

We Remember



100 years at Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School, Kensington

1907-2007

Written and Illustrated by
Liz Bowring

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Uncle Vince says it can be hard to imagine what it was like before all these houses and roads were built in Kensington. It was a land of quicksand, sand hills, creeks, swamps and most importantly, fresh water.

The Gadigal people of the Eora Nation originally lived on this land. While the salt water of the harbour, sea and bay provided plenty of food, there were also edible plants, animals and fresh water fish in the streams that crossed the area. The Gadigal people would have known the important pathways, aware of the dangers of the quicksands that discouraged the European settlers.

The aboriginal people were severely affected by diseases brought by the new settlers. Many were killed by a smallpox outbreak of 1789. Few were thought to have survived. They moved away from Sydney Town. Some moved to the land we know as Centennial Park, others as far as Botany Bay, and they continued to use the land in between.

Issie says that there is a red colour house called Bennelong at school. Bennelong was from a neighbouring group of aboriginal people, the Wangal people, who spoke the same language as the Gadigal. He was born around 1764, and he helped to teach the new settlers about aboriginal customs and languages. Uncle Vince says he was an early peacemaker.

The new settlers did not respect the Gadigal ownership of the land, and it was quickly taken away from them. Uncle Vince says that we must all remember the original owners of this land.

Issie says that we remember the Gadigal people when we visit the stone in our prayer garden and whenever we gather together as a school.



Toll charges

horse = 2 pence

horse and cart = 6 pence

lamb, pig or goat = 1 farthing

oxen = ha'penny

Uncle Vince knows lots about Kensington and Our Lady of the Rosary School. He is 100 years old, as old as the school. Uncle Vince says that just after he was born a tollhouse was torn down on the corner of Anzac Parade and Alison Road. It had been built in 1849 to collect money from people using the road. There was plenty of traffic coming into the area. At that time you could take Randwick Road to Randwick and Coogee or Bunnerong Road through undeveloped land to the south.

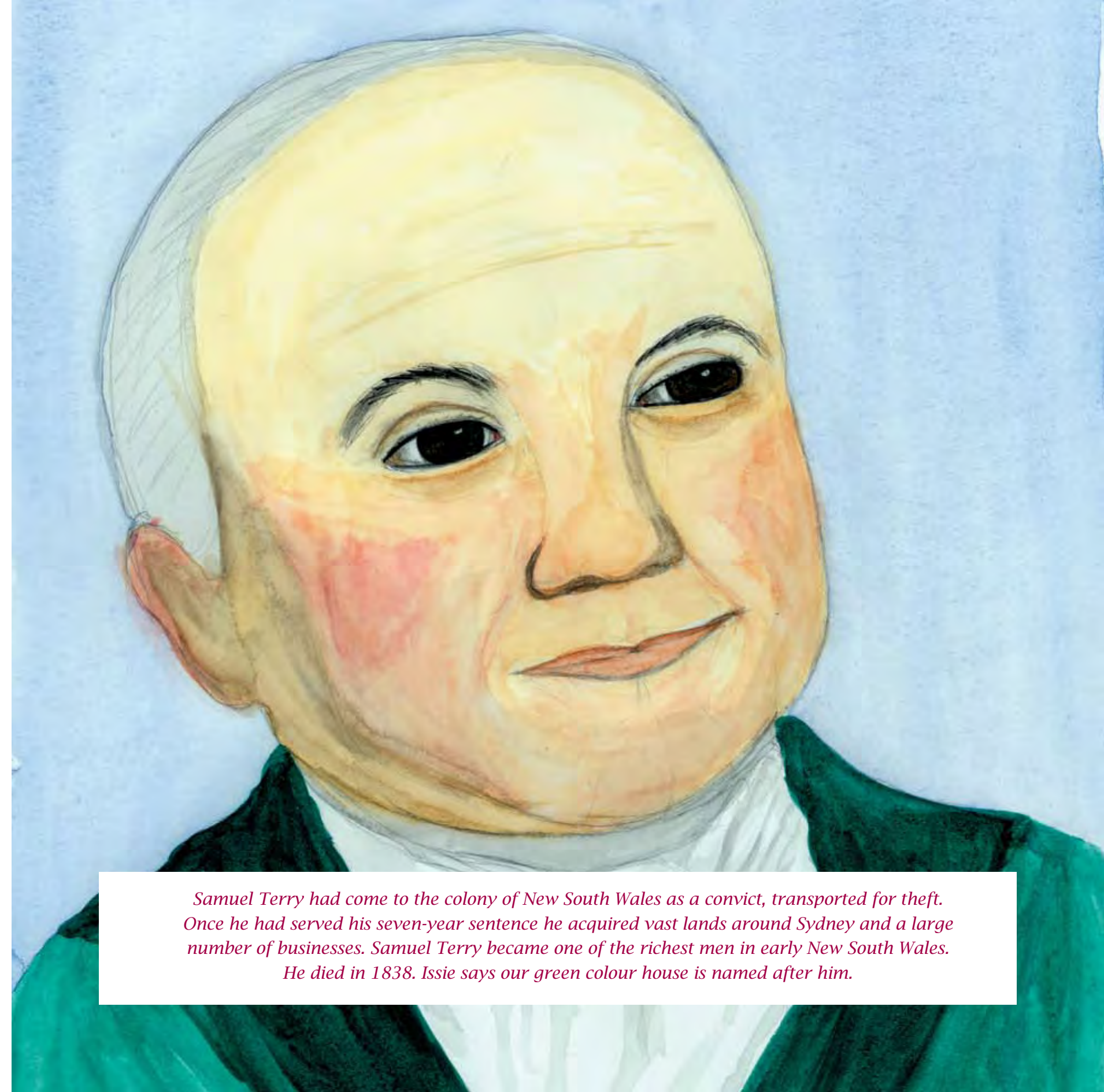
Issie says she has had a drink from the water fountain on the corner of Dacey Avenue and Anzac Parade, which was built in 1869. It looks just the same as the one that was in front of the tollhouse. Issie wonders if it had been moved across the road.



