

Early days of football and St Kilda

- My st Kilda cred – family lived in Irwell St., grandparents lived in Lambeth Place, first games of footy I saw from my pusher at the Junction oval, early 50s
- Then made an informed decision around 1953
- MELBOURNE in 1850s
 - Colonial town
 - Massive boom due to gold rushes after 1851
 - 1851 – population of Melbourne 77,000
 - 1861 – 584,000
 - Migration predominantly from UK
 - Brought a love of sports and pastimes – particularly racing and cricket
 - Important for the colony of Vic to beat NSW at cricket
- St. Kilda in 1850s
- Early games in Melbourne
 - Founders of game – members of MFC – including William Hammersley (ex-Cambridge), Tom Wills (ex- Rugby), Thomas (Red) Smith (ex-Trinity College, Dublin), J B Thompson (journalist, ex-Cambridge) , Alex Bruce, Jerry Bryant (professional cricketer and publican)
 - **IMAGE beginnings at yarra park**
 - Melbourne GS vs Scotch 7th Aug 1858 – regarded as first recorded match
 - Those not going to the Beijing Olympics as guest of channel 7 will be able to see the recreation of this game
 - BUT
 - Melbourne GS vs St Kilda Grammar – cited as 5th June 1858; arranged by new headmaster of Melb. GS, Dr Bromby
 - St K had been open for four years and did not last much longer – usurped by Melb GS, which had opened April 1858 on corner Domain Rd & St Kilda Rd
 - Headmaster was Dr Bromby who was very keen on sport within the curriculum (it also wore the boarders out – very important to keep mischief down)
 - Their opponents Scotch had opened in 1851 and moved to east Melbourne in 1854
 - Reports of Melbourne GS vs a group of men from St Kilda July 1858
- Rules defined – Parade Hotel
- **IMAGE PARADE HOTEL – where it all began**
- **Image Tom Wills**
- **Image Tome Wills and friends –**
- **Wills on right, next to the publican Jerry Bryant**

- Rules an amalgam of those from various English public schools – Rugby, Harrow, Eton, Winchester, Shrewsbury, Charterhouse
- 10 rules – believed to be the first written rules in any code of football
- What they didn't want – aspects of the English game such as hacking of shins, throwing the ball, offside (hard to enforce without umpires and when players dodging around gumtrees)
- My view is that there was no involvement of aboriginal tribes in then start of the game, although they certainly became proficient at it in subsequent years
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- **So at the end of first year, groups from Melbourne CC, South Yarra and St Kilda were involved in the new code which was becoming codified**
- Early Clubs – MFC, Gee FC, University
- Grounds – Yarra park, Royal park
- by 1859, St Kilda Rd had been 'made' and the railway had arrived in St Kilda in 1857
- St K had bowling, archery and cricket clubs
- reported that year as playing match against University at St Kilda – won 2-1 by St Kilda (under rule that awarded victory to first to reach two goals – two out of three rule later replaced by total at end of allotted playing time)
- St Kilda captained by Courtney
- Crowd contained a good sprinkling of the fair sex – generally the way that women were described but indicated that they were in attendance from earliest days, watching brothers and friends
- Became important later when attendance at football matches was one socially-approved place where young women could meet males
- Match report also claims that a club had existed in St Kilda since April 1858 ie before Melbourne was formed – but definitions of a club were generally very loose in those days – more likely to be a group of friends who lived in or near St Kilda
- Other matches reported in 1859 were against Melbourne (twice), Scotch College,
- Early games played for fun – players could turn out for whichever team (or teams) they liked+
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- early 60s – St Kilda club formed 1862? Mullens
- Sth yarra club
- Gradually evolved "a game of our own"
- 1860 – rules allowed captains to award free kicks
- matches were rough, and resembled Rugby – low to the ground, many packs, heavy slogging, played on small square or irregular grounds
- game commenced like Rugby – with two teams facing each other, and one side kicking off – players then dispersed to their positions
- the big issue was whether players should be able to pick up the ball and run with it – the compromise was that the ball could be carried as long as it was bounced or struck on the ground every ten yards

