

Jo Dubarry



Mrs Jo DuBarry was the Principal at St Albans East Primary School from the 1970s into the 1980s, probably for over a decade. Many people admired her as a great teacher and a great communicator. However, nothing much seems to have been written about her in the public domain, apart from some of her history in St Albans. Locally, she was always known as 'Jo' which is the diminutive for 'Joan' which was her middle name.

Marjorie Joan King was born in Brunswick in 1924 to John Robert King and Edith Marjorie Agnes Powell. The King ancestry goes back to 1825 in Reigate, Surrey, England. The Powell ancestry goes back to 1822 in Wales.

Marjorie King qualified as a teacher in the mid to late-1940s and one of her first promotions was in 1948 for Parkville Primary School.¹

In October 1948 at age 24 Marjorie Joan King married John Edward Duxbury aka Du Barry. The Duxbury ancestry goes back to 1841 in Mickleton, Yorkshire, England. John Edward Duxbury aka Du Barry was born in 1910 in Cottingley, Yorkshire, England, and emigrated in 1925 to Western Australia. In 1934 he married Elizabeth Fondon Rixon and they settled in Queensland. In 1940 they were in Gunnedah, New South Wales. John enlisted in the AIF in 1940 and trained with the Jungle Warfare School; he was discharged at his own request in 1943. Elizabeth Rixon divorced John Duxbury in 1947.



John Dubarry married Marjorie Joan King in Melbourne in 1948. In 1949 they were living around Melbourne before moving to Macedon (Gisborne) by 1954. John was listed as a welder and Marjorie Joan as home duties, but later they were listed as primary producers, which probably meant John took up farming. John and Jo Dubarry had one daughter, Roberta Marjorie, who was born about 1950.

Very little information has been found of Jo Dubarry's teaching career, and even the electoral rolls have her listed as 'home duties' rather than 'teacher'. She mentioned at one stage that she had been in Purnim in south-west Victoria and had taught some children from the Framlingham Aboriginal Mission. She was promoted to Parkville in 1948. In the mid-1960s she was the headmistress at Sunshine Heights Primary School. It's said she introduced children to the art of throwing boomerangs, which was probably inspired by her experience with her Framlingham students.

A wonderful acknowledgement of her role as educator in the 1960s was made by Justice Paul Anastassiou of the Federal Court in 2019:

"I wish to acknowledge publicly the teachers who I was privileged to be taught by throughout my primary, secondary and tertiary studies. I have remained lifelong friends with some of them. I acknowledge in particular Mrs Jo Dubarry, who was the headmistress of my local primary school and, though she cannot be here today, due to ill health, her daughter is here. She is also a fine teacher."

Jo Dubarry transferred to St Albans East Primary School about 1974 as the new Principal, as Ruth Tozer had transferred to St Albans North Primary School. At this stage Dubarry was aged 50 years and had been teaching for over 25 years. She was soon recognised for her leadership at the school and in supporting outside community interests. The late Lorna Cameron thought that Mrs Dubarry was an inspiration to women:

"... because she had fought a long time to be appointed school principal, because in that era whenever there was a promotion going the odds were very heavily favoured for the males. A headmaster's job was often given to a man even though a woman may have had some more experience or qualification. The woman usually had to do a couple of extra years so that she could compete for the job."

¹ Argus 1 May 1948 p6

Evelyn Mullenger interacted with her as a school parent and recognised Dubarry's innovations:

"Students were sent to the principal's office for being naughty. Dubarry would make them sit at a desk in her room and get them to write down in their own words what had happened. I came into her office one day and there were a couple of boys writing away. One lad stopped writing and asked politely how to spell a particular swear word. There were days when the children were released a bit early as there were regular teacher meetings held with the principal. Dubarry would ask them to do homework by reading a chapter about the latest theories on child education so they could discuss them at their next meeting."



