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St Kilda Pier & Kiosk Jacka Boulevard and Pier Road, St Kilda

In 1853, the St Kilda Pier and Jetty Company was formed to profit from pier fees exacted from users of the Pier, which presumably already existed. Firewood from the open woodland of St Kilda and beyond could be shipped to Melbourne and building supplies freighted to St Kilda by return. The West Beach was suggested as a site for docks. A jetty aligned to Fitzroy Street was destroyed by a storm. The colonial government built a new pier, which was by 1859, controlled by the St Kilda Council.



An early morning shot of the St Kilda Kiosk

In 1874, funds were provided for a breakwater and in 1883-84 the pier was extended. In 1899 the pier was again extended to 700 metres with 61-metre L-shaped 'breakwater', at which glamorous Port Phillip excursion steamers such as the *Ozone*, *Hygeia* and *Weerona* berthed until 1949 (48). The St Kilda Council Foreshore Committee files include correspondence between the Council, the Bay Excursion Company, Huddart Parker and the

Melbourne and Tramways Omnibus Company regarding their potential loss of business due to the steamers.

Whilst Port Melbourne's and most of Williamstown's piers are for commercial or naval use, St Kilda's pier has always been a pleasure promenade, and solely for this after construction of bridges across the Yarra from 1850. If Fitzroy Street was envisaged as the continuation of St Kilda Road (19), then the Pier was inevitably the extension of Fitzroy to the great world beyond.

Red carpeted, with military guards of honour and performing schoolchildren flag-waving on cue, the Pier officiated not only as the civic, but the national, the point of arrival for visiting royalty and other dignitaries. The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary) landed there in 1901, to then grandly process down St Kilda Road to the Royal Exhibition Building to open Australia's first Federal Parliament.

Great enjoyment was afforded the many thirsty souls who paid a visit to the Pavilion at the end of the pier. Mr Francis Parer, the popular caterer had evidently foreseen the rise of the mercury and laid himself out to provide the pleasant cooling creature comforts so much in demand on a hot day by picnickers. The fame of the pavilion is growing and justly so, for nowhere can more enjoyable peaceful happiness be secured at St Kilda than by lounging restfully on the broad balcony of this pleasure place...

So purred the *St Kilda Advertiser* on 30 December 1905. The annual *St Kilda by the Sea* for 1913 stayed to savour the evening:

...go aloft to the spacious circular balcony ... At night, the view shorewards resembles a fairy scene. The many lights are glowing ... The picture formed is truly a notable sight.

Splendid and multifarious and Edwardian amusement piers frequently adorn English seaside resorts, and several still survive and thrive. In 1886 Henry Woodall planned to erect an ornamental pier almost half a kilometre out from the Upper Esplanade, with newspaper and fruit kiosks culminating in entertainment and refreshment rooms for 1000 people. It never happened.

An Edwardian amusement pier was built and survives; much altered, at Manly, Sydney. Geelong attempted to upstage St Kilda's pier and kiosk in 1912-13 with a primitive resort pier, bearing an entertainment hall for 1500 in a 40 x 15 metre shed behind a half timbered façade with a crude face.

Midway along the pier at Cottesloe, Western Australia was a band stand. A grander amusement pier was erected more recently at Coogee, New South Wales, with a 1400 seat theatre, a ballroom for 600 dancers and a restaurant for 400 diners. It lasted for four years (1929-33) until it was swept away in a storm.

St Kilda's, by comparison a tiny kiosk, a unique and much-loved seaside building to Melburnians, was only one of many such quirky Edwardian establishments for refreshment

and amusement on the St Kilda foreshore, erected around 1900-14 and depicted in postcard views. Local myth is that it is only one of three identical pavilions built by Mr Parer to survive. The kiosk was emulated in South Australia by others at Glenelg (1906-07), 'similar in construction to the pier at St Kilda near Melbourne', and Semaphore (1907-14), actually quite differently to its St Kilda model, and destroyed in 1947.