- grounds were rough – swampy, rocks, mud-holes, slopes, gutters and tree-roots – but the St Kilda ground was recognised as the best in the colony in 1864 by Free Kick, in Bell's Life in Victoria (a sporting paper)
- located on the side of the St Kilda Railway, opposite the South park gates or on the opposite side of the railway facing the bay
- but little evidence that they played any games in 1864, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71
- Rules revised 1866, drafted by HCA Harrison
- **IMAGE HARRISON**
- Challenge Cup series, started in 1863 – won by aristocratic Sth Yarra in 1866
- Their leading player died soon after and the club declined
- new clubs in mid-60s Carlton 1864, Albert park 1864 (merged with Emerald Hill 1867)
- St K c. ground used for other matches – but scheduled match between Carlton & Sth yarra had to be played elsewhere due to “a drain having been cut through it” -(it was a very wet winter!)
- Major problem in those days was the encroachment of fans onto the ground – particularly matches between Melbourne and Carlton, attended by 5,000 to 10,000
- **IMAGE – Melbourne Football Ground**
- A major issue than became whether a goal was to be counted if it bounced off a spectator
- Sth Yarra disbanded and a number of players joined the new St Kilda 1873; other players from St K C C – most lived in district
- Clubs were seniors (18 players) and juniors (20 or more) – St K declared it would be a senior club – check Age 4/4/73
- Strong enough to field a second twenty
- Played at St Kilda Park
- **Image junction oval 1874**
- **IMAGE Umpires introduced mid-1860s**
- The Lake Premiership between St Kilda and South Melb can be dated from 1873
- Traditional rivalries between clubs (usually representing neighbouring suburbs) have been a cornerstone in the game in Melbourne, since those days
- when St Kilda scored an unlikely win over Albert Park at the Albert Park ground (notorious for its wind)
- Captained by Freeman; St Kilda players booed and pelted by AP larrikins after game – origin of term barracker from Sth Melbourne?
- Same thing happened following year and fears that the larrikins were getting out of hand – as one commentator said, nothing short of hanging will eradicate them!
- These were the days when away trips to country towns usually began with a trip to the pub – when the Saints travelled to Geelong in 1874, they arrived at

the Pivot by midday, were 'regaled with refreshments' and eventually were ready to play at 3 o'clock

- In the return match, the Geelong team was taken to the George Hotel, adjacent to the playing ground – but the game was delayed because the official responsible for erecting the goalposts had forgotten to do so – probably at the lunch at the pub!
- Colours? Red white and black – german imperial colours (became important when WW1 broke out)
- Players? Many were local
- Ground - Alpaca Paddock, near St Kilda railway station and adjoining Prince Alfred Bowling green
- 1874 – played as a senior club but out of its depth – won 2 out of 18, drew 8 – scoring low, draws common
- 1875 – trouble fielding a team, merged with University – disastrous for all but recovered in 1876
- no structure or governing body – clubs arranged matches
- 1877 – money in game, cricket grounds used widely
- **IMAGE - WOMEN AT THE FOOTBALL**
- ALWAYS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE CROWD
- VFA – St Kilda included
- Second VFA team to travel to Adelaide for match
- 1879 - reported as nearly dead – no players turned up for one match!
- Retired from VFA and played as a junior club and built itself up
- Performed well for a junior team, playing other local teams, including Southern, at Fawkner park, opposite the Alfred (note pavilion with Art Deco friezes)
- **IMAGE FAWKNER PARK**
- Fawkner Park was not particularly healthy – ploughed nightsoil in!
- Returned to VFA in 1886
- Home games now at the Junction Oval, home of St K Cricket Club – enabled club to charge admission
- **IMAGE – captained by Lockett**
- Played Sth Melbourne in first game on new ground – another chapter in the Lake Premiership which lasted until 1964
- **Image – Albert park**
- **Image – lake premiership 1890s**
- Prahran also admitted to VFA and fierce rivalry emerged
- But neither performed well and they merged in 1888 – St K kept its colours, name, ground and began talking about building a grandstand
- Important year in development of the suburb – a new Princes Bridge constructed and cable car tram extended down St Kilda Rd. turning St K into a favourite destination for Melburnians

