

OATLEY PARK

Notes by Alan Fairley

Area. 45 hectares. Adjoins Lime Kiln Bay Wetlands and Oatley Heights Park and linked by bush corridors to narrow but substantial bush reserves fringing South Peakhurst and Lugarno.

Formation. An area of 112 acres was dedicated for Public Recreation in the NSW Government Gazette on 25th March 1887. In the following year a proclamation was made in the Gazette (29 May 1888) declaring that under the Public Parks Act of 1884 the “the land at Limekiln Bay, Georges River, which was dedicated for the purpose of public recreation... be a public park and that it be known by the name of “Peakhurst Park”. Trustees were appointed, one of whom was Myles McRae who owned an adjacent grant of 81 acres on which he ran cattle. McRae was one of the leading proposers for setting aside the area as a park. The entry to his paddock was at the top of Mulga Road.

In 1906 the Local Government Act authorised municipal councils to take over as Trustees of public parks. Hurstville Council requested the Dept of Lands to vest the trusteeship of Peakhurst Park in their hands. Council was advised that the current Trustees (M.McRae, H. Patrick, J.G. Griffin, J. Sproule and T. Peake) would have to resign their trusteeship first. Eventually Hurstville Council was appointed Trustee on 20 May 1908. In March 1922, the name of the reserve was changed to “Oatley Park”.

Oatley Baths. The sandy bay of Oatley Park has long been used as a swimming spot for local residents. In December 1919, Mortdale P & C Association applied for the beach as a “bath site”. The Oatley Swimming Club was founded in 1927 and used the beach. The site was significantly re-constructed in 1930 and stone walls, a stone wharf and a protective shark net were built at Sandy Point Baths. In 1934-35 the baths were extended to 6½ acres. Piles for the sharkproof netting and jetty were turpentine logs from Levingston’s property at Riverwood.

Gallipoli Pine. About 1919 an Aleppo Pine was planted at the main park entrance. Oral tradition is that the seed was collected from Lone Pine on the Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey. It is believed to be one of only two such plantings known in Australia. The pine is still growing strongly.

Depression work. During the Great Depression (1929-1933) significant changes were made to the park. Roads were constructed by men on the Unemployment Relief Scheme. It was proposed to construct a scenic road around the foreshores from Jewfish Point to Oatley Park, over Lime Kiln Bay to Lorraine Street, Peakhurst. Roads were built around the oval, in from Douglas Haig Street past Hills Lookout and down to Lime Kiln Bay. Paths and lookouts were constructed as well as the castellated kiosk known as The Castle.

World War 2. In July 1942, the 26th Field Company of the Royal Australian Engineers was moved from Carss Park to Oatley Park. Many young men from the St George area had been called up to the militia after the Japanese bombing of Darwin. After gathering at Kogarah Drill Hall, they marched to Kogarah railway station where they caught a train to Ingleburn Military Camp for training. By Easter 1942, they returned to camp in Carss Park. Captain Sindel was put in charge. Heavy rains flooded the camp in May and the soldiers had to live in a nearby school or were sent home. It was decided to move the whole camp to Oatley Park. The men caught the train to Oatley station and marched up the hill to the park.

Several temporary structures were assembled to accommodate about 250 soldiers, including a mess tent and kitchen erected below the main rations tent and quartermaster's store. Shower blocks were at first open to the elements, but later enclosed with galvanised iron. Water was piped for cold showers from outside the park. An "Aldershot oven" was made from a 44 gallon drum cut in halves lengthways. There was also a storehouse for engineering and road building equipment. Not far from the kitchen, across a rocky gully, the company built a timber and rope bridge. A jack hammer was used to excavate the rock into which a log was placed to form an anchor for the attached ropes.

