

The following extract is taken from the "Yarra Bend Conservation Plan", provided by Parks Victoria on 5 March 1999.

4. Occupation / Area : YARRA BEND ASYLUM

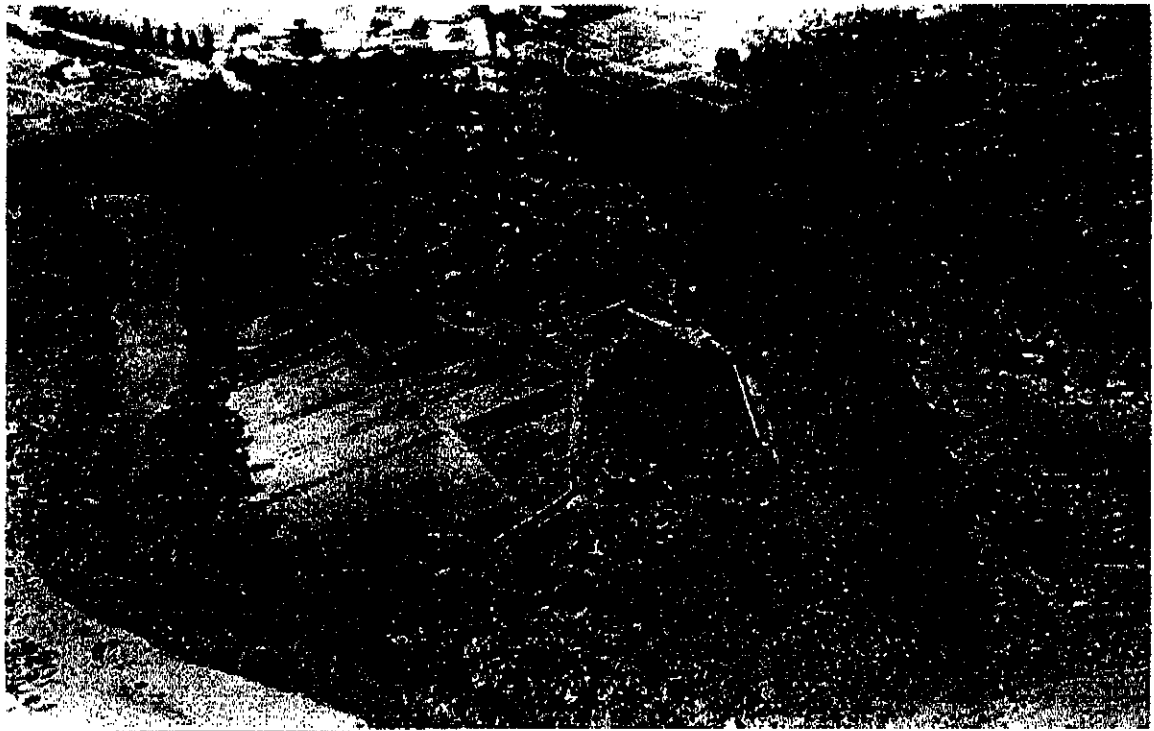


Fig 3. Aerial View of Yarra Bend Asylum and Surroundings (1922)

Historical Summary

(Primary References:- Andrew Lemon, The Northcote Side of the River

- C.R.D. Brothers, Early Victorian Psychiatry, 1835-1952

- A. Deasey, Yarra Bend Park: Melbourne And Its Urban Wilderness'

- Yarra Bend was reserved as a suitably isolated area for the location of undesirable functions of the community from the earliest days of settlement, due to its natural inaccessibility.
- The Metropolitan Lunatic Asylum opened in October 1848, the first Asylum built for the purpose in Victoria.
- It served as this for 77 years, housing up to 1100 inmates at one time.
- The buildings were generally bluestone or brick, and formed an extensive complex, covering a substantial portion of the Yarra Bend site, particularly in the vicinity of the current golf clubhouse.
- The Asylum complex took on the appearance of a township in itself, with the numerous buildings providing their various functions, including residential divisions, staff residences, cottages, infirmaries &c. and being served by farm lands and vegetable gardens, set in a developed landscape containing a variety of exotic tree species, some of which still survive.
- The asylum contained its own cemetery, located by the river in the vicinity of the current practice fairway, the site now marked only by some exotic planting remnants. It is believed, though not confirmed, that the majority, if not all of the bodies were exhumed prior to the development of the park.

- The complex was superseded by the Willsmere Asylum in the 1870's, but continued to operate in an overcrowded and declining condition for a further 50 years. It finally closed in 1926. The decision to close it was taken at the beginning of the century, so nothing was done to update it in the 25 years it took to ultimately close. It became very dilapidated.
- The buildings, walls &c. on the site were progressively demolished in the late 1920's and 1930's to make way for the new park, and to obliterate the memory of the former uses and activities of the site.
- It has become evident that extensive below ground footings and other remnants from the asylum still remain on the site.

