

**St Helena** Secondary College

# Foundation Years - 1983 – 1986; From planning to reality



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**During 1999, one of our inaugural staff members, Mr Chris Lavender, wrote a 36 page booklet on the history of the college from 1983 – 1986. The initial sections of this document are direct extracts from his work. Earlier this year, Chris lost a long battle with cancer. He is sadly missed.**



## ***Introduction***

The land had been purchased, the first sod had been turned, the students were enrolled, the staff appointed and teaching resources ordered. St Helena Post Primary School was launched.

The school began in 1984 as one of a new breed of secondary school. It was to be neither a high school nor a technical school, but was to have the best of both systems. Within very few years it became the largest school in the district with the latest in equipment and buildings to suit the curriculum and specific needs of the school and community.

This was achieved through the combined efforts of many people under the leadership of the foundation principal Ken Cunningham, council presidents Ken Wearne and Sue Dyet and Regional Office Representative, Keith Creed.

I have attempted to record something of the early days of the school concentrating on the planning period and the first three years leading up to construction and occupation of the permanent buildings. I have used the available records but have written from a personal perspective as a parent of a student in the first intake, as a member of the Interim Planning Committee and a teacher at the school from the first year. Others who were there in the early days have contributed their memories and records.

There are many stories that could be told and many characters that have passed through the school. Unfortunately most of this can't be written but much will be passed on by word of mouth and will grow over time. However I felt that there should be a record of these first few years and the more juicy stories can circulate informally.

Many people have assisted in the compilation of this story having provided written records, photographs, technical assistance, proof reading, advice and the benefit of their memory. Thanks to those people who have contributed to a document that may lead to an ongoing systematic recording of the continuing development of this important institution. Special thanks go to Judy Vizzari for her work on the overall presentation and selection of photographs. An organisation like this needs to understand and have a feel for its past. Hopefully others will take on the task of writing about later years.

**Chris Lavender**

November 1999

## *The Early Years*

### **The Area**

In the early 1980's this area was largely a mix of residential land and encroaching residential development. The towns (suburbs) of Greensborough, Eltham and Diamond Creek each have a history from early days of white settlement as towns that were distant from Melbourne. During the rapid post war expansion of the Melbourne metropolitan area these towns were to become part of the suburban sprawl. Despite the growth of these suburbs, there were still large areas of rural land between Eltham and Diamond Creek and between Greensborough and Diamond Creek. The land around the site selected for the school had some subdivisions such as the Glen Katherine estate and the estate bordering Allendale Road but was mostly open paddocks. Developers however had plans to subdivide all of this area so that by the end of the 90's houses and roads covered most of these former paddocks. While there are still some vacant blocks the area is now largely residential. When describing the area, the Interim Planning Committee noted the rapid and planned development but also highlighted an underlying commitment to the environment. (See margin #1)

In the early 80's when the school was being planned, development was anticipated and all the problems of rapid development and lagging infrastructure such as roads and public transport were becoming evident. Forward planning by the Victorian Education Department indicated that there would be a need to develop new primary and secondary schools. Eltham High School, Hurstbridge High School, Diamond Creek Technical School and Montmorency High School served the state secondary school needs of the area.



### **Pressure for a new school**

In 1981 a working group consisting of representatives of the Education Department, local schools, local government and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works recommended that two new secondary schools would be required in the area but one should be established by 1985.

The committee obtained detailed population projections for the Greensborough /Eltham/Hurstbridge area and matched this against the enrolments in the existing schools and the potential of each school to cope with increased enrolments.

Current enrolment numbers were established and projections made based on primary school enrolments.

	Montmorency	Eltham	Hurstbridge	Diamond Creek
	HS	HS	HS	TS
1976	888	757	553	327
1977	931	767	604	334
1978	977	781	655	328
1979	1034	818	681	347
1980	971	868	708	415
1981	992	935	774	488
1982	1020	964	847	559
1983	1031	1016	917	648
1984	1021	1083	963	745
1985	1009	1099	1018	790
1986	1011	1091	1055	818



# **ST HELENA POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*Dear Parents and Students,*

*It gives me great pleasure to write this first newsletter to you and I intend to keep you informed of progress at the school through further newsletters each fortnight.*

*My appointment as principal of St. Helena began officially on Wednesday 2nd November when I was released from my position as Deputy Principal of Princes Hill High School to work full-time on preparing the new school for its opening in February, 1984. I know there has been concern that the school may not be ready in time for students in 1984 but as you will see a great deal of progress has been made recently, and a successful start to 1984 is now assured.*

*Land: The site was finally purchased by the Education Department on Wednesday, 2nd November and the Public Works Department expects to begin work on the site this week.*

*Buildings: The final plans for an Integrated relocatable complex on the Calendonia Drive corner of the site have been completed. Initially we will have the following: 8 General Purpose classrooms, 2 Science rooms, 1 Art/craft Rooms, 1 Woodwork Room plus administration and staff areas, canteen and of course toilets. Further specialist rooms are expected to become available in the new year. These facilities will enable the school to begin with a comprehensive Year 7 curriculum. Planning for the permanent buildings, which will be sited well away from the temporary school, is proceeding and It should become available during, 1985.*

*Grounds: Discussions are taking place with Diamond Valley Shire about the siting of the sports grounds which we are keen to commence as soon as possible. These will be permanent facilities and will include an oval, basketball and tennis courts.*

*Staff: Teachers should be appointed late in November at the same time as the secondary schools receive their new teachers. A very large number of applications have been received for St Helena and I am sure we will begin the school with a highly qualified, experienced and enthusiastic group of teachers from both technical and high schools.*

*Curriculum: The parent survey indicated a strong desire for a foreign language (probably Italian), and both classroom and instrumental music. Every effort will be made to obtain good teachers of these subjects.*

*In addition the curriculum will include English, Humanities, Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Home Economics, Woodwork, Art and Graphics. Metalwork may become available during the year.*

*Uniform: A final decision on uniform will be made early in 1984 when discussions can be held with the parents of the school.*

*Books: Once the staff have been appointed to the school you will be notified of the details of book requirements.*

*Enrolments: At the moment 180 students from a total of 23 primary schools*

*Transition for our Primary Schools: I am currently visiting as many primary schools as possible. I will be talking with the children and their Grade 6 teachers about their work and the arrangements for their transfer to St. Helena.*

## **BBQ SUNDAY 27TH NOVEMBER**

***A Lunchtime family B.B.O. (bring your own food and drink)  
will be held on the site of the temporary school on Sunday 27th November.  
Mrs. Puline Toner, is expected to attend at about 1.00 P.M.  
This will be a good opportunity for people to meet  
and to learn more of the developments at the school.  
Please come along.***

*Finally I would like to say again how happy I am with my appointment and how impressive the enthusiasm for the new school has been from all quarters.*

*The Interim Committee has done an enormous amount of work to get the School to this stage, the officers of the Northern Region of the Education Department are determined that this school will set the maximum support and parents and teachers have all shown their excitement about participating in establishing this new school.*

*We will have an excellent year in 1984.*

*K T Cunningham  
Principal  
8-11-1983*