St Kilda Kiosk, 1950

Like many clients, Francis Parer (1860-1935), caterer claimed in family correspondence to have designed the kiosk himself. He was certainly the entrepreneur driving the proposal. He was a member of a successful floor milling and hospitality family who had first emigrated from Barcelona in the 1850's. The Parer Brothers operated at least four Bourke Street hotels and restaurants, including the splendid four storied Parer's Crystal Café, a landmark for generations and John Parer had the restaurant at the Royal Exhibition Building. Francis Parer's son, Damien, the film-maker, won Australia's first Academy Award and another son, Ray, aviator and adventurer, established an airline in New Guinea.

Francis came out from Spain in 1888. He submitted 'rough plans and details' of their proposal to the St Kilda Council's Public Works Committee on 8 October 1903. However, the kiosk was designed and working drawings prepared by an architect employed at the Public Works Department, the owner of the Pier, who called tenders in the usual way. A PWD drawing dated 25 January 1904 is initialled JCM. This was James Charles Morell (1868-?), an architect in the PWD from 1889. His name appears on drawings of minor government buildings until the financial crash of the 1890's when building works ceased.

Morell remained employed at the PWD. In 1913 he had become interested in the new discipline of Town Planning (31 & 35) and was sent overseas, and met Raymond Urwin, the father of town planning. Morell wrote a report on developments in slum clearance, civic beautification, garden suburbs and cities on the American model as seen in Los Angeles Court (35). He saw as the developments as more relevant to Australia rather than the English model as exemplified at Ardoch (31). He worked with Walter Burley Griffin (3) on the Australian Government's Arsenal Committee. Morell promoted such currently standard aspects of planning as internal parks and use zoning. His views were adopted by the Melbourne Town Planning Commission and in the planning of the new town of Yallourn (now demolished). After the Great War, he was responsible for the layout planning for the Commonwealth War Service Homes Commission.

The surviving architectural tender drawing also indicates that John W. Douglas was the builder. He was a showcase-maker, shop and office fitter of 315A Block Place, Melbourne. This would account for the fancy joinery details in the kiosk building.

The structure of the curious timber pavilion is unusual. Located at the end of the 457 metre pier, the pavilion rested not on the pier, but on 60 piles, driven into the seabed and supporting the 20 x 14.6 metre decking, onto which the 11 x 6.7 metre building was bolted, allowing a wide 'promenade' around, for tables and chairs. At ground level was a 'refreshment' (or concert) room with a small office and shop. Stairs climbed to the first floor which forms a 5.7 x 2.7 metre observatory and up again to a widow's walk around the flagpole surmounted by a weathervane. The kiosk was located to one side on the L-wing of the pier, rather than on axis, to where it was relocated when the pier was rebuilt in 1970.

The *St Kilda Advertiser* described the architectural style as 'oriental'. It noted the Muranese glass (which survived until 2003) in the outer windows on each side, the plain and fancy weatherboards with embellishments of fancy scalloped scrolls and woodwork. It also recorded the robust dimensions of the members necessary in such an exposed position and the iron pillars supporting the 'roof promenade' from which the 'wonderful panorama of the metropolis' can be viewed.

