. We also need to understand why mid to late nineteenth-century conservatives could reconcile themselves to the expensive provision of state schooling. Many European liberals and conservatives were able to countenance strong doses of democracy, and its corollary—something state-run, Free, Compulsory, Secular or Non-Denominational—unlike the Athenian oligarchs who abandoned the astounding Greek democracy of the fifth century BCE.

Consider Imperial Germany and the United Kingdom. A different but parallel model of universal state education emerged during Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, 1872–78. It was premised on an authoritarian Imperial

nationalism, differing from Ferry's and Combes's democratic imperialist nationalism. But the key point is that commitment to state education remained the same. There were now elections throughout Imperial Germany and an appearance of democracy, with Bismarck confident that his many constitutional and customary limits on parliamentary prerogatives would constrain radicals, even as he developed the educated armed and work forces he recognised Germany now needed. In this era in the new imperial Germany Bismarck had created so spectacularly in 1870–71, there was a loosening of the thrall of churches over education in general, and over secondary education especially.<sup>39</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the tilt to state education was even more unusual than in Germany. Lord Palmerston had first to die, in 1865, as his leadership of the Liberal Party had curbed Lord John Russell, blocking reform of parliament and of education. Change was able to emerge only because the Conservative Party—out of power for so long, and eager—came to accept in 1867 Edward Stanley's (Lord Derby) and Benjamin Disraeli's reforms extending the franchise to all male heads of households, tenant or owner. Many Conservatives and Liberals had reappraised Lord Derby's model of multi-denominational 'National' Schooling, trialled since 1831 in Ireland (which had Scots models). The same 'National' Schooling was then tried (from 1848) in NSW and then in Victoria (from 1850, as promoted by Governors FitzRoy and La Trobe, the former appointed by Lord Derby). Westminster Liberals soon committed to a version of Free, Compulsory, Secular too. In the English version, it was only Free if you were poor (local ratepayers having to pay), and Compulsory, and Non-Denominational. The last term was a product of a Cowper-Temple amendment, though the provision was still radical because parents of 'conscience' could choose to withdraw their children.<sup>40</sup> These changes were led by an ex-Quaker in the Liberal Party, William Forster, resulting in the Elementary Education Act of 1870. British implementation of the changes took until 1893 to complete. The plucky and lucky Colony of Victoria started later but the change was completed more quickly—as the other essays in this special issue show.

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I cannot add to what I already wrote about the one state school in the suburb in which I live.<sup>41</sup> I preferred to set Victoria's Education Act of 1872 in a wider ethical and political historical context.

I indicated what Ancient Athenians and nineteenth-century Moderns had in common instead. Too much Australian historical writing overlooks comparisons. I noticed that these two eras were the only two eras in history when democracies were confident and secure enough to debate, and to try to implement, what they understood then as mass education.

I chose not to worry about their obvious gender, class, slavery and race blind spots. Every era has blind spots. I wanted to do something to help recapture how these two eras were also eras of amazing intellectual courage, confidence and consequence.

The two eras differed in one important respect. If ancient Athenians quickly preferred to abandon their democracy and to persecute Socrates, their most innovative educator, I think we have been more steadfast in our adherence to state schooling that is Free, Compulsory, Secular. To be sure, each adjective attracts and always has attracted heaps of qualifiers. We still value the promises and actions of the reformers of the 1870s. Athenians gave it all up. The democratic achievements of the late nineteenth-century Moderns are still worth celebrating.

Another key thing besides democracy was at stake. The onsets of democracy, ancient Athenian and late nineteenth-century modern, both caused critical literacy to be esteemed more than open dialogue. Teaching pushed ahead of learning—in both eras. Socrates resolutely opposed those changes, preferring a dialogue of equals premised on freedom and valuing creativity and oral spontaneity. We might wonder what he would make of social media. We still endorse the eventual change to critical literacy. We even choose to assess students by judging their writing. We view the critical literacies gleaned from history studies of sources and of historiography as a great grounding, perhaps even the best grounding, for active citizenship. Yet, I wonder if our classrooms could be more open to student-generated open discussion, assessment and inquiry.<sup>42</sup>

Socrates established this example, simply by enabling open learning in streets and shopping complexes. But then values shifted. Alongside Thucydides, the greatest of Athenian historians, the pupils of Socrates, the astute and nimble thinker Plato, and the plodding but earnest Xenophon, changed everything. They changed everything, not only by opting to write when questioning, but also by choosing to undermine democracy.

Now we too live in times when democracy looks threatened from within and from without. If we cannot imagine any system of mass

education without linking it also to Plato's and Xenophon's prescriptions of critical literacy—imposed, ordered and rewarded by an oligarchy—we also need to remember that in ancient Athens it once scripted the death of democracy.

