



Burwood Park

A Short History by Chery Kemp

Burwood Park is one of the most important Victorian era urban parks in Sydney. Few Victorian era parks have survived with any semblance of their original layouts, so in this respect, Burwood Park is a rare gem.



The southeast corner of Burwood Park looking south along Burwood Road when trams were running. Burwood Post Office can just be glimpsed in the distance on the far left.

Burwood was originally covered by Turpentine-Ironbark forest¹, none of which survives in Burwood Park today.

Originally part of a land grant made to Thomas Rowley, the Adjutant of the NSW Corps, by Governor Hunter on 3rd August 1799, and named by him 'Burwood', the Burwood Park land was resumed as a park in October 1882, from the remnants of the Burwood Villa estate. The area had been known as Edrop's Bush - C.A. Henderson saw it as a lad in 1855 and described it as follows: "Close to our residence was Edrop's Bush, consisting of about fifteen acres of the original forest. Edrop's Bush was the home of many birds. Any birds coming to the district would naturally make for so fine a shelter. Here one might see large hawks, cranes, moorporks, kookaburras and gill-birds when in season. I saw a kookaburra dart down on a snake here and carry it to the top of a tall tree, then drop it, and repeat the process. The Kingfishers had a nest here in an old leaning apple-tree. Small birds were also plentiful, yellow robins, black caps, silver eyes, yellow hummers, ring coachmen, the diamond bird, a ventriloquist and many others. Then there were Blue Mountain parrots, King parrots, parroquits and green leeks in their season, but there were no magpies that I remember except the peewhit." ²

¹ Benson, Doug "Taken for Granted: the Urban Bushland of Sydney"

² Page 73, Dunlop, Eric "Harvest of the Years: The Story of Burwood", 1974

It is difficult to know what some of the species (both of flora and fauna) were that Henderson refers to, but the “leaning apple tree” may have been an angophora costata, a native of Sydney (not the European fruiting apple tree) - unusual nevertheless as it generally grows on the north shore. It is also unusual that King parrots (now only seen in the Blue Mountains) were seen - the “green leeks”, may be a reference to immature and female King parrots, which are green with no red on them. In any case, the quote above is a fascinating glimpse into Burwood’s environmental history. Burwood Park today is the realm of Sulphur crested cockatoos, corellas, ducks, ibis, seagulls, pigeons, rainbow lorikeets and noisy native miner birds.

The area had previously been known as Edrop’s Paddock, and possibly the lush bush recalled by Henderson was actually regrowth. In any case, this was all swept away in favour of formal plantings of ficus trees and later Canariensis date palms.

Mayor of Burwood in 1887, R.W. Hardie (of Hardie and Gorman Real Estate fame) who was the owner of the mansion ‘Ilfracombe’ to the west of Burwood Park, (commemorated in the name of Ilfracombe Avenue) organised the first ornamental plantings in Burwood Park. Hardie appears to have been responsible for the planting of the fig (*ficus*) trees in the park, many of which still survive. “The prize winning design adopted for the Park’s development was roughly in the form of a Union Jack - a useful enough lay-out for the paths, though it unfortunately divided the area into sections rather too small to permit of any adequate sporting field.”³

In 1904 Burwood Council “decided to alienate a portion of Burwood Park for the construction of a bowling green...and the Burwood Bowling Club was opened on 26th November 1904...In 1921 Council further permitted the Burwood Tennis Club to lay down two tennis courts in the Park, and a small cricket field was later developed on the western side.”⁴



Apart from these sporting facilities, the Park over time acquired a number of monuments. In 1902 the bandstand in the centre of the Park was built to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII.

³ Ditto

⁴ Pages 102-103, Dunlop, Eric, “Harvest of the Years: The Story of Burwood”, 1974

A memorial to William Paisley, the unfortunate Burwood Mayor who was murdered by the Town Clerk, is near the bandstand. This memorial was originally a fountain, but is no longer operational. On February 12, 1894, the Town Clerk, William Redfearn, burnt various Council records, shot the Mayor, William Paisley, and then shot



himself. This monument

[pictured to the left of the bandstand above and left] was erected in Burwood Park in Paisley's memory (Paisley Road, Croydon was also named after him). Curiously, in Rookwood Cemetery Redfearn has a headstone, but Paisley's grave is unmarked.

In the 1930s, on the western side of the Park a small Burwood Villa Obelisk was erected commemorating Burwood Villa, the house which Burwood was named after.

This monument stands east of where Burwood House or Burwood Villa stood. The house was built in 1814 by Alexander Riley, a Sydney businessman, on land originally granted to Thomas Rowley in 1799 by Governor Hunter. Rowley named his land "Burwood" after Burwood Farm where he had lived in Cornwall. Rowley's land extended from Parramatta Road to Nicholson Street and from The Boulevarde, Strathfield, to Croydon Railway Station.

Rowley died in 1806 leaving his property to his five children. The Trustee gave approval in 1812 for the property to be sold to Alexander Riley for £520. However, Thomas Rowley's children discovered the property had been sold against the orders of their father's will, and a court case followed, with the outcome in favour of Rowley's children. The estate was then shared between them. After 1834 the estate was subdivided and lots of "generous proportions" were sold.

Burwood Villa was demolished in 1937, after having been renovated around the turn of the century. The Burwood Villa estate began to be subdivided in the 1880s, however the actual site of the house was not subdivided until 1937, hence the houses built on the land date from this period.

Following the end of World War I, a 'Victory Arch' was erected as a war memorial at the southeastern entrance to the park. The massive War Memorial Arch commemorates the First World War of 1914-1918. On its tablets are the names of 937 men and 4 women (nurses) who



volunteered for service, and of these 149 died serving in the war. The War Memorial Arch was unveiled on 25th April 1923 (Anzac day). The arch is a Victory Arch, harking back to the Roman habit of celebrating victories in war, a rare type of war memorial in Australia, and of a grand scale. To drive the point home that the monument is a victory arch, its inscription is “Thanks be unto God who gave us this victory”, a biblical phrase.

Following World War II, the Sandakan monument [*pictured below in 2006*] was erected near the centre of the Park. The Sandakan Monument honours the prisoners of war who died at Sandakan in British North Borneo (now Sabah) or on ‘death marches’ from there to Ranau in 1945. All but six - out of 2500 - died of disease or were executed in the last months of the war. This monument was unveiled on 1 August 1993 by the then Prime Minister Paul Keating. A relief map on top of the monument shows the route of the death march, and on the sides are inscribed both a detailed narrative of the events and the names of the victims who had enlisted from the Sydney area. Asterisks against the names of 21 Burwood men give the monument a local character which connects it to the Memorial Arch. “Three times more men died at Sandakan and at Ranau” Paul Keating said in his unveiling speech “than died in those heroic battles in Kokoda and in New Guinea...Yet until now Sandakan has been forgotten.” But not by Keating, whose father’s brother Private Billy Keating had died there on 3 February 1945. Paul Keating unveiled the monument both as Prime Minister and as member of a bereaved family.



