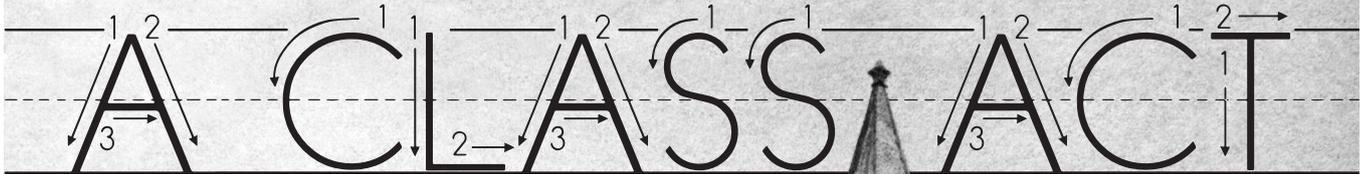


OTAGO SETTLERS NEWS

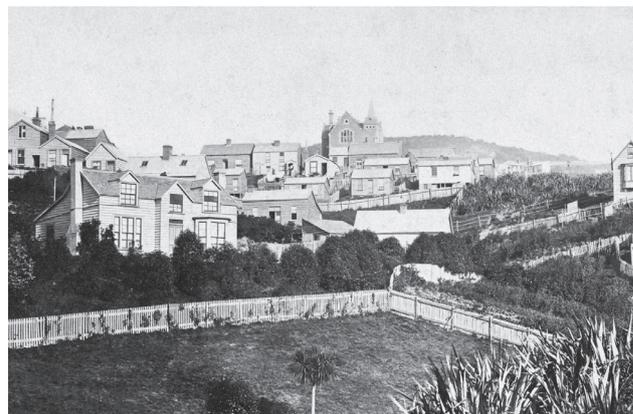
OTAGO SETTLERS ASSOCIATION *proud to be friends of* **toitū** OTAGO SETTLERS MUSEUM

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The Middle District School



Halliwell's School in the mid-1860s, photographed by JW Allen.



Academically, 1873 was a good year for the Middle District School, a steeped red brick structure on the corner of York Place and Dowling (now Tennyson) Street. It drew forth praise from the Otago Board of Education inspectors, most of whom had been promoted from the ranks of schoolteachers, for its outstanding teaching standards, well-behaved pupils and high level of proficiency in all subjects. 'Although I have been present at many examinations, both in England and the Colonies,' wrote one inspector in the *Otago Daily Times*, 'I have not met with any school whose examination was more creditable to scholars and teachers than this one.' Another commented on the progress of the pupils, especially the girls, in mathematics. 'In algebra and the elements of Euclid, they were very good.'

Miss Isabella Hay, the teacher in charge of the Industrial Department, was highly complimented on a handsome display of useful and ornamental articles which her pupils had made. That the skills of sewing, knitting, crochet, lace, bead and other fancy work were taught at primary school level indicates a sensible syllabus aimed at preparing children at an early age for the future realities of life. It was considered as important for a girl to be able to sew as to read or write. Families were large in those days and it was no easy task keeping them clothed. Those who could afford a dressmaker had their clothes made. The less well-off made their own. Hand-me-downs were a given. If a little girl died, her good clothes were passed on to her sisters or cousins, and her shabbier ones to the poor girls in her Sunday School class.

The annual public examination of the pupils in 1873 was conducted by the school inspectors in 'rooms profusely decorated with flowers and evergreens.' A programme of recitations and the distribution of prizes followed. Teachers received certificates rating their performance and the pupils were awarded prizes, most notably pens, pencil cases, work boxes, books or mathematical instruments, donated by local benefactors.

The *ODT* described the school in December 1873: 'There are some eight or nine large rooms, each of which has its clock, time-table, cupboard and teacher's desk. The walls are suitably covered with diagrams illustrative of various scientific subjects, and there is ample accommodation for the books, hats, and

cloaks of the pupils. There is now very good ventilation, and the school is in a fine healthy position and well supplied with water.' When the school first opened the ventilation had been found to be far from adequate: 'the sun shines right on the heads of the scholars nearly all day. This, added to the smell of the close and over-crowded rooms, is so distracting as to render teaching and study almost an impossibility.' One parent worried that 'the crowded rooms and their tainted atmosphere may breed disease ... on a recent visit to the school he was quite sickened by the effluvia.'

