



Supplement to Industry & Perseverance



St Clair, James Street, Miss Annie Midgley's Educational Establishment¹

In 1903, Mary Elizabeth Midgley (nee Brown), husband James, and family took up rented residence at St Clair, the handsome eight-roomed stone house at 135 James Street (now No 235) having moved there from South Brisbane. Prior to that, they had live in the South Grafton for many years - Until at least the early 1880's.



St Clair in 2007. Photo per Annie Midgley

By the time of taking up residence at St Clair the household had eight grown-up children including: Annie and Violet who were artists, Madeline a teacher, Harry a brushmaker, and Richard a timber salesman. Annie, the eldest daughter, was noted as being particularly talented.

St Clair was within a stone's throw of the State School. With the recently opened New Farm State School increasingly overcrowded, the way lay open for competent teachers to take private pupils. Since the family home had once served as a school, and later a hospital, it lent itself perfectly to becoming Miss Midgley's educational establishment which she opened in 1905.

Annie well merited the description "artist". Her 1899 painting 'The departure of the First Queensland Contingent to South Africa' found its way into the Colonial Collection of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Interest in military matters was uppermost in the Midgley family and all of Annie's brothers joined the Queensland Defence Force.

Stephen, later Lieut Col Midgley CMG DSO, was in an army contingent during the 1891 Shearers' Strike, fought in the Boer War in South Africa with Breaker Morant, and distinguished himself both at Gallipoli and in France. Frank served in Africa, and Harry also served at Gallipoli.



The departure of the first Queensland contingent for South Africa²

According to Midgley family recollections, Annie was 'ambidextrous' and could instruct two pupils at the one time and write with both hands simultaneously. She painted in oils and water colours, modelled plaster busts, and after injuring her hand or developing arthritis, she took up wood carving as a therapy.'

Miss Midgley's school, for boarding and day scholars, Music and public exams', is also remembered as a family enterprise. Since her brothers and sisters continued to live either at St Clair or close by, her nieces and nephews shared in the duties of running a school.

A charming vignette of life at St Clair during the late 20's and early 30's was provided by Thomas Love, a great-nephew of Miss Midgley, reminiscing about his boyhood there:

In the Drawing room were many paintings by Ann, one of which was an oil of a troopship leaving Brisbane for the Boer War, no doubt just like 'Maori King' in



Maj. Stephen Midgley, CMG DSO, 5th Light Horse Brigade London, UK, August 1916.³

¹ In 2008 the New Farm & District Historical Society Inc (NFDHS) produced a book 'Reflections on New Farm' about the early years of New Farm which included this chapter on St. Clare school. This chapter was largely contributed by Anni Midgley (great granddaughter of Mary Elizabeth Midgley nee Brown) and has been revised for the David Brown (1750-1836) website.

² AWM Ref ART50111

³ AWM Ref A01349



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which her two brothers Frank and Stephen travelled to South Africa. The room also contained a good deal of furniture which had been carved by Ann. A short distance down the hall to the right was the music room. On a pedestal outside the door was a plaster head of Stephen, also by Ann. In the music room hung a very realistic charcoal and chalk drawing of the head of a horse, apparently during a war action, showing great fear in its eyes and biting on the bit. Ann was obviously influenced by the family's army associations and her brothers' war service.

Down a short flight of stairs was another small hallway which, to the left, led to the front door and the classroom, and to the right the dining room and kitchen. The kitchen and dining room had that smell peculiar to schools, institutions and the like. Through the kitchen was the pantry and a passage where, among other things, Indian clubs and dumb-bells were stored.

Outside this area was a toilet, and in a cage was a once-white sulphur-crested cockatoo which

had lost almost all of its feathers except the sulphur crest..

In the yard there were outbuildings and a fowl run. There was also an emu which was confined to a certain area. This emu laid eggs quite regularly and these were given to anyone who asked for them. There was also a pet koala in the early days.

Alongside the main building was the tennis court which had orange and purple bougainvillea growing over the enclosing wire mesh. In later days, two houses were built on the land once occupied by the tennis court and the land surrounding it.

The sleeping quarters were on the upper floor.

