



## The History of Three Kings School

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### The Early Years

One hundred and fifteen years ago a small band of enthusiastic pioneers purchased the land whereon the Three Kings School now stands.

Their judgement and foresight have been well and truly vindicated, for Three Kings is one of the very few older schools of Auckland which still stands on its original site.

Over the years much time, effort and money has been expended in forming and beautifying the site.

On the 9th March, 1875, the tiny Mt Roskill community held an historic meeting at the Royal Oak Hotel, Epsom, householders 'resolved that the Board of Education be requested to declare Mount Roskill an Educational District in accordance with the Act.' Bold words considering we only had fifty-five householders, with but a hundred school-age children between Onehunga and Mt Albert.

By September 10th, events had rushed forward enough for the Board of Education to be informed: 'Gentlemen, I have the honour to inform you that a School Committee has been appointed, consisting of the following gentlemen:

- David McIndoe, Chairman
- John Crawford
- Robert Glasgow
- John Davies
- Joseph Greenwood

Alas, during early 1876 there was great trouble getting started with a building. They were not able to obtain one from the Wesleyan Mission where it had been hoped something was 'available free of charge for school purposes'? So the next letter to the Authorities 'humbly requested the Board to take what action you think proper for the erection of a school in the district.'

In mid-1877 Chairman McIndoe left the district, regretting that 'the great number of children still much need a school'. The Board replied that 100 pounds would be granted if landowners and householders could raise 30 pounds by public subscription. And raise it they did. Again, alas! 18th November, 1878, I quote: 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick' and a sad letter now spoke of the unrest of the subscribers, of the old Committee now being 'a most thankless office. We remain, Gentlemen, Yours truly with patient obedience, etc.'

At last came good news. The Waste Lands Board had already set aside 3 acres of Lot 85 of Section 10 Suburbs of Auckland for a school and Teacher's residence, now in December, 1878, suddenly came the calling of tenders!

### The Earliest School Days

The history of the Three Kings School commences with the school that was built in 1878 near the corner of Mt Albert and Mt Eden roads, to serve the then sparsely populated district of Mt Roskill. It consisted of one classroom and an entrance porch. The first sole teacher was Miss Burns, who, in due course, was followed by Miss Hungerford. Both of these teachers boarded with Mrs Schmiedl, who lived opposite the school on the site, now occupied by the original building of the Veteran's Home.

When the third teacher, Miss Fletcher, married Mr Roney, a teacher's residence was built in School (now St Andrews) Rd which then had no exit and ended at the gate of the teacher's residence.

The first Chairman of the School Committee was William Greenwood Sen., who was succeeded by his son William, who in turn was followed by his brother Joseph. Joseph Greenwood remained in office until his death in 1891.



Prior to the building of the school, the Road Board, which was inaugurated in 1869, held its meetings in Mr Dornwell's barn, while the inaugural meetings of the School Committee were held in Mr W.J. Connolly's home in 1877. Sufficient money was raised in the early days of the school's existence, by public subscription, to plant shelter trees in the playground, purchase a piano, and start a library.

Each classroom had a fireplace. In the older room there was a big open one which was surrounded by a high old-fashioned fire guard on which coats and stockings were hung to dry on wet days. In the newer room, there was an old style register grate which was far too small for the room, so that Standard 3 children, whose desks were close to it, were the only ones who derived any benefit from a fire on a cold day.

Between the two classrooms there was a clear glass door, and over this, on the side of the larger room hung a large gilt framed picture of Queen Victoria. Year after year, we commenced and ended our singing lessons with the National Anthem.

About the time the shed was erected horizontal parallel bars were installed in the boys' playground and these were the nearest we ever approached to a school gymnasium.

A library, a piano, swings, and many fine shelter trees, in an extensive playground offered plenty of scope for youngsters to work off their surplus energy.