Governor Lachlan Macquarie had made the sandy land to the south east of Sydney Town the 'Sydney Common' in 1811. He saw that the Tank Stream in Sydney Town was becoming polluted. There was a handy supply of fresh water from the Lachlan Swamps. The land was to be a 'water reserve'. An underground tunnel, known as Busby's Bore, was built to supply Sydney Town with fresh water in 1837. Even though they wanted to protect the water from contamination, Uncle Vince says they still gave the land downstream to a few businessmen.

One of these businessmen was Samuel Terry. He was granted 570 acres of land in 1823. In fact he was given all of the land that makes up today's suburb of Kensington and at that time it was called the Lachlan Mills Estate. He never lived in the area, but he operated two water mills. There must have been quite a strong stream, as the mills used the power of rushing water to move grinding stones. One mill was established where Kensington Oval is today. It ground wheat into flour, bran and pollard (which Uncle Vince says you feed to the chooks). John Hutchinson was Superintendent of the mill. He was probably the first settler to live in the place we now call Kensington. On his death in 1820 his share of the business was sold to Samuel Terry. The other mill was a paper mill. The managers, Fisher and Duncan, ground old linen and rags into paper. This mill was closer to the tollhouse, on the corner of Bowral Street and Anzac Parade. Convicts worked in both of the mills. Neither mill was very successful and they had both closed down by 1830.

What is left of the Lachlan Swamps can be seen as a spring and lakes in Centennial Park, storm water drains in Kensington and as ponds on the Australian Golf Course. Issie says that you can see Busby's Bore on special days in Centennial Park and the Victoria Barracks in Paddington.



Samuel Terry had come to the colony of New South Wales as a convict, transported for theft. Once he had served his seven-year sentence he acquired vast lands around Sydney and a large number of businesses. Samuel Terry became one of the richest men in early New South Wales. He died in 1838. Issie says our green colour house is named after him.

Uncle Vince says it was a while before other business was conducted on the Lachlan Mills Estate. Perhaps the sandy land made it difficult to build upon, and the saturated sands were dangerous. Once Busby's Bore began operating the environment of the Lachlan Swamps changed substantially. The swamps dried up and the native plants that grew there died out. Many of the streams dried up. However after heavy rain there would be flash flooding.

The two mills were taken over by fellmongers who washed sheep skins in the late 1840s. One was Mr Armitage's wool washing business, which used the old paper mill building. The other mill was used by Mr Atkinson's wool washing business, which Issie says you can see in this watercolour painting from 1852.