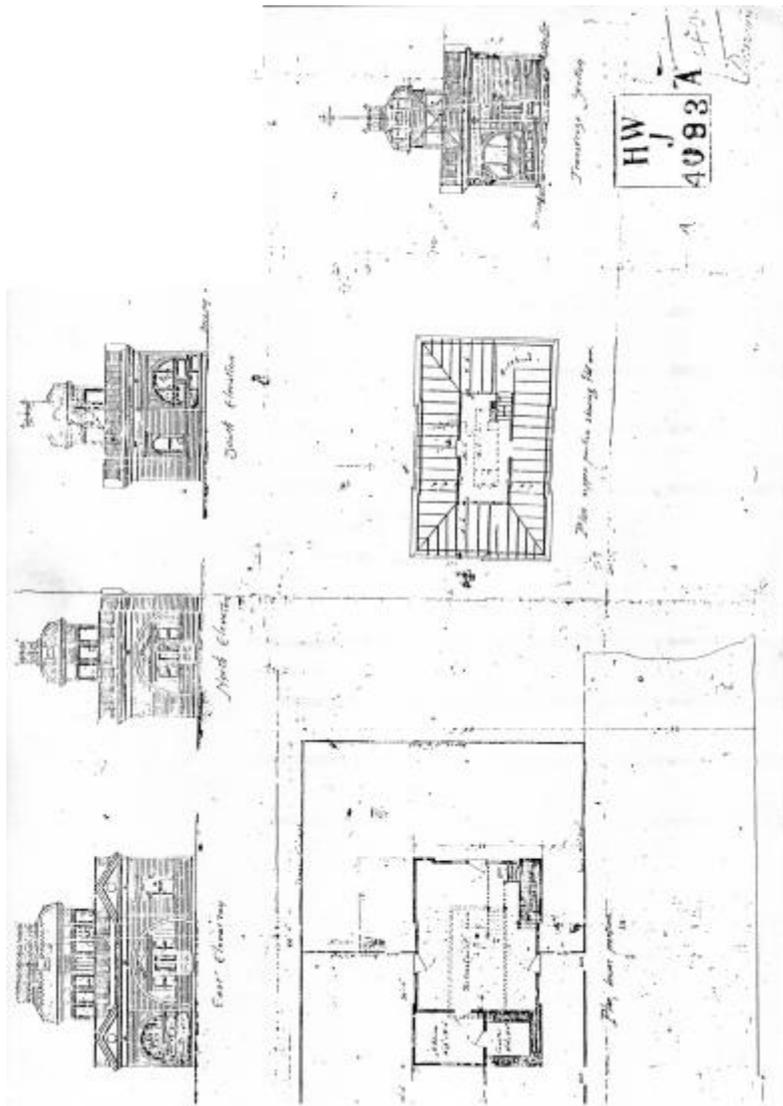
The design, despite its reputation for quirkiness, is actually sedate and symmetrical French Empire Classicism, in the tradition of William Pitt's (33) 1886-87 design for the Princess' Theatre, Spring Street, with its flanking pediments, round mansard roof and widow's walk. Its only eccentricity, two apparently Moorish horse-shoe arches, were actually relatively common in Federation domestic design. Those at the kiosk were actually circular, rather than horse-shoe shaped anyway. In 1982, Helen Garner fancifully and mythically described the kiosk's 'nautically scalloped weatherboards' and 'onion shaped curve outlining its front door'.

Francis Parer operated the kiosk on a government lease for about 30 years, well into the 1930s. He soon decided to live in the kiosk itself, giving his address as 'St Kilda Pier Pavilion'. He 'offered fish and fruit luncheons, without any intoxicating liquors of any

sort!’ Parer’s Pavilion as it was popularly known was actually named the Austral Refreshment Rooms.

The pavilion enjoys, under the Commonwealth Meteorological Bureau, a semi-official status... Mr Parer is an enthusiast in weather lore... Flags are showing what the weather forecast for the day is, and these flags are hoisted from information received each morning from the office of Mr M.A. Hunt, the Commonwealth Meteorologist.

There have since been many straggling additions and alterations to the original design, which had been continuously altered since 1908, when Parer added to the rear.



Original Drawings for the St Kilda Pier, c.1913

The popular annual *St Kilda by the Sea, Australia's Premier Pleasure Resort, the Pleasure Seeker's Mecca, On the Blue Waters of Port Phillip* depicts the Kiosk as its 1915-16 cover centrepiece, flanked by Luna Park (4), Paradise Pictures and the Lyric theatre (30).

