

## The Rockfield Centre – site of former Rockfield School

### Development

In 1875 The School Burgh Board was appointed as governors of the school under the chairmanship of Peter Cumstie. The Burgh Board was required to find a suitable site, employ an architect, and arrange for a school to be built. The school was required to accommodate and educate approximately 400 children in Oban. This was in response to the inception of the Education Act 1872.

The building and completion of Rockfield Primary School was not without controversy.

By 1876 a site was found- known locally as St Thomas Park. There was opposing opinion regarding the suitability of the sites since sewage pipes ran through the park from the houses higher up on the hill. The Rev Hugh McFarlane wrote in the Oban Times stating that he had consulted sanitary specialists from Glasgow who declared that it was “utterly unwise” to consider the site since it would impose a health risk. “I am fully persuaded that just such a verdict would be given by every medical man”.

However, the site was secured for the sum of £450, paid by the School Burgh Board. Alexander McQueen , a Glasgow architect was appointed to designing the new school. The drawings were viewed by the Education Department but it was reported to the Board that the accommodation was too large and the tower “superfluous”.

The School Board, however, argued that the tower needed to be in conformity with neighbouring buildings and that the cost of revising the plan would incur even more expense. Furthermore when the plans had been publicly exhibited for consultation the School Burgh Board was asked by local people to consider a more expensive structure. Despite pressure being brought to bear of the Board both from the public and the Education Department, a plan was agreed to proceed and to accommodate 420 children. The sum of £3300 loaned would be repaid by instalments annually over 50 years to the “Public Loans Commission”.

### Total cost – 1877

Site	£450
Architects Fee	£140
Building Cost	<u>£3300</u>
Total cost	£3890

### **Opening ceremony 1877**

The grand opening of Rockfield Primary School took place on 19th May 1877. It was known at the time as “ the New Public School”.

Parents had been asked to present their children “ with clean faces and hands and where possible, adequately clad”.

Local dignitaries , teachers , children and parents were present when various speeches were delivered. After joining in prayer the 100th psalm was song.

Imagine at the end of the ceremony, the sheer delight for every child when presented with a bun and an orange before being told that the school was closed for a holiday!.

## Extensions to the school

By 1894 the local population had increased and the school was short of accommodation. A local architect, Alexander Shairp was already known for his design of two commanding buildings ( the Parish Church and Eadar Glinn).

Alexander Shairp was appointed to a further plan to add some more classrooms, play sheds and toilets. The design was sensitive to the existing school although less elaborate.

Close observation of the building frontage reveals this change from the original to the extended section and was completed in 1901.

Yet again, in 1954, a modern "block" for more classrooms was constructed to the rear of the school.

Finally in the 1959 a further 4 classrooms in two modern huts were erected in the "boys" playground. These structures completed the school's facility for primary education.

## The Listing Status

In 1995 the school was listed as a "B" listed building – recognised both by Historic Scotland and the local authority. This status can be compared with the "B " listing for McCaig's Tower- both structures regarded as being of local and national significance.

<http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/details/914191>

## Description Buildings at risk register

2 storeys over partially exposed raised basement, with 14-bay principal facade. Asymmetrical school building with French style detailing, built into hillside. H-plan main block with 1901 addition to N end, and square 3-storey tower in S re-entrant angle. Bull-faced squared and snecked basement, stugged, squared and snecked sandstone walls, and stugged dressings to quoins and chamfered openings.

A very complete and little altered example of a Board School, its building instigated by the 1872 Education Act. Dean of Guild plans record "new lavatories, coal cellars etc at Public School for Oban School Board 1894, Minor alterations 1894, and New classrooms, playsheds etc by Alexander Shairp, architect 1901". (Historic Scotland)Building Dates1873; 1894; 1901

Architects        1875 Alexander MacQueen  
                         1894 additions Alexander Shairp;

## Information from

Oban Times; Historic Scotland; Hugh Sheddon; School Board Minutes; A&B Council Archives