It was not easy for businesses that relied upon a regular water supply. Mr Atkinson had constructed a dam to provide his mill with water. It took one big storm, however, to cause a flood that destroyed the dam and soon afterwards he leased the fellmongery. These businesses were also very dirty and smelly. Offal (which Uncle Vince says is the unwanted organs of the sheep) was thrown into the streams where it would be left to decompose. The government worried that the drinking water would be contaminated. In the end neither business lasted for long.

Uncle Vince said that the Lachlan Mills Estate became a 'tin town'. People who could not afford to rent or buy houses built shanties in the sand dunes. They used any materials they could find to build with, and these were usually flattened out jam tins, bottles and bark from trees. The houses were very small, usually one room, and had no running water or toilets.



The Lachlan Mills Estate had been bought by a firm called Cooper and Levey. They sold it to the property-developing group, the 'Australian Cities Investment Corporation' in 1883. As it was still a water reserve, they had to wait for the Sydney water supply from the Nepean River to be completed in 1887. Then the land that had been the water reserve was released from restrictions and houses could finally be built. The government kept ten acres as agreed in the first land grant. This land is now Kensington Oval.



This watercolour by R Turner is called 'J E Armitages Fellmongering establishment, Bridge End near Sydney' and was painted in 1851. The original is held in the Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales and is used with permission.



Uncle Vince said it wasn't housing that drew people to the area at first. It was horse racing.

There was regular horse racing at Randwick Racecourse from 1833. At first there was only a rough track, but it gradually improved. By the time the racecourse was officially opened in 1860 a grandstand had already been built.

Racing was so popular that another racecourse, Kensington Racecourse, opened up next door in 1890. This piece of land was not part of the Lachlan Mills Estate. Races were held there on weekdays. They were pony races. Uncle Vince says that ponies are not as big as regular racehorses and don't run as far, or as fast. Occasionally they held polo matches there too.

Many people are required to work in racing and its associated occupations. Even Father McAuliffe was called on as the chaplain of Randwick Racecourse when there was a serious injury oncourse.

Racing occupations

- saddler
- blacksmith
- farrier
- harness maker
- feed merchant
- jockey
- strapper
- breeder
- trainer
- veterinarian



Kensington racecourse was used as an army camp for troops and horses during both the Boer War of 1899-1902 and the First World War 1914-1918. The first AIF marched along Bunnerong Rd from the racecourse on their way to fight overseas. The road was renamed Anzac Parade. During the Second World War 1939-1945 Kensington racecourse closed down. The University of New South Wales began building on the land in the 1950s.

THE MODEL SUBURB OF KENSINGTON



Sydney's first zoo was established in 1883 where Sydney Boys and Sydney Girls High Schools stand today. The Moore Park Zoological Gardens were very popular with visitors but proved less than ideal due to flooding, drought and the occasional escape of animals. In 1916 the Zoo moved to its current site at Bradley's Head. Issie says she wishes it were still nearby.

The 'Australian Cities Investment Corporation' held a competition in 1889 to design a marvellous suburb and this was the first time the name Kensington was used for the area. There were many entries and three substantial money prizes awarded. The entries were displayed in the Sydney Town Hall. The winner was called 'rus in urbe' which meant countryside in the city, and had wide streets with trees and large gardens. None of the entries were built.

First the land had to be cleared. Uncle Vince says men were employed as sand shifters to level the suburb, using shovels and helped by steam traction engines and horse-drawn scrapers. By the time the land was ready there were no trees left. Uncle Vince thinks that's also because people had been collecting firewood for a long time and had removed anything that would burn.

Unfortunately there was a world depression in 1890, and people didn't have much money for a while. The 'Australian Cities Investment Corporation' sold the land to another company. The first building lots were sold in 1891. They were in Doncaster Avenue, near the racecourse, and cross streets to Anzac Parade. The houses that were built were mainly semi-detached which was the most economical use of the land. Many of the 'racing people', as Uncle Vince calls them, looked at Kensington as a place to live.

Despite the barren landscape, Kensington was promoted on the basis of its healthy environment, particularly the closeness to Centennial parklands, and the recreational opportunity of the racecourse, golf course and the zoological gardens. Centennial Park had been granted as a park to the people in 1888 to commemorate one hundred years of British settlement.

People could travel quickly to the city by the tram. There was a steam tram to Alison Road with a stop at the racecourse in 1880. The tramline in 1900, by then electrified, followed the current Anzac Parade through Kensington. It could transport people into the city in 20 minutes.