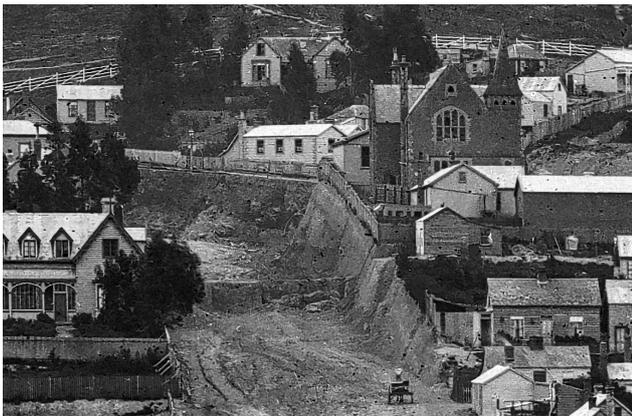
A wooden extension to the brick building, designed and supervised by Henry Frederick Hardy, had been erected in 1871. Calculated to comfortably seat 130 children, it had two fireplaces and a front porch. The same year, French classes were introduced into the curriculum, at two shillings a quarter (equivalent to about \$20 today). A hundred pupils signed up.

Opened in August 1864, the Middle District School, with Thomas Halliwell as headmaster, was built to accommodate the growing number of pupils in central Dunedin, the original school on the foreshore having become insanitary and overcrowded. Within six months the new school in turn was already overcrowded, and a proposal was made to move the former military barracks down the hill from what is now Littlebourne Ground for additional accommodation.

The school, also known as Halliwell's, was one of the first to introduce the pupil teacher system, with marked success. The Education Ordinance of 1862 authorised selected schools to engage apprentice pupil teachers, drawn from the school roll, to be instructed over a four-year period in the subjects laid down for them. They had to be at least 13 years of age and were paid a nominal wage, with males receiving £10 more per annum than females. A similar disparity existed between the wages of schoolmistresses and schoolmasters, the latter often earning £100 more than their female counterparts.

Sadly, regardless of its excellent reputation, by 1873 the Middle District School's days were numbered. The Dunedin City Corporation, which had for some time been considering extensive roadworks in the vicinity, made the decision to proceed. The plan was to create continuous street gradients

Left: The boys of the Middle District School kneeling for the photographer, JW Allen, and the amusement of the girls. Hocken P2014-014/3-117. **Right:** The school, as seen from Moray Place. Hocken MS-4171/018/004.



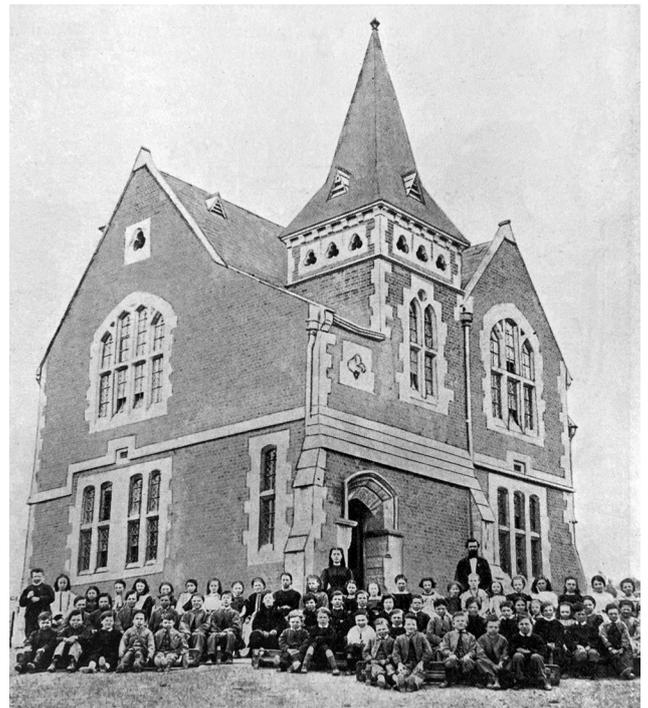
encompassing upper Dowling (renamed Tennyson in 1916), Smith, Arthur and Stuart Streets, thus providing easier access within the area. Construction work began on the levelling of Dowling Street at the York Place T-junction in 1874. The deep cutting in Dowling Street, excavated within seven feet of the school's foundations, left the building standing on the edge of a 35-foot precipice, endangering not just the school but also those within.

