

Ashfield Municipal Council

Archives

Administration Building
260 Liverpool Road, Ashfield 2131

PO Box 1145, ASHFIELD 1800

Archive Hours

10am to 4pm

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday
Appointment necessary

Council's archival collection includes records dating back to 1872, when Council commenced business.

The collection includes records which were created & used by Council aldermen and officers. They relate to the specific functions & responsibilities of Council. Most are official Council records, in their original format.

A small number of records which were not generated by Council but which are closely related to the Ashfield area are also held in the custody of the Archives.

Many other record types, useful for various research topics, are held including a small collection of photographs.

For more information about the Archives Collection, please ask for our brochure.

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The story behind

Ashfield Park



Ashfield Municipal
Council Archives
Leaflet Series No.4



**Ashfield
Municipal Council**

Purchase

Urban myth has it that intrigue and secrecy surrounded the establishment of Ashfield Park. A more realistic version of events sees the Park founded on pragmatic grounds. Either way, the future existence of Ashfield Park hung in the balance on 9 June 1879.

Lobbying of representatives of State Parliament by Council members and local residents for a substantial park in the suburb started shortly after the Municipality was established in 1871. Ashfield Council had no way of raising sufficient funds to buy enough land for a park. Lobbying did not produce the desired result and was undertaken in uncertain political times. Eventually, a deputation of aldermen and concerned citizens, lead by Mayor Holborow, were granted an audience with the NSW Premier Sir Henry Parkes, late in May 1879.

It appeared that the Premier was interested in establishing a Park, but where, and how much of an investment the State government was prepared to make, remained unclear. One consideration was that a large park in the suburb would take away valuable revenue raising potential from the Council. In addition, Cabinet approval was required and a suitable location needed to be found. As it happened, the entire Underwood Estate in the North Ward (approximately 100 acres) had been subdivided after a protracted legal battle based on the will of the late James Underwood, and was to be auctioned on the 9 June that year for housing. The aldermen and residents of Ashfield were aware that the area would have provided an ideal location for a significant park for Ashfield.

The available information suggests that Sir Henry Parkes did not communicate with the Ashfield delegation between the time of their last audience and the auction. It seemed to residents of Ashfield and Council's representatives that a golden opportunity was slipping away.

At the auction, a number of the land speculators bought large tracts of the Estate, including Mr Henry Moses (a resident of Ashfield) who acquired 20 acres of building land between Ormond, Pembroke and Orpington Streets and Parramatta Road. Unknown to the people of Ashfield at the time, Sir Henry Parkes had instructed Henry Moses to buy the land on behalf of the Government. The cost was approximately £5,000, and Ashfield had its Park.

Earlier

The area of land that now makes up Ashfield Park, prior to settlement, was forested and part of the territory of the Cadigal and Wangal peoples. The first European owner of the area that now includes Ashfield Park were four Privates in the NSW Corps who sold it to Henry Kable after a day. Henry Kable arrived in Australia on the First Fleet as a convict. He later became chief constable, a landowner and businessman in the colony. James Underwood, one of Henry Kable's business associates, bought the land, which appears to have been leased to settlers for a number of years before subdivision and the June 1879 auction.

Sundays in the Park

Ashfield Park is one of Sydney's oldest and most spectacular public recreation areas. Over the years though, the Park has not always been as tranquil as it appears now.

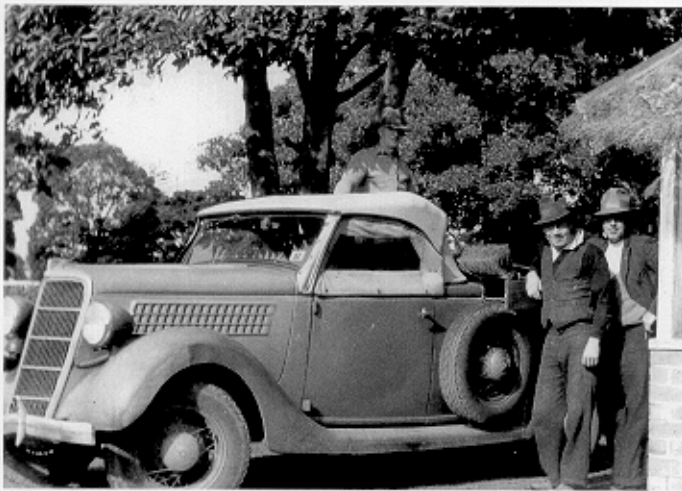
In 1926, for instance, the newly appointed Gardener FW McLaren stated in a report to the Town Clerk: "In Ashfield Park I find much room for improvement." At the time, he found the Park untidy, with many dead and half-dead trees and shrubs. The water supply too, was unreliable. McLaren's enthusiasm however, found adequate support from Council and the Parks Committee, particularly from Alderman Hedger. In 1930 for instance, begonia bulbs were ordered for the Park from Holland. Also in 1930, Alderman Hedger offered to make a gift of a collection of ferns provided a bush house was erected in the Park.

Unfortunately, the great depression prevented the bush house being built, but today, looking north-west from the War Memorial, the outlines of a well camouflaged bush house (Begonia House) can be seen where seedlings are grown. Looking north-east, from the Memorial, two avenues of Canary Island Palm trees can be seen intersecting in a triangle of parkland bordered on two sides by Parramatta Road and Ormond Street.

Among other features of interest in the Park is a Summer House with tiles that come from as far away as France. At diagonally opposite ends of the Park are the sandstone block ("BM79", thought to have been a replacement of the original 5 1/2 mile marker from Macquarie Place), and the distinctive sandstone pillars and metal gates from Schuldham Hall, Croydon.

Some things have disappeared from the Park in the course of its evolution. Perhaps most notable was the bandstand, originally built at Farm Cove as a commemorative pavilion on the site of the landing of Australia's first Governor General. The bandstand was opened in Ashfield Park in 1903 but removed in the 1940s because of its increasingly rapid decay.

As a social centre, Ashfield Park has few competitors. Since proclamation in 1885, it has played host to, for example, the NSW Rugby Union as a training ground, the Ashfield Bowling Club (since 1889), countless ceremonies, bands, organisational meetings and events. During the First World War, it was the subject of a withering set of letters to Council from anti-conscriptionists who accused Council of allowing conscriptionists to hold rallies there.



Nowadays, at the War Memorial (erected in 1921) in the middle of the Park, wreaths pay tribute to the fallen of a number of wars and emergencies since the 1914-1918 war.

The emphasis has been to try to maintain the beauty of the Park whilst providing maximum accessibility to residents and others wishing to use it. The work of Rusty McLaren was instrumental in this respect. Ashfield Park has been known for the diversity of its trees as well as for the creative use of flowers and flowerbeds. At sunset, the shadows of trees are cast right across the Park.

It was said in the first years of the Park that you could see all the way to the clock tower in Martin Place. The view now towards the city is vastly more intricate.

The importance of the Park was formally recognised by the National Trust in 1986 when it was listed in its Register.

References

Correspondence files held in the Archive at Ashfield Municipal Council

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