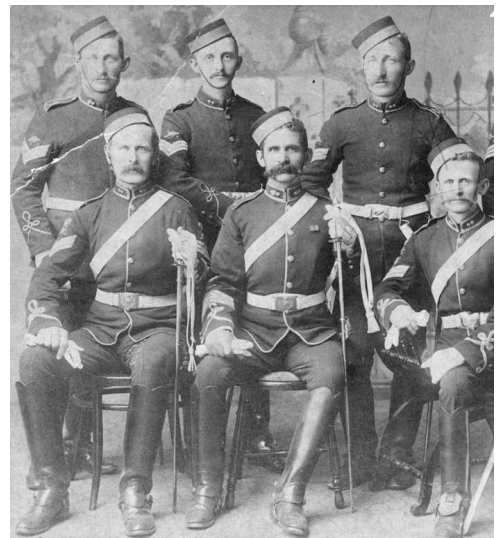
On Sundays all pupils were marched to church services at the Holy Trinity Church in the Valley or to St John's Cathedral. All the family attended church at least two or three times each Sunday. On Sunday night was high tea usually consisting of boiled eggs. Each had their personal ring on their serviettes which were kept in a rack. Ann and Madeline every night went from dormitory to dormitory after prayers, at lights out, and all would join in singing the hymns, 'I have Promised to Serve Thee to the end'. Mrs Brown was one of the professional teachers at the school.

The land upon which St Clair stood was made available at auction in 1853 and 1862, a large portion on the corner of James and Terrace Streets was acquired by Cairncross House. It housed 47 children by 1867 and was the forerunner of Nudgee Orphanage.

Among subsequent owners of St Clare House (as it was advertised in an 1882 auction) was Sir Arthur Hunter Palmer, Premier of Queensland during 1870-74. When the Hunter Palmer family



MISS Madeline Midgley (right) holding niece Florence with 27 students St Clair December 1912⁴



A group of Queensland Field Artillery Sergeants c1897. Back Row: Richard Midgley (left), Edward Midgley (right) (twins)⁵.

⁴ Photo per NFDHS

⁵ Victoria Barracks Historical Society



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eventually subdivided the property, Annie Midgley took the opportunity in 1925 to purchase the house and a portion totalling around 70 perches. That year only three of the family were listed as living at St Clair – Annie and Madeline (teachers), and Maud (who had joined an Anglican order of nuns and subsequently left). Next door on the corner of Terrace and James Street was Richard still a timber salesman. Annie and Madeline continued to teach into the next decade and were joined by their niece Florence (Sonnie) Midgley who taught music.

Joan Kopelki attended St Clair's from around 1927 to 1930:

I do not remember much about St Clair's. I started school here as there were only a few private schools and the State School. An older girl, Drell Shields, would walk me there. I always said that the Midgley sisters were two old maids but when you are only six, everyone else is old. I can remember concerts in the Holy Trinity Church Hall and the Midgleys would stand in the wings and say, 'Louder, Louder' all the time we were singing. When I went to the convent, it was 'Softly, softly'.

While the sisters certainly taught young children, St Clair apparently also took in orphans and wards of the state boarders, with government paying for their upkeep.

It was a funny school. Mum decided she wanted us not to go to the State School but to be little ladies so we went to St Clair's. Most of the children came from the country and they were boarders in dormitories. There were two young teachers, just girls, who could never have coped with boys.



Annie Midgley with Hammer c1923⁶

In 1931, 11 year old Leona Ross boarded at St Clair:

At Christmas-time all the children left at the school received a gift, usually a book which the Midgley sisters may have paid for out of their own money. After marching back from the Christmas Day service at the Holy Trinity Church, the children would all sing songs and hold their books above their heads.

Leona told her daughter Pat Smith that these were "The best and happiest memories from her childhood, and that the children loved the Midgley sisters"

Miss Annie Midgley is said to have always been meticulously dressed, with high collars buttoned up to the neck, dresses below the ankles and wearing laced boots. It was a 'uniform' that she continued up until her death in September 1943, aged 77.

The property was conveyed to her sister Madeline, passing out of the family in 1951. The building was converted to flats and painted pink, becoming known locally as the Pink Flats.

⁶ Stephen Harmer Midgley is the son of Stephen Midgley. Photo from Stephen Midgley, Canberra.

Adapted from 'Reflections on New Farm' &

Revised as 'Supplementary Material' for **David Brown (1750-1836) & Family** [website](#)