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**Cheryl Griffin** FRHSV was a secondary school teacher of English, media studies and history. She completed a PhD at the University of Melbourne in 2005 on teacher and activist Doris McRae. On retirement Cheryl has devoted her time to community history through the Coburg and Brunswick historical societies and the RHSV, where she convenes the RHSV Writers Group. She created the ongoing resource, the RHSV Women's Biographical Dictionary, which is found on the RHSV website. In 2022 Cheryl curated 'Kaleidoscope', an exhibition on the women of the RHSV that grew out of her dictionary project.

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**Rosalie Triolo**, FRHSV, author of *Our Schools and the War* (2012), is current vice president of the RHSV and an adjunct senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. For 25 years she helped facilitate the development of specialist teachers of history for Australian and overseas schools before retiring at the end of 2021. She was president for six years of the History Teachers' Association of Victoria and a board member for a further 24 years.

**Georgina Tsolidis** was for 16 years at Monash University, including as an associate professor, and for six years a professor at Federation University. Since retiring from full-time academic work, she has become a counsellor, and an adjunct professor at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation. Earlier in her career she worked within the Department of Education as a secondary teacher, English as a second language consultant, and researcher and policy worker.

## About the Royal Historical Society of Victoria

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is a community organisation comprising people from many fields committed to collecting, researching and sharing an understanding of the history of Victoria. Founded in 1909, the Society continues the founders' vision that knowing the individual stories of past inhabitants gives present and future generations links with local place and local community, bolstering a sense of identity and belonging, and enriching our cultural heritage.

The RHSV is located in History House, the heritage-listed Drill Hall at 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, built in 1939 on a site devoted to defence installations since the construction of the West Melbourne Orderly Room in 1866 for the Victorian Volunteer Corps. The 1939 building was designed to be used by the Army Medical Corps as a training and research facility. It passed into the hands of the Victorian government, which has leased it to the Society since 1999.

The RHSV conducts lectures, exhibitions, excursions and workshops for the benefit of members and the general public. It publishes the bi-annual *Victorian Historical Journal*, a bi-monthly newsletter, *History News*, and monographs. It is committed to collecting and making accessible the history of Melbourne and Victoria. It holds a significant collection of the history of Victoria including books, manuscripts, photographs, prints and drawings, ephemera and maps. The Society's library is considered one of Australia's richest in its focus on Victorian history. Catalogues are accessible online.

The RHSV acts as the umbrella body for over 330 historical societies throughout Victoria and actively promotes their collections, details of which are accessible via the Victorian Local History Database identified on the RHSV website. The Society also sponsors the History Victoria Support Group, which runs quarterly meetings throughout the state to increase the skills and knowledge of historical societies. The RHSV has an active online presence and runs the History Victoria bookshop—online and on-site.

### *More information:*

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## **Guidelines for Contributors to the *Victorian Historical Journal***

1. The *Victorian Historical Journal* is a refereed journal publishing original and previously unpublished scholarly articles on Victorian history, or on Australian history where it illuminates Victorian history. It is published twice yearly by the Publications Committee, Royal Historical Society of Victoria.
2. The submission of original scholarly articles is invited following the journal's *Guidelines* available at <http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/publications/victorian-historical-journal>.
3. Articles from 4,000 to 8,000 words (including notes) are preferred.
4. The *VHJ* also publishes historical notes, which are reviewed by the editors. A historical note may be up to 4,000 words in length. It contains factual information and is different from an article in not being an extended analysis or having an argument. Submitted articles may be reduced and published as historical notes after consultation with the author.
5. The *VHJ* has a category 'Interpreting an Image' reviewed by the editor(s). Submit 1,000 words together with image(s).
6. The review editor(s) commission book reviews—no unsolicited reviews.
7. The RHSV does not pay for contributions to the journal.
8. The manuscript should be in digital form in a minimum 12-point serif typeface, double or one-and-a-half line spaced (including indented quotations and endnotes), with margins of at least 3 cm.
9. Referencing style is endnotes and must not exceed 10 per cent of the text. They should be devoted principally to the citation of sources.
10. The title page should include: author's name and title(s); postal address; telephone number; email address; article's word length (including notes); a 100-word biographical note on the author; a 100-word abstract of the main argument or significance of the article.
11. Suitable illustrations for articles are welcome. Initially send clear hard photocopies, not originals. Scanned images at 300dpi can be emailed or sent on disk. Further requirements for final images and permissions will be sent if your article is accepted.
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