Mr Noble and Mrs Ivy Kerby acquired the lease from the Victorian Government in 1939. Their son Colin (1921-) had worked there since 1934, as a young boy. Kerby operated the kiosk in the pavilion for 18 years. Mr Kerby's performing seals are remembered. During World War II, a dance deck with a polished steel floor was erected over the first floor balcony. Dances were held there on Sunday afternoons. Many remember being taught to jitterbug by American servicemen at Kerby's.

Sidney Nolan (1917-92) whilst painting his famous first Ned Kelly series at Heide, Bulleen in 1945, also completed *Under the Pier, St Kilda* (also known as: *Playing under the Jetty, St Kilda*), recalling memories of growing up in St Kilda. How many boys lay under the pier and gazed up the dresses of the girls promenading overhead? The Nolan family lived at Pakington Street; St Kilda from the year Sidney was born (9).

A new breakwater was built in 1956 for the Melbourne Olympiad (33) when the yachting events were held on Port Phillip Bay over the 26 November – 5 December period. The Kerbys replaced the 1905 window joinery with plate glass picture windows, close the deck to the public and cluttered them with clotheslines and ramshackle extensions. The building bore little resemblance to its 1903 drawing. The kiosk was reduced to a milk bar with take-aways. In about 1970, the pier was demolished (presumably also the sub-structure of the 60 timber piles supporting the kiosk) and replaced in reinforced concrete, onto which the kiosk was then placed, relocated on the longitudinal axis of the pier.



Noble died in 1959 with Colin and his wife Judy Kerby (née Lingard, 1932-), a former Tivoli Theatre dancer, taking over the lease. They also lived upstairs in the kiosk, which they altered with many further additions to the rear. Colin says he has saved 200 people from drowning off the pier.

The Kerbys retired in 1987, after Colin's 53 years in the kiosk and the expiry of their Crown lease. They were off to sail around the world in their boat, *Ooroo*. The pavilion was renovated in unattractive 'heritage colours', some accretions removed, the façade recreated and leased again by its owner, the Victorian government. For the

past decade, it has been operated as a café by Joe Sillito, who wanted to remain there ‘until he drops’.

The pavilion was to be renovated within the St Kilda Tourism Development Plan funded by a million dollar Bicentennial Grant. The plan was to redevelop the area of the pier as far as West Beach at Fraser Street, including: a boat harbour, the Alma Doepel Sea Base, relocation of the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron and a harbour village development. The capital cost was to be \$32.5 million with construction over 1986-98.

A far more sensible and less intrusive proposal arose when Mirka Mora (17) was commissioned to create a mosaic at the end of the pier. It became a ‘kind of map of St Kilda,’ said Mirka. ‘It was part of the view from my house in Barkly Street through to the sea, past Luna Park, The Palais, the Esplanade Hotel...’

The pier’s maintenance is the responsibility of Parks Victoria, who oversaw large development works there over the two years 2000-02. They report that 2.5 million visit St Kilda Pier each year.

The St Kilda Pier kiosk was totally destroyed by fire on 11 September 2004. That incident precipitated numerous kaleidoscopic memories and oceans of public emotion. The Premier, Steve Bracks immediately undertook to reconstruct the kiosk: a much less sophisticated response to that when the Town Hall was lost to fire in 1991 (33). In his report, David Moloney fastidiously detailed the subsequent Proustian debate by both community and professionals, as to whether the past is lost, or can be regained.

Allom Lovell Pty Ltd’s tender to ‘re-construct the kiosk as per the 1904 drawings and construct a single-story dining facility to the west of the kiosk building’ was accepted on 22 December 2004. Expressions of interest to fit out and operate St Kilda Pier Kiosk and Café on a 16 year lease were sought by Parks Victoria.

In the light of the history of invariable destruction by exposure to extreme weather, of piers elsewhere and by fire of other St Kilda public and foreshore entertainment buildings, it is perhaps surprising that the St Kilda Pier Kiosk survived at all for almost a century.

Note: This chapter was originally completed in August 2002, over a year prior to the kiosk’s destruction by fire. It has not been substantially re-written, but rather, its subsequent story has been very briefly summarised.

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