Time was spent doing engineering exercises, such as road building, constructing barbed wire coastal defences, tank barriers in the sand, inspecting road and rail culverts and planning to use explosives to blow them up. There was also bridge building training over the Hacking River at Audley. Guard duty was in a hessian tent near the park's main entrance. The men slept in tents; the NCO's tents were near today's children's playground. There was a galvanised iron dry canteen stocking tobacco and soft drinks near the oval. Social contact was common with nearby locals and the men attended a number of football matches, dances and church meetings at Oatley. By January 1943, after only 6 months, most of these soldiers had joined the AIF for service in New Guinea so the 26th Field Company was disbanded.

26th Field Company was replaced in Oatley Park by the Tasmanian 12th Field Company, RAE, which was stationed there for 10 weeks. This company of 250 men commanded by Captain W.A. Davey had gone into camp in 1942 at Brighton near Hobart to do training for basic infantry skills and engineering tasks. They left Brighton about 10 January 1943 for Melbourne, then by steam train to Sydney, electric train to Oatley and marched up the hill to Oatley Park. Here they were to be re-equipped for tropical service. The short stay was a happy period for most men, for some like a holiday. As well as basic training, there were swimming classes in Oatley Baths and outings to Blue Mountains, Taronga Park Zoo and Luna Park. The Oatley people showed kindness and hospitality. There was dancing with local girls at Rockdale every Thursday night and at Oatley every Friday night, as well as horse racing, local picture shows and drinking at Tom Uglys Hotel. Some kind Oatley women even did the men's washing. This unit left Oatley Park on 7 April 1943 for Townsville and then onto New Guinea in July 1943. Hurstville Council was later advised by the Australian Military Forces that it intended to cease using Oatley Park on 27 October 1943.

The concrete floor of a kitchen, ordinance store and shower block, some stone steps and a small concrete map of Tasmania can still be seen.

[See next page for Threats to Oatley Park 1955 - 2005](#)

PROPOSALS AND THREATS TO OATLEY PARK, 1955-2005

Opposed by Oatley Flora & Fauna Conservation Society
as they would damage the park's natural values

1955	General bush vandalism; the reason for the Society being formed.
1956	Application for a Rifle Range in bush between Lime Kiln Bay and Waterfall Road. Clearing began but abandoned after protests.
1961	Olympic-sized pool for Sandy Bay, with concreted bottom and walls. Rejected by Council.
1964	Mangroves of Lime Kiln Bay to be filled in for a sporting complex and an extended golf course. Did not proceed at this stage.
1964	Proposal to extend road through Oatley Park, over Lime Kiln Bay to Peakhurst. Dumping of rocks for causeway begun.
1964	Plans for an Olympic Pool between the oval and the playground. Three acres of trees to be cleared. Provision of car park and widening of existing access roads. Opposed by Lands Department.
1966	Application for fireworks in Oatley Park.
1966	Proposal by Hurstville Council for a second oval in Oatley Park.
1967	Plans for a sporting complex in the mangrove area of Lime Kiln Bay still being considered.
1968	Application for permissive occupancy for a marina off Jewfish Bay. Cars to be parked in Oatley Park.
1968	Application for a private telephone to be installed in Oatley Park so that boat hirers could park and then telephone the above marina.
1969	Council policy of frequent burning off of park bushland.
1970	Proposals to run high tension power lines through park.
1971	Council application to tip household rubbish in Jewfish Bay.
1972	Council filling in of north arm of Lime Kiln Bay. It became Roberts Ave Garbage Tip.
1973-74	Council proposes to fill eastern arm of Lime Kiln Bay.
1975	Application for a Commonwealth grant to build a swimming pool in park.
1977	A water activities centre, with boat sheds, proposed by Scouts Association for Sandy Bay. Proposal eventually failed after 3 years.
1978	Application for a helicopter pad on Oatley Park oval. Refused by Council.
1985	Excessive hazard reduction burning by Fire Brigade. Opposition led eventually to a park fire policy.
2003	Hutchison Telecom communications tower and facilities constructed on edge of park oval. Removed after court action by Hurstville Council. OFF action part of community protest.
2003-04	Mountain bikes causing significant damage to park. Council Management Plan excludes mountain bikes at request of OFF.