

The Creation of Jubilee Park and its Oval. by Max Solling

The configuration of the Glebe waterfront was altered during the nineteenth century by extensive reclamation. Johnston's Creek, which began in Stanmore, and Orphan School Creek with its source on the University ridges, ran down through Glebe. Tidal swamps fringed with mangroves extended along these creeks before they emptied into Rozelle Bay. In 1878 the proprietors of Toxteth Park were reportedly carrying out reclamation work along Johnston's Creek in 1878.¹

As Glebe was filling up with houses, in December 1886 ratepayers at a public meeting urged the government to resume Allen's Glen for the purposes of public recreation.²

William Pritchard, former Leichhardt councillor, referred to the area in 1891 as "North Annandale a few years ago known as the stinkpot, a reputation earned for it by the horrible stench and miasma that came from the mangrove swamps" near the head of Rozelle Bay. The Sydney Freehold Land Building and Investment Company, both owner and financier of development of North Annandale Estate, had then begun reclaiming the swampy land, as did the Allen family who owned the other side of Johnston's Creek.³

Francis Abigail MLA urged Henry Parkes MLA and Premier to have swamp reclamation works carried out.⁴ The Public Works Department thus began construction in 1893 of a ballast dyke from the mouth of White's Creek to Glebe Point. A government dredge, the 'Groper', cut up the clay with rotating knives below. A vertical suction pipe was used to pump the dredged sediment half a mile, to be discharged behind the stone dyke. Reclamation of the swampy land was completed about 1897 when the precinct was levelled and grassed.⁵ A rising mortality rate, attributed, in part, to insanitary conditions, led to construction of the concrete and brick Johnston's Creek stormwater channel between 1895 and 1900 by the Public Works Department, draining a large area.⁶ The creek, it was observed, had been "reverently interred, a dream in cement marking the channel along which it wandered".⁷ An expanding sewerage system resulted in the construction of the great arches of two Monier reinforced concrete aqueducts over Johnston's Creek and White's Creek in 1897.

By the end of 1898 reclaimed land in a rough state stretched from Glebe Point wharf to Allen's Bush.⁸ Five years earlier in a paddock known as Eglintoun, the Glebe Council had employed twenty casual labourers on drainage works beside the Chinese gardens operating there.⁹ In 1899 the Minister for Lands appointed the Councils of Annandale and Glebe as joint trustees of the new reserve, though doubt was expressed about the councils' power to expend money on such lands, and uncertainty about municipal boundaries.¹⁰

Though proposals for a "large and commodious swimming baths" at Rozelle Bay in 1900 and 1912 never materialised, Glebe residents formed a Glebe district swimming club and a ladies swimming club which flourished before the war.¹¹ A new boatshed, pontoon and floating stage on the waterfront at Glebe Point in April 1907 became Sydney University Rowing Club.¹²

Lacking funds to develop the reclamation known from 1900 as Federal Park, both councils approached the government. Though an exasperated Glebe Town Clerk told Annandale Council in 1904 it was "useless to approach the government for money", they persisted with a joint deputation to the Minister for Lands in July 1905. In 1906 Glebe Council began preparing its wasteland for tree planting when relations between the trustee councils had become strained.¹³ Annandale strongly objected to Glebe's proposed use by of the area as a garbage tip for house garbage and road sweepings, while Annandale had indicated it proposed to destroy refuse there by incineration.¹⁴

Despite the unkempt nature of Federal Park's grounds it became a popular place between 1902 and 1908 for a variety of sporting activities - cricket, rugby union, soccer, and hurling especially, and it was also a haunt for Sunday gambling schools until this was suppressed by police.¹⁵

In his 1907 mayoral report P.C.Lucas noted that the control of Federal Park was not yet Settled, but he hoped the government would soon divide the park between Glebe and Annandale boroughs.¹⁶ The joint trusteeship of Federal Park, then said to cover 16 acres, was terminated in February 1909, with each municipality to now manage their own park under the terms of the Local Government Act.¹⁷ On 23 September 1908, an area of 10.5 acres dedicated to public recreation use in Glebe was enlarged after the Crown acquired further land from G.B. Allen. The resulting new reserve covered thirteen acres one rood.¹⁸

Part of Glebe Council's Jubilee celebrations marking fifty years of local government on 2 August 1909 was to rename their portion of the reserve Jubilee Park, with Lady Chelmsford planting a tree there, Governor Chelmsford unveiling a memorial fountain and a tea party being held at Glebe Town Hall.¹⁹ Robert Edward (1848-1932) wrote To Council congratulating it for "laudable and successful efforts to beautify the Glebe Jubilee Park".²⁰ Edward was hardly a disinterested spectator. He had just completed building nineteen single storey brick terraces adjoining the park in Eglintoun (now Eglinton) Road.²¹