In addition to the playground, the adjoining paddock was at our disposal. This was originally intended as a grazing area for the headmaster's cows and horses. The School Committee sold the grazing rights of the paddock to a nearby farmer.

As the Three Kings Institute was the centre of the religious and social life of the community in the sixties and seventies, the old Mt Roskill School filled the social role in the eighties and nineties.

In each of the two porches there were rows of pegs for hats and coats, half of which was allocated to the girls, the other half to the boys. In one corner there was a fixture with a tap and an enamel basin, and, attached to the fixture by a long chain, was a truly "John Greer Home" enamel drinking mug.

On the fine days, lunch was eaten outside under the trees, on wet ones, at midday, all the girls crowded into the porches, while the boys packed themselves into the wood-shed and under the tank stands for a short spell, because a wet day was always a two o'clock day.

Eventually, a shelter shed was built and divided into two, one half for the girls, the other for the boys.

On Wednesday, July 18th, 1900, the unfurling of the first Mt Roskill School flag took place. This ceremony was performed by Dr. W.E. Close-Erson, the then Mayor of Onehunga.

In the evening at 8 o'clock a social was held in the school to celebrate the occasion.

Almost nothing is known of the 1890's, except that by the end of the century the school had enrolled a grand total of six hundred pupils. Few went from five years to age fifteen, however. Young men of eleven and twelve often headed off to learn a trade or to help Dad.

It was the age of the Inspector. In his report he would ask: "Does the neatness of the school appear to be habitual? Are slates ruled to the size of the Copy-book? What is the state of the School Garden, Fence, etc? Are chimney pieces used to put away lumber? Are provisions of the Act transgressed in any way?"

In the patriotic fervour of the day the famous high flagpole went up, a grand ceremony taking place July 18th, 1900, when the Onehunga Mayor raised the world-famous Union Jack at the pretty little school of Mt Roskill.

Another great social dance came in 1902 with the South African Peace and the Coronation of Edward VII - (every child received a pretty little Coronation card).

During school days a tremendous building was under way on the opposite side of the main road. Was it a church or a hotel - no one had a clue. Then came the announcement - it was a Veteran's Home, and on Empire Day, 1903, the school pupils were invited to line the steps of the Home, and Lord Ranfurly came to officially open it.

## Laying of Foundation Stone Veteran's Home – May 1903

His Excellency the Governor, Lord Ranfurly, laid the foundation stone of the Veteran's Home at the Three Kings Farm.



## Early Roads

In the 1880's, the only roads in the district were Mt Albert, May, Mt Eden, Mt Roskill and Pah Roads. Hillsborough Road was formed as far as the cemetery and Buckland Road as far as Liverpool St with scoria surface. The scoria was quarried from a pit about halfway between Kingsway and the terminus. Mr Connolly, who lived about where Winstones concrete building now stands sold metal privately. When Hillsborough Rd was formed it is stated to have cost 5/- per chain. This sum would pave about half an inch today.

## The War Years

Could anyone who attended school at this time ever forget the calico bags strung round the beck containing cotton wool and one cork? The idea was to put the cotton wool in the ears - and the cork between your teeth - no chance of concussion if this was done. Of course the school garb was not complete unless one wore an identity disc with full name and address - this was also 'just in case'.

The day the first Lancaster bomber flew over Auckland was a big event. All the children were gathered on the lower field and grouped together to form the word "Welcome". It would be nice to know whether the bomber crew noticed us or not, but at that stage we were only too pleased to miss some schooling,

The Senior girls entered into the war effort strenuously, and every Wednesday sewing classes were devoted to making toilet bags for the men overseas.

Notwithstanding all this, every year the entire school left Three Kings for a day and went on their annual trip to Point Chevalier. What great excitement there was on that day, and what fun we had piling into the special trams provided, and there could never have been a noisier crowd.

The late Canon Smallfield visited us every Wednesday for Bible stories, and how he ever managed to mount his bicycle armed with a brief case and numerous rolls of maps and pictures was amazing.