Principal Jo Dubarry St Albans East Primary School 1981

Jo Dubarry's contribution to education was recognised in 1977 when she was awarded the Silver Jubilee Medal "by command of Her Majesty The Queen."²

One of Dubarry's major initiatives in combining school and community activities started in the 1970s and came to fruition in the 1980s. In 1975 the Schools Commission granted St Albans East money to run a cultural festival. For two years schools and community groups organised concerts and ethnic arts displays. Many of the people wanted to put on a big show about the cultural richness of the area. "It is finally happening in 1982," said Jo Dubarry. "The St Albans Show is a great finale for our project. We have always wanted to perform a St Albans story when people were ready to get involved."³

The St Albans Community Youth Club was also a major supporter of the project. Lorna Cameron would later write:

"In June [1982] we held the biggest ever performance event in town and that was 'The St Albans Show'. It was an idea that developed several years earlier through Jo Dubarry who was the principal at the East Primary School – they received a grant for a Cultural Festival and the balance of that grant was put towards the new show. Sunshine Council took some convincing but finally came up with \$500 and Keilor gave us free use of the public hall as rehearsal space. The Australia Council and the Victorian ministry for the Arts chipped in. During the year the Club decided to do something even more special to promote the area in a positive way and came up with the idea of holding a 'St Albans Show' and asked the West Theatre Company to assist in running the whole thing. The project aimed to boost community confidence by putting the story of St Albans on stage, to celebrate its multicultural heritage. In June 1982 the show was held under a circus big top on Errington Reserve. The West Theatre team included a number of actors, designers and visual artists, and a director, funded by the Australia Council."

In the early 1980s Dubarry also supported the development of the first kindergarten at St Alban The Martyr Church by offering a room for workshops - mothers (pre-school children welcome) could use the art room facilities and a teacher if necessary.

There were a couple of major disasters for the Dubarry family in the early 1980s. Some people say

² Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. Periodic (National : 1977 - 2011) 1 August 1977 (Issue No.P7) p32

³ St Albans Bridge 1982

their home on Mt Macedon was destroyed in the 1983 bushfires, and John Edward Dubarry died in 1984 at age 73. However, Jo Dubarry kept working and was still at St Albans East in 1985. She was aged 61 and perhaps looking forward to retiring.

In 2019 Jo Dubarry was aged 95 and her health had deteriorated. She might have been living with her daughter in Kyneton. It is not known when she passed away.



John and Jo Dubarry had one daughter, Roberta Marjorie Dubarry, who was probably born about 1950. Very little is known about her, but she followed in her mother's footsteps by becoming a teacher.

In 1972 she was the French teacher at Kealba High School. Some students remember her as *"an interesting woman who always remembered all her students."*

Roberta Dubarry was Year 8 Coordinator at St Albans High in 1980.⁴

In 1980 Roberta Marjorie Dubarry was listed as a student living with her parents at Macedon, which suggests she may have returned to studies.

In the mid-1980s Robert was teaching at the Kyneton High School. She must have spent some time at the Kyneton school because she left them a wonderful legacy:

*"On Thursday 7th March, our 2023 Languages award recipient, Kofi Chambers, was hosted to a morning tea by the benefactor of the \$1000 scholarship, Roberta DuBarry. This was an opportunity for them to meet and for the school to present a letter and certificate of appreciation to Roberta. Roberta is a past staff member and taught French language during her many years of service at Kyneton High School. She is a strong advocate for public education and has demonstrated this commitment by sponsoring two significant scholarships, one for Languages and another for Performing Arts, which will be available to students in Year 10 for the next 25 years."*⁵

Roberta Marjorie Dubarry passed way in 2024, aged in her 70s.



Roberta Dubarry (front row second left) at Kealba High School 1972

Written by Joseph Ribarow January 2026

⁴ St Albans High School, Alba magazine "Flashback" 1980

⁵ <https://kynetonhigh.vic.edu.au/news/17364/>