

Brunswick Primary School: Then and Now



Brunswick Primary School: 1873 - 1997

Brunswick Central State School (State School 1213) opened in 1873 in temporary accommodation. A new building in Albert Street was ready for occupation in 1877, one of the original 600 [Henry Bastow schools](#) built in Victoria following the passage of the Education Act 1872.

Enrolments over 1,100 led to the addition of more buildings in the 1890s, including an infant school and a cookery centre. The 'Model Infant School' became famous under the direction of Emily Pye and Amy Wallace, who introduced the teaching methods of [Froebel](#). They also established an Infant School Course at the Teachers College, commencing a relationship that made it a prominent teacher training school.

The Brunswick Salvation Army citadel next door forged a special relationship with SS1213. During the Second World War a canteen was set up in the citadel to provide hot meals daily for the children, as so many had mothers doing shift work in industry. For their part, The Salvation Army brass band would rehearse in the school grounds, being far too numerous (and loud) for their own premises.

The post-war waves of migrants saw Italian and Greek and later Turkish surnames in the ascendancy. Enrolments surged again in the 1960s, and the school began to lobby the Education Department for a major upgrade of the school buildings. In 1972, the [Education Department acquiesced](#) to local demands by bulldozing the Henry Bastow red-brick classic and replacing it with a pre-cast concrete structure developed by the Housing Commission. Now known as Brunswick Primary School, the multi-storey structure was intended for 1,000 students, but history would prove it a terrible misjudgement.

By 1975 the Education Department was already contemplating a future reduction of the number of government schools in the Brunswick area. During the 1980s enrolments were declining, making the rebuilt Brunswick Primary School appear oversized. While similar trends were being observed throughout the inner suburbs, other Bastow era schools were acquiring a new status: heritage listing. Hence, primary schools in Dorcas Street and Yarra Park were protected against demolition. Not so Brunswick Primary.

Enrolments went into freefall in the 1990s, just as the Kennett Government launched its school rationalisation program. Down to 120 in 1996, it was 'merged' with Brunswick East Primary School the following year, and closed. The 'merger' meant that a few dozen former students travelled to Brunswick East Primary, a red-brick classic some distance away. At least some significant relics came with them, notably the Honour Board from the Great War (First World War) which is proudly displayed near the reception foyer.

State School 1213 was sold, and the buildings then demolished to make way for a housing estate. There were no heritage issues surrounding the bulldozing of a 1970s concrete structure. Ironically, if the original Bastow building had survived it would have had heritage listing, and been converted into apartments, as occurred with Dorcas Street Primary and Yarra Park Primary.

The same fate befell North Melbourne Primary School (Boundary Road), contributing to the [untenable overcrowding](#) now afflicting the sole surviving North Melbourne Primary School (Errol Street). Yet to read from the Report of the Victorian Minister of Education 1971-1972, you'd swear that adults were in charge:

“Tenders were also accepted in 1972 for the rebuilding of Boundary Road Primary School, North Melbourne, and Albert Street Primary School, Brunswick. The existing buildings, erected in the later decades of the last century, will be demolished and replaced by two-storey structures embodying the best features of modern educational planning.”

Legacy

There is no plaque or other acknowledgement that a school once existed in Albert Street. Two schools in fact, because Brunswick East High School abutted SS1213 until it too was demolished to make way for housing. This is awkward for staff at the Brunswick Salvation Army citadel when strangers wander in to ask what happened to their old primary school. The volunteers do not know, and are therefore unable to help. Itself the oldest operational citadel in the country, it's tragic that the rich history of their former Albert Street neighbour is not readily at hand.

Little Randazzo Park was created in Albert Street, between where the two schools used to stand. A keen observer may find some curious words painted on a boundary wall:

“The Secretary, Education Dept. Melbourne,
School 1213 Brunswick Oct. 28 1889. Sir, I beg to report that the school bell is out of order. The contractor who has just finished the new classrooms repaired the rope last week, but it broke again the following day. I should be glad if it could be properly placed in order, as it is very awkward without it. I have the honour to be Sir your most obedient Servant. H. Teacher. [Signature]”

As an art installation, it works. But it's not a plaque: the reader will have no idea that they're sitting in what remains of a Henry Bastow school. And what of Froebel... The Salvation Army... the World Wars... famous alumni... teachers? Most of all, what of the thousands of people whose formative years were spent in Albert Street, Brunswick?

Contact Us:

If you have anything to add or amend, please contact us.

Acknowledgements:

- The Salvation Army
- Public Record Office Victoria
- *Vision and Realisation: a centenary history of state education in Victoria*, Education Department of Victoria, 1973