

History of St John Vianney R.C. Primary School and our Connections with France

Our school's patron saint, St John Vianney, was a French parish priest in the town of Ars which is in Ancient Lorraine, France; our local Parish Church is also named after St John Vianney.

St John Vianney RC Primary School opened on 1st November 1956. The Headmaster at the time, Matthew McCabe, wished to mark the school's links with France and wrote to the Consul General of France to ask if President General de Gaulle's name could be used as one of the school house names. Not only did General de Gaulle agree to Mr McCabe's request but, in November 1957, he presented the school with the medal which was engraved with the Free French emblem, the Cross of Lorraine, and presented to him during the liberation of France in World War II by the French people. It was General De Gaulle's express wish that the medal be used as a significant award. The medal was presented originally by the Consul General of France in Scotland at a unique evening in the school where pupils sang The French national anthem - La Marseillaise. To this day, primary 7 pupils research and present projects on 'the connection between our school and France' with the pupil who submits the best essay being awarded the 'de Gaulle Medal' at a special P7 award ceremony.

On 6th October 1960, Madame Michund, a cousin of General de Gaulle's wife visited the school and was given a tour of Edinburgh by Mr McCabe who, in Spring 1962, visited the Elyseè Palace in Paris, the residence of the President of France. General de Gaulle wrote several times to the school and, in October 1961, sent a signed photograph. In 1963, the Headmaster and his wife were presented to the French Ambassador at a reception in the Caledonian Hotel. The Auld Alliance trophy was presented to the school in July 1965 by Monsieur Charles Renner, Consul General of France and was to be presented as a prize to the House with most points for 'diligence and behaviour'. At the time, there were two houses: de Gaulle and de Guise; today there are a further two houses, Lorraine and Bordeaux and the trophy continues to be awarded to the house which has accumulated the most points over the year.

Although St John Vianney RC Primary School opened in 1956, it was not housed in its current location until August 1980. The school was located in various places in the intervening 24 years including Inch House, Craigour, Burdiehouse, Drum Street, Ravenscroft Annexe and Glenvarloch Inch Primary.

The design of the St John Vianney school badge consists of a Cross of Lorraine in gold enclosed in a circle of gold (representing the wheel of Gilmerton which

was once known as 'the Carter's village'), all on a bright red or scarlet background. The colours of the Cross of Lorraine, which were quartered on the escutcheon of Mary de Guise or Lorraine (mother of Mary Queen of Scots) were verified by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. On 26th November 1956, the design was approved by Edinburgh Corporation's Education Committee and officially adopted as the school badge. The Cross of Lorraine was also the symbol adopted by the Free French in World War II. It is worth noting that our church of St John Vianney has adopted the school badge as the motif for the wrought iron railings around the church and the fleur-de-lys has also been incorporated.

St John Vianney RC Primary School is situated in an area of Edinburgh with many links to France. Craigmillar castle, which was a favourite residence of Mary Queen of Scots, is nearby and the area below the castle, which now houses the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, is known as 'Little France'. It is believed that many of Mary's retainers settled in the area, hence the name. The village of Burdiehouse is close by and it is said the Queen's wine was stored there; the name Burdiehouse is derived from Bordeaux House. There is evidence that an oak tree, purported to have been planted by Mary Queen of Scots, stood near the site of the Royal Infirmary on Old Dalkeith Road until it was removed due to decay and vandalism. One of the multi-storey residential buildings in Moredun, a stone's throw away from Little France, is named 'Mary Tree House'.