Uncle Vince says things were looking up when each of the later subdivisions was sold. Most people by the 1920s had more money, and the buyers had to agree to spend a minimum of 300 pounds on the house, and that the house would be built of brick. The bungalow was the most fashionable design at the time. They featured verandahs, fancy timberwork, stucco and bay windows. The roofs were made of tiles and all had chimneys as one of the fuels for heating and cooking was coal. Kensington became a quiet residential suburb.

A heritage plan protects these houses in the south west of Kensington, but flats and units replaced many houses first in the 1930s and then again in the 1970s. The building of apartments in Raleigh Park in the 1980s after the closing of the large cigarette factory has resulted in sixty percent of housing in Kensington being units and apartments.





It was on the 13th January 1907 that Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School began. With all the people moving into newly built houses in Kensington there were more members of the church and more children to be educated. In 1906 a church/school was built on the corner of Grosvenor and Kensington Roads. Uncle Vince says it was common practice at that time for the church and the school to share a building. He remembers there was a lot of moving of chairs and desks so Mass could be celebrated on the weekend.

Twenty-seven children started at the school on the first day, and the Principal was Mother M. Chanel Bergin. The school grew quickly, and by 1913 there were 143 pupils. The church/school had been extended in 1911, adding a transept and sanctuary, and folding partitions were used to separate classes. A weatherboard building was provided for the infants' classes.

A major change came to the running of the school and church in 1914 when the Kensington Parish was established. Originally it had been part of Randwick Parish administered by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Fathers. The new Parish Priest was from the Sydney Archdiocese, but the sisters continued to conduct the school.

Father Edmund McAuliffe was a long-time Parish Priest. He returned from service as an army chaplain during the First World War in 1918 and came to Our Lady of the Rosary Parish. He stayed until his death as a Monsignor in 1964. In 1959 he celebrated the golden anniversary or jubilee of his ordination, fifty years of being a priest. The parish built the school/parish 'Jubilee Hall' to commemorate this achievement. Issie says that our blue colour house is named after him.

The school was to have sole use of their building from November 1928, when the church was completed on the corner of Kensington Road and Roma Avenue.

There have been a lot of changes to the buildings. During the 1950s and 1960s it was the parents who came after work each evening and on the weekend to renovate the school and build new structures. Now the work is done by building contractors.

There has always been a constant demand for money for school improvements, whether for building, maintenance or providing equipment. The school has always had great support from the parents and the parish. One of the fundraisers the children always looked forward to was the fete. After lots of work from the adults there would be a day of stalls featuring home baked cakes and toffees, crafts, the 'tombola', 'white elephant' (where Uncle Vince says that one person's junk becomes someone else's treasure) and the 'chocolate wheel' (where you win a prize on the spin of the wheel). The girls always looked forward to the dolls' stall. Weeks before the fete, dolls were sent home and families made clothes for them, often from scraps of material left over from making dresses and children's clothes. The school fete was one of the big entertainment events in the community as well.





Another exciting event came with the end of year concerts, which would involve all children in long rehearsals, and finally a place in the spotlight, as their parents and families crowded into the hall on a hot December evening to watch.

Uncle Vince looked forward to hearing about the sports carnivals. Of course the children would always run around during playtime and play with balls. Marbles, jacks, skipping, hula-hoops and yo-yos were regular crazes. But the carnivals were the big competitions. The children marched in their house colours, and then cheered their team in the athletic and field competitions. Uncle Vince was keen to hear who won the most points.

In the early years, Uncle Vince says, most of the children didn't wear a school uniform, but that had changed by the mid 1920s. The girls wore a uniform with a navy box pleat tunic over a white blouse, and the boys wore ties and blazers. There was even a straw hat. Following the Great Depression that started in 1929 and went on until the war in 1939 a lot of people lost their jobs. Those people found it hard to afford uniforms.



Every year a special celebration is held for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Uncle Vince says that in the old days it was like a little wedding. The girls would all wear white dresses and a veil. The boys would beam in their white shirts and freshly washed and combed hair. Everyone was on their best behaviour, and looked forward to the First Communion breakfast. Long tables were set up in the hall, and plates piled high with home baked treats for the children who had fasted since dinner the night before. Issie says the children still line up outside the church in the same way.





One thing that has really changed at Our Lady of the Rosary School, as with the whole community is technology. When the school started all that was needed were pens and books. The books didn't even have staples, but were stitched together with cotton thread. Gradually new technology replaced the old.