Not many children in the district will ever forget those "thrilling" parades of the Home Guard marching up Mt Albert Road, and how brave they all looked in their uniforms.

The Home Guard was our own special army, and was there to protect Mt Roskill, so of course they earned our praise.

## First Chairman

William Greenwood, the first Chairman of the Mt Roskill School Committee, was born in England in 1807, and arrived in New Zealand in January, 1841, with his wife and four young children.

He purchased what is now known as Greenwood's Corner on the first suburban land sale in 1842. A few years later he purchased another property in Mt Roskill which extended from May Road, along Richardson Road to White Swan Road, thence along what is now known as Stoddard Road to May Road.

The 'New Zealand Herald' of July 21st 1894 says 'We give today a brief biographical sketch of Mr William Greenwood, of Epsom, the builder of old St Paul's Church, and who was one of the survivors present at the laying of the foundation stone 53 years ago, and at the laying of the foundation stone of the new St Paul's, Symonds Street, the other day.

Though in his 88th year, he is hale and hearty, and vigorous in mind and body. His Excellency Lord Glasgow, who laid the foundation stone of the new church, requested that Mr Greenwood should be introduced to him, and this was done, the Governor being greatly pleased to meet the builder of the old church and a worthy representative of the pioneer colonists who laid the foundations - political and social - of this colony."

Mr Greenwood also built the first bridge foundation of Newmarket, connecting the Parnell and Epsom districts. In the course of his business as a mason he was engaged on works for the Kawau Copper Mining Co, the Great Barrier Island Mining Co, Dangar's Mill (Official Bay), Snodgraas' Mill, W.S. Grahame's etc.

One of his last works before retiring from business (1853) was the erection of the monument to the late Rev. J.F. Churton, the first incumbent of St. Paul's Church. He died at Greenwood's Corner in September, 1895, in his 89th year.



## 1910s

In 1911 came Headmaster Traves. But also came a rapid rise in the roll, as the immediate surrounding area became residential with many more houses being started. The 1910 roll of 96 became the 1911 roll of 124. By 1912 the school with 1520 sq. ft., was only large enough with 174! All these with a staff of only three adults and a teenage Pupil-Teacher!

For 579 pounds we acquired two more rooms, another shelter shed, plus a much needed septic tank. It must have all been even more welcome when the 1912 roll later reached 220!

The days of walking to school through fields of corn were nearly over, but in 1912 race horses were able to be trained up St Andrews Road. Our nearest neighbouring schools were then Epsom, Edendale and Onehunga.

In 1914 a war had to be fought. A popular young teacher, Dick Henderson, enlisted in the Medical Corps, and quietly earned immortality with his donkey at the hell of Gallipoli. Many others left from the district, many from the school.

A further room (24 by 22) was added in 1916, the roll still climbing. Jobs may have been scarce - one for an ordinary assistant (120 pounds per year) drew 18 applicants.

Headmaster Paterson (a kindly man, well-remembered) had only four assistants for a roll of 320 when War ended in 1918.

In 1919 the roll went on up to 344 (in four badly overcrowded classrooms, and infants three to each desk). Mr Lloyd was appointed Head, with all the worries that come with overcrowding.

## 1920s

A fire destroyed the old records kept in the office, hence some gaps in history. In 1920, Mr Lloyd found staffing so hard to get that, 'pupils with no experience at all had to be appointed to teach.'

Also, influenza struck, closing the school in May, and giving poor attendances until August. One memory of the year is of 'decrepit shelter sheds, dirty open toilets, smelly bins' - but good news was coming.

A new Infant Block was planned. Two rooms of 26 feet by 24 feet would cost 1920 pounds in concrete and brick. It opened in 1921, and a prize was given to 'the child L.M. Bowden, who selected the new school motto for the building 'Act Well Your Part'.

The Prince of Wales came to the Auckland Domain! Our children joined thousands who did flag drill, carefully rehearsed into a big Union Jack, and then mobbed H.R.H.