- President 1895 – George Turner, Premier (and a prominent land-boomer of 1880s)
- Supporters? –
- **IMAGE – CROWDS**
- **HATS, PICKET FENCE**
- image of St Kilda supporters as aristocratic, well-heeled, with many Jewish supporters
- 730 members 1890, double previous years
- **IMAGE SUPPORTER 1890**

- Supporters – reflected characteristics of the suburb
- Ginger Steve – the larrikin barracker – disliked authorities, weak-chinned English governors and St Kilda supporters
- **IMAGE STEVE**
- **Referred to Saints as St Kilder Gussies**
- **Saints mostly named Ruben an Erdolphus an all them kinder disgusten names outter the sentlemental stage dramers (which they weren't of course but it suited Steve's prejudices)**
- **According to Steve its usual to barrack against St Kilda as follows**
- **Well played Percy! Pass it on t'Bertie! Good shot Adolphus! Mind yer eye glass, Horace, dear boy! Play lite, Ruben, or yer may be carried home to yer ma in a bucket!**
- Merged with Prahran (to enter VFA?)
- Record in VFA
- Lake Premiership – with Sth Melbourne

In 1896, the year before the inception of the Victorian Football League, St Kilda managed just 6 wins and a draw from 18 matches to finish 9th out of 13 clubs. A contemporary review of the season indicated that:

St Kilda.....maintained its reputation for playing the game on its merits as a pastime. They never make a business of it. They have the knack of rising to the big occasion and they invariably afford gratifying and sportsmanlike entertainment. [\[see footnote 2\]](#)

- Formation of VFL – St K lucky to be included (as was Carlton)
- Southern suburb; close to transport
- Good ground – with cycle track around it
- **In 1898 and 1899 the ground was used by the league to host finals matches.**
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- **Things did not improve during either of the subsequent two seasons and St Kilda entered the twentieth century without having achieved a single VFL win (or even a draw) from 48 consecutive matches, [\[see footnote 4\]](#) a sequence of failure which remains unparalleled to this day.**

IMAGE – NEW CENTURY

ST KILDA VS Essendon 1901 – no numbers, white shorts on visitors

Image – Junction – centre of the suburb, reflected in their song

Song – a music hall song from England (1909?) – popular in English seaside towns such as Brighton; found it on a web-site about England's best beaches!

Image – club song

- "Oh I do love to be beside the seaside
Oh I do love to be beside the sea
Down at the Junction there's a football ground
And that's where the Saints all hang around

So let's give 3 cheers for ol' St Kilda
For this year the premiers they may be
Though it's not yet in the bag
We've got hopes of winning the flag
Beside the seaside, beside the sea".

IMAGE SAINTS 1907

IMAGE SAINTS IN ACTION

- note lace-up jumper and heavy boots
- match vs Fitzroy – a powerful club
- Vic Cumberland – an early champion, with a roll-neck jumper
- First Grand Final 1913

IMAGE – SAINTS CHANGE COLOURS

Colours, - kept their black white & red until the outbreak of war against Germany, then switched to colours of Belgium

Image NEW JUMPER In 1915 St Kilda changed its official colours to red, yellow and black in a move allegedly designed to bolster patriotic pride given that the club's original colours of red, white and black were shared by Imperial Germany. (However, an equally plausible explanation for the change may have been that it brought the football club in line with the cricket club which for many years had boasted red, yellow and black as its official colours.)

IMAGE Archer 1923/4 – back to red black & white but with more black than before

Image – Junction Oval grandstand

Image – Junction oval 1940s

Image junction 1950s

Image Neil Roberts 1958