Even pens have changed. Although good biros were available from the end of the 1950s, it was believed for a long time that you could only learn to write well with nib-pens that had been used ever since the school began. While everyone started writing with pencil, students progressed to nib-pens that were dipped into ink. Nib-pens had sharp metal tops. They would write two or three words before needing to be re-dipped. All the desks had inkwells that were filled daily. Uncle Vince says that the children, especially the boys, would launch the tips of their pens towards the ceiling with the goal of sticking them into the exposed beams of the building. Some were successful and you can still see them in the exposed wooden rafter beams. Nib-pens were used until the 1970s.

Originally the music in the school was played on the piano. Then music could be brought into the classrooms with portable record players during the 1960s, and films could be played on film projectors, though you had to have a really dark room like in the movie theatre, to see the screen. Teachers had to learn the tricks of the film projectors, as they were complicated to set up. There were also photographic slides that could be shown in dark rooms. As the slides had to be put in the machine upside down and back to front, and the room was dark, sometimes the pictures were put in the wrong way, which gave the children a great laugh. There were radio programs for school children, which could be listened to in the classrooms. Once the school purchased a black and white television children could go and watch programs when they were screened. Teachers thought video and audio cassettes were the best thing when they first came out. Then they could choose what time of day a program could be watched or listened to.



Uncle Vince says he can't believe how fast technology changed in the 1980s. Computers came into the school in 1983. Now there are lots of computers, CDs and DVDs and the internet throughout the school. Issie says she has always had a computer in her classroom.

Things have always been pretty good at Our Lady of the Rosary School, and whenever possible the children have done what they can to help others. For many years the children have brought in blankets to send off to people in need. There was, however, one occasion when the school and the Kensington community had a great need. Just after dark on the 14th April 1999 a violent storm tore across the eastern suburbs of Sydney. The lightening and thunder were accompanied by a hailstorm. Hailstones measuring up to 10 cm, the largest in living memory, shredded roofs and smashed windows, cars and gardens. Heavy rain followed, causing even more damage inside the homes. Kensington was the hardest hit area. Our Lady of the Rosary School did not escape. The wonderful volunteers of the State Emergency Service put plastic tarpaulins over the roofs and made sure everything was safe. Uncle Vince says that if you flew in an aeroplane over Kensington you would see that almost every roof had a blue tarpaulin.





Our Lady of the Rosary School is a multicultural school. After the Second World War there were many people who fled the European countries that had been ravaged by war, and some settled in Kensington. People from many other cultures have come to Kensington because of the University of New South Wales. Uncle Vince says it's funny in a way that when the first sisters left Issoudin in France and came to Australia their mission was to reach out to all people of the world. They came to a British colony. Now the world has come to Kensington.

For a long time all the teachers were nuns. In fact many sisters were given teacher training at Our Lady of the Rosary School, where teaching techniques were demonstrated. The nuns kept with tradition wearing the full-length black habit with the veil supported by a heart-shaped stiff white coif. Their habit continually reminded them of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They always carried the rosary on their belts and a medallion of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart on a cord around their necks. They did not use their birth names, but chose the name of a saint on whom they would model themselves. By the 1960s the sisters began to relax their dress code and more comfortable habits were worn and they were able to use their baptismal names. Full-time lay teachers began working at the school in 1964. The last sister to be a principal at the school was Sister Patricia Smith in 2001.



*Every day our hearts are touched
with the love of Jesus as we strive together
'to be on earth the heart of God'.*

The 'tradition of the heart' established by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart beats on through the school. Issie says that each year new children and teachers are welcomed with a gift of a heart from the school. The Prayer Garden holds the mosaic featuring the heart onto which each child in the school placed a piece in 2005.

Issie says that this Centenary year has had many celebrations. There have been special Masses and school open days. The children have dressed as the first children attending the school, participating in activities just as those children would have done in the past. A group re-enacted the first children coming across from the old school. There was an 'Art of the Heart' day. On another day all the children gathered together in the shape of a heart for this photograph to celebrate 100 years of education at Our Lady of the Rosary School, Kensington.

Thankyou, Uncle Vince and Issie, for telling us all about Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School, Kensington.