At school children played under the big pine trees on the St Andrews Road boundary - there too was the Big Bank, with a steep track, down which many lost the seats of their pants until the full road was formed and the steep wall built.

The headmaster suspected birds were nesting in one chimney and it was unsafe to light a fire.

The boys' outbuilding fell to pieces and was rotten right through.

A fence was to be erected near the Infant Building as ponies are teasing the smaller children!

Staffing became critical during 1922, as the Head and six assistants faced a roll of 396.

Grammar, Composition, Geography, History and Civics, Music, and Arithmetic probably filled in most of your day if you attended in 1923. The school squeezed in 439 children somehow, but the following year 126 went off to the Royal Oak School - said to be newer and preferred - so Mt Roskill was left with plenty of room while someone else has a turn at being squashed. Measles and influenza still had an annual toll - on one day 66 children were absent.



## April, 1924

The train system extended to Balmoral Road in Mt Eden, and one walked the remaining mile or two, or there was the alternative roundabout route by the Onehunga tram, and a rather longer walk from Greenwood's Corner, or Royal Oak. Isolation masked the school site. This was emphasised by the imposing Three Kings

volcanic cones with their dark shadows striking across the main road, then undormed and notoriously broken and wet, and further, by the rural nature of ther surrounding Waikowhai and Mt Roskill areas.

A few odd houses, old farm homes, were visible from the school except in the direction of Royal Oak and Onehunga and even further afield beyond Epsom and One Tree Hill, if one sought nearby heights from which to view them. The school was completely isolated by the lack of transport, and the very nature of the surrounding country.

The somewhat depressing effect of isolation was intensified by the condition of buildings and grounds. The main position of the school itself had been built some forty-five years previously, with its windows facing south, and floors very close to the ground. Lack of sunlight and dampness had left their mark. Under blocks had decayed, floors sagged and bent beneath the tread. Doors refused to close. Two additions were in somewhat better shape, but badly sited for sun and air, and the comparatively new infant portion was not much better. In 1924 the roll was about 450, but in that year Royal Oak School was opened, and over 100 were transferred there.

The greater part of acres was in its virgin state. In ages long past the several volcanic cones in the immediate vicinity had poured forth their liquid lava and deposited whole hills of black and brown scoria on what was the school playground. There was hardly a square yard of level space. Masses of rock formed a huge uneven dyke of irregular shape right across the area. Here and there pockets of rubble and scoria added variety. The introduced gorse and blackberry had found congenial conditions and completed the confusion.

The Garry years were most significant because the school saw the final transition from a rural district to a highly populated urban area. The 1925 roll was up to 450 as great local development continued. The annual picnic was to Waikowhai, with adults a shilling in the bus, children carried free. Should three ten gallon kegs of cordial be procured? Two pounds worth of free ice-cream be enough?

1926 (Roll 491, plus side school of 640 squ. fit. with two assistants). The school acquired a temporary classroom dismantled from Takapuna - only two other Auckland schools were then as crowded, for still the roll was rising. The Board were asked to erect a Dental Clinic, but as no nurse was available nothing happened for four years.

The nucleus of the present main building was constructed - 1927 - two rooms of 24 by 22 feet, plus cloakroom and Head's room. None too soon, as the roll peaked at a huge 547. "Should a telephone be put in the school?" asked the Committee. The Headmaster could run a concert to pay the annual charge. After all, the Annual School Concerts wer great popular successes.

One amusing item: A reputedly dangerous bull is at large in the Richardson Road area!

A picnic at Point Chev. Domain was enjoyed under very favourable conditions.

In 1928 there were 33 applicants for the job of Caretaker - the successful man asked only 25 shillings!