Twelve trees donated by the Botanic Gardens were planted on the area's western boundary at a ceremony in October 1908, at which Glebe MLA J.A.Hogue, mayor Cole of Glebe and mayor Wells of Annandale were present. Glebe Council had already fenced its area and installed park seats.²² Council, anxious to have an oval of their own, began construction of a picket fence around the oval in August 1909, ignoring protests from the Glebe Ratepayers Association and the St Johns Institute at fencing off portion of the park.²³ In 1910 flower beds were established in the park, a Council park ranger, Thomas Dowse (1866-1933) appointed, and the Glebe Municipal Band played "Sacred and Classical music" there on Sunday afternoons.²⁴

Glebe Council expended over one thousand pounds improving the park, and acquired pieces of land in 1909 and 1910. J.A.Hogue formally opened a half acre piece of land at the foot of Glebe Point Road, previously vested in the Sydney Harbour Trust, on 31 August 1910 where Council "planted trees, provided seats and converted the area into a beauty spot". Adjoining the new public reserve was the University boatshed.²⁵ Jubilee Park was further enlarged in June 1911 when Niels Nielsen, Minister for Lands, agreed to contribute 700 pounds to resume five residential allotments on the northern side of Eglintoun (now Eglinton) Road, with Glebe Council required to match the government's contribution.²⁶

Inadequate Glebe Council records on park tree plantings do not permit tree dating with any precision, however the Moreton Bay figs, Canary Islands palms and some rainforest trees generally date from the period between 1906 and 1910. Second and third grade cricket matches in the Sydney district competition, and in the City & Suburban Association competition were first played at the "Sports Oval". A pavilion was constructed in 1910, and a scoreboard erected in 1913.²⁷ Glebe District Rugby Union Club established a Rifle Club in 1915 and a miniature rifle range in the new park.²⁸

On the eve of the Great War mayor Frederick Artlett proudly declared "Our park has been well maintained and our street plantations are bright spots and reflect credit on Mr Dowse who has always exhibited energy and ability in his duties". He also reported council had decided "to assist in the movement of children's playgrounds".²⁹ After the war carnivals, galas and fairs were conducted at Jubilee Park on Saturdays helping to raise funds for the local Distress Society, the War Memorial Committee and the Workingmen's institute.³⁰ Jubilee Oval became the home ground of Glebe District Cricket Club with its first grade fixtures played there from 1923, and in the same year a rotunda was built in the park to accommodate the Glebe Brass Band.

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- 1 Sydney Morning Herald 19 August 1878 p3
 - 2 Sydney Morning Herald 23 December 1886 p8
 - 3 Sydney Morning Herald 1 October 1891 p6
 - 4 F.Abigail to H.Parkes, 12 August 1889, ML
 - 5 M.N.Clarke & L.Coltheart, A Heritage of Waste, Fifth National Conference on Engineering Heritage, 1990, Perth, 3-5 December 1990, ppl-7
 - 6 Report & minutes from the Select Committee on the Claim of Glebe Borough Council in respect of Sewerage Works, V & P NSWLA. 1901, pl131,1156. Sydney Public Works Annual Report V & P NSWLA 1902, Vol 5 p 963 Water. Heritage Item. Johnston's Creek Stormwater Channel No 55 ppl-5
 - 7 J.A.Tunncliffe, Grose Farm, Hermes, August 1918
 - 8 Letter W.Barrack to editor, Sydney Morning Herald 20 December 1898 p8
 - 9 Sydney Morning Herald 8 June 1893 p8
 - 10 Sydney Morning Herald 2 October 1899 p6 GMC minutes 2 January 1900 re gazettal.
 - 11 C.T.Burfitt letter to editor Sydney Morning Herald 2 March 1895 p7 GMC minutes 2 January 1900 p123, 21 March 1912 p322 Sydney Morning Herald 28 September 1910 p14, 14 March 1911 p10
 - 12 Sydney Morning Herald 13 November 1906 p3, 8 April 1907 p10
 - 13 GMC minutes 1904, 1906. Sydney Morning Herald 7 July 1905 p3
 - 14 Sydney Morning Herald 29 August 1906 p4
 - 15 Sydney Morning Herald 1 February 1902 p7 4 May 1907 pp16 9 May 1908 p7,27 April 1904 p6
 - 16 Sydney Morning Herald 8 February 1907 p8
 - 17 Sydney Morning Herald 11 February 1909 p14
 - 18 GMC minutes 23 November 1911
 - 19 Sydney Morning Herald 3 August 1909 p7
 - 20 Glebe Council Parks Committee Book minutes 19 August 1909 p295
 - 21 Lots 14 to 23 DP4444 at Glebe
 - 22 Sydney Morning Herald 26 October 1908 p5
 - 23 GMC minutes 19 August 1909, 7 June 1910
 - 24 Sydney Morning Herald 5 September 1910 p7, GMC minutes 17 March 1910 p208
 - 25 Sydney Morning Herald 1 September 1910 p3
 - 26 Sydney Morning Herald 14 June 1911 p18
 - 27 GMC minutes 19 September 1910, 20 July 1911 p284, 11 September 1913.
 - 28 Sydney Morning Herald 23 February 1915 p9
 - 29 GMC minutes Mayoral Report 1914 Sydney Morning Herald 13 February 1914 p5
 - 30 GMC minutes 1 December 1919 p156, 6 December 1920 pl92, 4 November 1921 p221