Timeline of Our Lady of the Rosary, Kensington

- 1815-18** A water mill is built on the Lachlan Stream.
- 1823** May 23 Samuel Terry is granted land of 570 acres.
- 1830** Racing of horses begins on a rough track on the site of Randwick racecourse.
- 1837** Water from Lachlan Swamps is redirected to Sydney Town as water supply and so the stream flow decreases.
- 1849** Randwick Toll Bar cottage is built.
- 1860** May 29 Randwick Racecourse officially opens.
- 1881** Moore Park Zoological Gardens opens.
- 1882** Lachlan Mills Estate land is sold to 'Kensington Freehold Estate Corporation Ltd'.
- 1883** May 23 government resumes 10 acres of land – 'Waterloo Park' now 'Kensington Oval'.
- 1884** January 31 five sisters of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart arrive in Sydney from Issoudun, France.
- 1888** January 26 Centennial Park is established to commemorate 100 years of British Settlement.
- 1889** The competition is held for a plan for the new suburb of Kensington.

- 1890** 'Board of Australian Cities Investment Corporation' takes over developing the suburb. Kensington racecourse is also established next to Randwick Racecourse.
- 1891** April 11 the first land subdivision is sold at auction.
- 1892** Missionaries of the Sacred Heart priests purchase 5 acres land for a monastery in Kensington and are donated 2.5 acres for a school.
- 1893** Property is purchased for a convent in between Kensington Rd and College Rd (now Tunstall Ave). The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart move into 'Bennett House', at 161 Randwick Ave (now Todman Ave). A school is started in the house.
- 1894** September 3 the sisters move into the newly built convent and the students move into a small school building next to the convent.
- 1897** A school known as the High School (though it had both primary and high school students) is built separately from the school near the convent.
- 1901** The tramline is extended from Alison Rd along Anzac Parade to the Randwick rifle range and then onto La Perouse.
- 1906** A church/school is built on the corner of Grosvenor St and Kensington Rd.
- 1907** January 13 Our Lady of the Rosary Church/School is blessed and opened by Cardinal Moran. 27 children begin the school year on January 21. Mother M. Chanel Bergin is the first Principal. A small weatherboard building is built for the infants' school soon afterwards.

- 1912** The Church/School is extended with new Principal Sr. M. Columba Purcell.
- 1914** Kensington becomes a parish and along with the school come under the direction of the Sydney Archdiocese.
- 1916** Sr. M. Genevieve Downey replaces Sr. M. Columba who has a short break.
- 1918** Fr Edmund McAuliffe is appointed Parish Priest of Kensington where he stays until his death in 1964. Names of Principals from 1918-1927 are unknown.
- 1928** November 28 Kensington Parish Church is completed and blessed. Sr. M. Benigus Sweeney is Principal.
- 1929** Our Lady of the Rosary School becomes a demonstration school for training teachers.
- 1930** Sr. M. Reginald Tathem becomes Principal.
- 1931** A new infants class block of three classrooms with a verandah to the west is opened.
- 1940** Sr.M. Damascene Callahan becomes Principal.
- 1943** Sr. M. John McGuigan becomes Principal.
- 1946** Sr. M. de Chantal Harrigan becomes Principal. 265 children were enrolled.
- 1947** Parents and Friends Association formed.
- 1957** Renovations of the Church/School are undertaken by parents and parishioners.
- 1958** Sr. M. Teresita Carroll becomes Principal.

- 1959** 'Jubilee Hall' is built to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the ordination of Monsignor McAuliffe.
- 1962** A shelter shed is built by the P&F on the southern playground.
- 1964** The first full-time lay teacher, Mrs Mary Fennell, is employed. Sr. M. Ancilla White becomes Principal.
- 1966** Sr. M. Antonius Schuman becomes Principal.
- 1969** Sr. M. Jose Crutchett becomes Principal.
- 1971** A two storey building is constructed on Grosvenor St.
- 1972** Sr. Blandina O'Meara becomes Principal.
- 1973** Sr. M. Paul Mary Compton becomes Principal.
- 1978** Sr. M. Teresita Carroll again becomes Principal.
- 1981-82** More classrooms with a canteen, toilets and storerooms are added.
- 1990** Sr. M. Ancilla White becomes Principal again.
- 1996** Sr. Patricia Smith becomes last religious Principal.
- 1999** Major refurbishment and rebuilding is undertaken.
- 2002** Marie Nilon becomes first lay Principal.
- 2005** Prayer Garden is established. Two sites of campus are officially named Hartzler and Chevalier to honour the founding orders.
- 2007** Centenary celebrations.

Bibliography and Acknowledgments

As far as possible this book is historically correct, except for Uncle Vince and Issie who were created to help tell the story.

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