

Fairfield Park

With the removal of the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum, its patients in 1925 and most of its buildings soon after, the area was permanently reserved in November 1926 for recreation purposes.¹ Subtracted from this area was that of the Queen's Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital (41 acres). Prior to the Yarra Bend Park, adjoining parkland of 15 acres had already been reserved in 1914, and the park, reserved a year later for Public Purposes.² Through this latter reserve, an M.M.B.W. water main had existed since 1878; resting on abutments set into the bank and piers midstream (This pipe bridge was damaged in the 1934 floods and was rebuilt in 1937 with a 30" main from Kew to Richmond and an 18" pipe to South Melbourne).³

1. a) Lemon Ch.10 p.26
b) Gov. Gaz. 1926 p.3054
2. a) Gov. Gaz. 1914 p.1202
b) Gov. Gaz. 1915 p.3531

3. a) R.C. Seeger, A
*Chronological Survey
of the Development
of Melbourne's Water
Supply (Melb.1957)*
b) M.M.B.W. Detail Plan

M.M.B.W. Record
Plan 63

Swimming carnivals commenced for the Fairfield Park Swimming Club in March 1908 and many followed: photographs of these events show Fairfield Park to be a grassed embankment (*Weekly Times*, 12/3/ 1909 p.25) with a timber landing for boating at the river. In December 1932, the Fairfield Swimming and Life Saving Clubhouse was opened by the Heidelberg Shire President. Later photographs show, diving boards and extended landings at the base of this building (*Heidelberg* 1937)

After fencing in 1912, the present ornamental garden was planted next to the Heidelberg Road and the terraced rockeries established on the embankment. Today an avenue of *Platanus orientalis* (Oriental Planes) (C) traverses the perimeter of the roadside flat and continues south to the Fairfield Hospital. Between this avenue and the road, a number of exotic and native ornamental trees have been planted. These include Bunya Bunya *Arcaucaria bidwillii*, Roman Cypress, Atlantic Cedars and Silky Oaks (A); together resembling the original character of Northcote Park. However, here the character has been preserved; with little unsympathetic planting having been introduced. The She-oaks and Cypress blend with other conifers with a predominant dark green foliage. An occasional Yellow Gum *E. leucocorydon* (D) is sited between these groves but does not intrude, whilst existing Yellow Gums (D) at the north-west corner have been reinforced by further planting, although there has been a noticeable loss of the Cypress border (B) which once enclosed the park from Heidelberg Road.

Beyond the Plane Tree avenue, the species become more heterogenous; being more so as they approach the river bank and the clubhouse. Plant groupings however, are evident such as the Cabbage Tree Palms encircling the former rotunda site (M) and the repetition of ornamental trees along the top of the nearby bank viz. Atlantic Cedar (N), Bunya Pine, Tree and Roman Cypress (N). A nearby track to the river is lined with mature Radiata Pines (L). Further east are Lemon Scented Gum (F), Silky Oak (E) and Mahogany Gums (E). A dominant part of the lower bank is a large English Oak (K) with the Silver Poplars clumping on adjacent banks (J).

Note: Fairfield Park was levelled and fenced in 1912; a Mr Brown of the Heidelberg Shire Parks and Gardens Committee laid out the paths and planting; a gardener was employed to realise the plan in detail; Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department and renowned landscape gardener (Catani Gardens, St Kilda; Alexandra Avenue and Gardens) designed the rockeries on the hillside facing the river which were complete by 1914; 400 trees from the Mt Macedon Nursery were planted, a picket fence built and an iron portal placed at the entrance in 1914.

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Base: Lands Department 1960



Of particular importance is the view across to an extensive hedge-row of Cypress and Pines (D) which form the dark green backdrop to the lower River Red Gums, Blackwoods and Golden Wattles which encircle the river bank to the south (R). Other notable views exist to the Kew Lunatic Assylum and the M.M.B.W. pipe bridge.

Recommendations

Generally seek out and reinforce the existing character of the areas viz. Maintain the dark green foliage dominance on the upper section (i.e. preserve the conifers) and replant soon slower growing avenues such as the Silky Oaks at the Heidelberg Road alignment. Retain the framing rows of cypress and seek to regain some of the former enclosing elements to screen out the intrusive Heidelberg Road viz. a medium height hedge (formerly of Privet) at the boundary would enhance the feeling of place in the park. At the bank and fringe, retain and replace significant existing species. Attempts might be made to re-establish the rockeries and planting (S). In adjacent areas the River Red, Mahogany and Yellow Gums should be the major species retained and replanted as (O) .