The school's fate was discussed at a meeting of the Dunedin School Committee in August 1874. Proposals included pulling it down and erecting a new building on the lower part of the school grounds, lowering the schoolhouse and site to the new street level, or building a retaining wall on the face of the cutting.

Declared by competent authorities to be unfit for purpose, the building was abandoned and eventually demolished. Mr Halliwell, instructed by the committee to find temporary accommodation for the pupils, chose the former and somewhat derelict Robin Hood Hotel on the corner of York Place and Rattray Street. Advised of its unsuitability, due to the fact that it was dark and uncomfortable and some of the rooms were occupied by transients, he nevertheless moved the children in. He was taken to task for his actions and more appropriate premises were found.

The Otago Witness reported in July 1876 that, as a consequence of the destruction of the schoolhouse, many of the teachers, fed up with coping in makeshift classrooms, had left. Among them was James Lindsay, whose class numbered between 60 and 70 pupils. On his departure for the South District School in William Street, in his new role as second teacher, his pupils gave him a silver cup, and his fellow teachers presented him with a handsome inlaid table. Mr Halliwell, in making the presentation, expressed his regret at losing such a valuable teacher.

Thomas Halliwell retired shortly afterwards, due to ill health, and died in New York in 1888. Miss Emma Stevens, a teacher whose long association with the school began as a pupil teacher in 1866, furthered her career, with some distinction, at the Normal Schools in Union Street and Moray Place. When she retired in 1911, she had the honour of being one of the

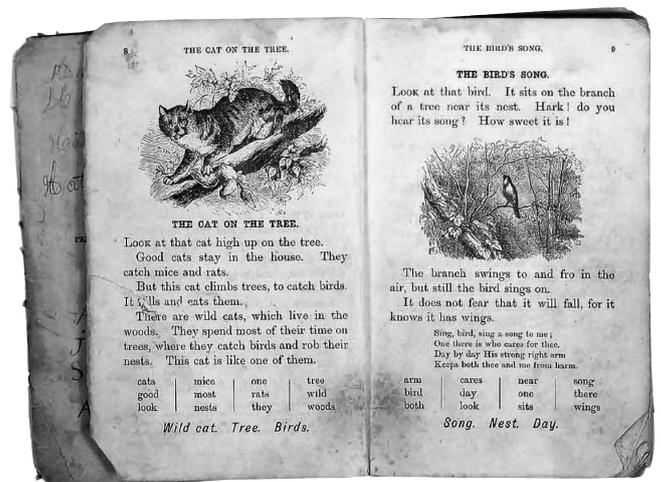


longest-serving members of the teaching profession in Otago.

The school transferred to the Cemetery Reserve in Arthur Street in 1877. Still known initially as the Middle District School, and described as such in the annual prize-giving lists published in the local newspapers, it was not termed the Arthur Street School until about 1880.

In 1937, a purpose-built art school was erected on the former Middle District School site as an extension of King Edward Technical College, the Dunedin Art School having amalgamated with the college in 1929. The building is now the Trinity Catholic College Arts Block – the educational use of the site now dates back more than 160 years.

Cecilie Geary



Top left: The excavated street below the school, from a Burton Brothers panorama, 1874. Te Papa C.018410; **Top right:** The Middle District School about 1868, photographed by JW Allen. The teachers are Mr Halliwell, Miss Gordon, Miss Castle and Mr Ferguson. *Otago Witness*, 25 May 1910; **Bottom right:** A simple story from the Royal Readers, No 1.