We lost May Road School as our side school in 1929, but took on a new one at the Dominion Road Estate. The school finances were down to zero, not because of the looming Depression but because "we have spent so much on improvements to our side school - buckets, brushes, firewood, etc." For ourselves we did afford a new Honours Board (since then it has vanished). There was quite a fuss that fares to Onehunga for technical lessons had gone up a penny to 10d for 10 rides!



## 1930s

A Dental Clinic opened and trial lessons were allowed on temperance topics! The new Dental Nurse had a good first year: 2115 fillings (ouch!), 414 extractions (moan) and 742 others (others?). But our Committee was asked/told to help pay her wages.

The school acquired a Hawkes Bay teacher for a month in 1931. Unemployed teachers could only be offered a term of relieving to give them some money. It was agreed that no married woman be appointed to be Infant Mistress unless she was entirely dependent on her own earnings.

How did we gain these most beautiful stone terraces when originally volcanic outcrops lay everywhere? How was our school made into a showplace? From 1931, skilled masons and unemployed men were to spend years bashing, heaving and cutting the basalt and scoria. It cost our families 5 pounds a fortnight for basic materials to keep the work going, but everyone knew it was worth the struggle to raise it. The first men were twenty of

the No. 5 Employment Scheme who were transferred from the Teachers' College grounds. At times sixty to a hundred and twenty worked here.

The men worked with the most primitive of tools and progress was slow. Masses of lava rock were dislodged and broken up with picks, crowbars and hammers, and afterwards shaped by hand chisels. Full use was made of the scoria for concreting and the rocks for wall building.

Mr Mark Posa, a skilled worker in stone, was responsible for all the rock construction.

Meantime a move was beginning towards the reconstruction of the buildings. The original position of the school itself, together with the earlier additions, were demolished, and the new block on the Mt Albert Road frontage erected in 1935-36.

During excavation there was uncovered the remains of a Maori. Masses of shells and numbers of Maori tools and stones were found. One or two greenstone chisels were given to the Auckland Museum, and others deposited in an outdoor glass front recess in the stonework of the school grounds.

## 1936

The original building has flooring and joists in some places dangerous and unhygienic. Doors open with difficulty, and flooring threatens in parts to collapse. It has been unoccupied eight years, lacks sunshine, and in design is out of date. It was proposed to replace the whole original block of six rooms, but at the last minute the most original building was reprieved to be a Library and Cinema room. A new building of four classrooms - the rest of the present main block - was officially opened in December. 3385 pounds well spent.

During 1937 the rising roll (430) meant the small original building received children again 'of necessity'. The side school at Dominion Road was constituted a separate school.

About 200 pounds was raised towards a pool for the district, the the school was soon to get one of its own: (you could buy a tile and put your name on it).

## 1940s

Although the roll remained steady, in 1940 accommodation was called 'barely adequate and the problem is becoming pressing.'

Accommodation was even more pressing in 1941 when the roll was up to 484 including 112 squeezed in and 22 under the Infant Block. Two temporary Infant rooms were set up. The hours spent on exciting Air Raid drills are probably the main memory of those infants today, or of our own Home Guard marching up Mt Albert Road behind a band.

The 1942 roll reached 501, including 189 New Entrants.

Why in 1943 did we change our name to Three Kings? Parents of the time voted: Three Kings 180 vs. Mt Roskill only 19. A main reason was the considerable confusion between trams and letters reaching Mt Roskill School at Dominion Road School, or getting off the tram at Mt Roskill terminal to find you were far from the school you sought at Three Kings.



But the roll was rising ominously again. 489 in 1945, so the school boundary was redefined, and new buildings planned. It was unsatisfactory that the old room and Infant basement were again in use for classes, and everyone knew Hillsborough was going to be a big settlement! Besides, doesn't rain spattering over half the desks in a shelter shed sound unhealthy and a bit primitive?

In 1946 the roll was 520 and had plenty of potential at the thousandth State house went up in the district.

The 1947 roll was 534.

## 1950s

1950 and the roll went crazy! An all-time peak of 642 was followed later in the year by a drop to only 503 as Hillsborough School opened, and as we were decapitated to Manukau Intermediate.

The 1952 roll of 580 was a big, cheerful crowd.

We've always had active parents here. In 1953 a Ladies Social Club began, with popular winter card evenings bringing more funds for the school - over 500 pounds in the following ten years including a fine new piano in 1956. The 1953 roll reached an alarming 615, but extra accommodation was deferred as Mt Roskill Intermediate was being built. (Please hurry.)

During 1954 the roll touched 633. Another worry of that year was the big build-up of traffic on the main roads, and we pressed for lights to go in at the intersection.

Two things came down in 1955 - the huge macrocarpa by the Three Kings Road entrance - and, at last, the roll. From 609 it became 503 as Form Ones left for Mt Roskill Intermediate, and Mt Roskill Primary opened. Form Twos we kept a final year, but since 1955 we have been classed a contributing school.

1956, and the old landmark, the old flagpole - now considered dangerous, was replaced by the present 25 foot model. The grounds were being put in order during 1957 ready for the 80th Jubilee. The roll was then down to 380.

A school Broadcasting and Inter-Communications system was paid for by 1958, as Three Kings was then one of the few schools not in financial difficulties in Auckland.

## 1958 – Jubilee Year

The 80th Jubilee was an unqualified success. After a Sunday Service conducted by old pupils, a totara was planted on the top ground by Mr Boyd and Mr Herd - themselves popular characters. Today (1978) the tree is larger and survives well, close to the Open Plan room.

## 1960s

The Education Board gave the formal go-ahead in May, 1963 for the swimming pool. By August, 1963, it was enough advanced for an informal christening, when it was test-filled and the Head Teacher's wife 'stayed in for about fifteen minutes'.

The Three Kings Pool went tepid in November, 1963, when a colourful Children's Opening Ceremony was held. In May, 1964, the glassing of the end walls made the pool fully enclosed.

The pool was almost unique among all New Zealand schools, 60 feet by 20 feet of pool inside a solid 80 feet by 46 feet building; kept at 82 degrees fahrenheit and filtered through a full cycle every 3-1/2 hours.



## 1970s

Here is the accommodation of our school in 1970.

5 rooms and library (1927 with 1936 additions)

2 rooms (1945)

2 room (1921) Infant Block

1 room (1878 and 600 sq. fit)

An attempt was made to preserve the original building by using the local Schedule of Historic Buildings, but it could not be secured.

Away, too, went the poor old School Residence.

In 1971 an Adventure Playground filled a part of the old house site. A marvellous wide slide comes down over a big rock pile with pipe funnels; a platform stage and open-air seats makes a child-sized theatre.

1972. As the Auckland Teachers' College was extended to take over the property of the Carlson Cerebral Palsy School, we were pleased to welcome Carlson to our grounds - our own roll then, as now being about 300.

Carlson took over the 1945 Block with the rest of the old orchard area.

Mr Howlett (1970 to 1974) and since then Mr Wilson led the school staff in the change to Open Plan, Remodelling included:

- a) A staffroom from the Western-most classroom.
- b) New Office and Sick Bay.
- c) 2 classrooms joined by removing old Sick Bay.
- d) Resource area made from the triangular area in main block.
- e) Old Head's office turned into library.
- f) 2 rooms at East end joined 'by removing flimsy folding door'.
- g) Corridors removed and added to new Open Spaces.
- h) Carpets over the oiled floors!

But 1973 saw construction of the show piece Open Plan School for the Junior classes. It has 3562 sq. fit on two levels, with ramps to allow our Carlson friends to visit. The building is self-contained, and has a sound-proof room for quiet group teaching. Best of all the beautiful room can encourage good citizenship, as well as efficiently working at traditional skills.

## 1976, 1977

During enlargement of the carpark an ancient Maori skeleton was dug up. In the past, masses of shells and some tools have been found - one or two going to the museum.