Summary of Significance

Yarra Bend is of State significance as the site of the earliest and one of the largest 19th Century lunatic asylums in Victoria, which was testament to the high levels of internment of the mentally insane or intellectually disabled in 19th century Victoria. It was the site where a large community suffered, lived and died, largely hidden from the awareness of mainstream society.

It is also of State significance as one of a diverse range of institutions to occupy the site which were linked only by their common marginality to mainstream society, including an aboriginal reserve, institution for the insane, infectious diseases hospitals, and a prison.

Extant Significant Physical Features

1. Asylum Gate Pillar memorial
2. Remnant Trees
3. Archaeological Remains

Conservation Policy

Conserve physical remnants and interpret the Asylum's occupation of the area.

4a. Occupation / Area : YARRA BEND ASYLUM
Significant Feature: GATE PILLAR
Plan Reference: A1

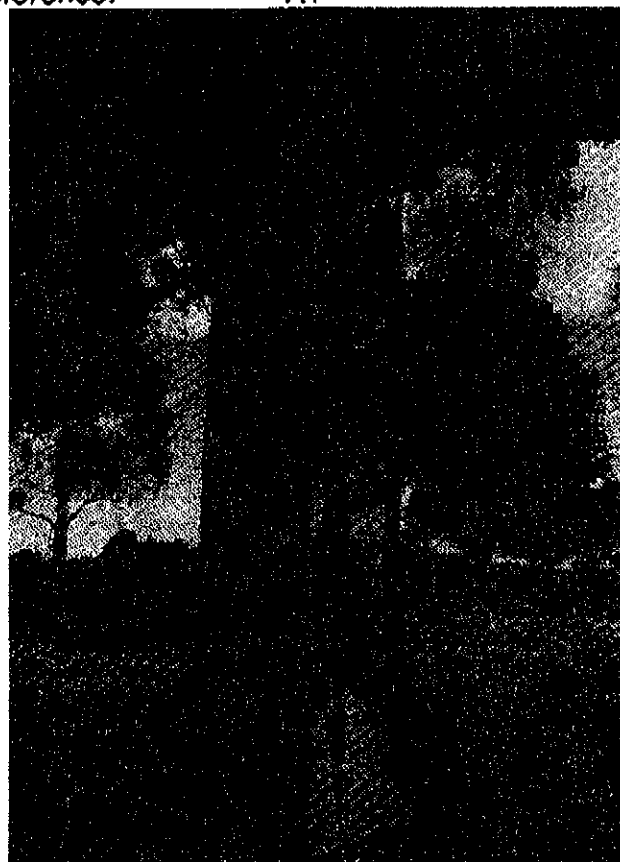


Fig 4. Remnant Gate Pillar, the only extant structure from the once extensive Asylum complex.

History & Description

The gate pillar, currently standing beside Yarra Bend Road just north of the freeway cutting, originally flanked the entrance to the enclosed Asylum Infirmary complex courtyard, and probably dates from c.1860. The Infirmary, including its wall and gates, survived after the closure of the Asylum, being reutilised firstly as a venereal diseases clinic, and later as the Fairlea Womens Prison (see separate Section). In 1985 however, the Prison was redeveloped, with a new wall and entrance gate being constructed. As part of these works, it was decided to retain and reconstruct a single gate pillar on a nearby site, across Yarra Bend Road from its original location as a memorial to the Asylum.

The pillar is a squared bluestone block structure standing some 5m high, on a 1200mm square tapered base. It is crowned with a simple cornice capital over featureless rectangular corbels and string course to all four faces. A brass plaque fixed to the column interprets its origins. Its lack of context in its open landscape setting detracts from the understanding of its origins.

Significance

The extensive structures and buildings which comprised the Asylum were systematically demolished with the development of the Park in the 1920's and 1930's. The gate pillar appears to have been deliberately retained by the Yarra Bend Trust as a memorial to the asylum, and remains the only surviving above ground built remnant of the complex. As such, it is of primary significance.

The Gate Pillar is included on the State Heritage Register.

Physical Condition

The Pillar is generally of sound structural condition, though the face stonework and mortar joints are considerably weathered. Despite its exposed location, its incidence of vandalism and graffiti appears minimal.

There is evidence of additional brass plaques having been mounted on the pillar in recent times, but have been removed.

Conservation Actions

- Monitor condition for mortar erosion and vandalism.

Financial Considerations

No substantial expenditure is required for conservation works to the pillar in the short to medium future.

4b Occupation / Area: Yarra Bend Asylum
Significant Feature: **REMNANT TREES**
Plan Reference: A2



Fig 5. Examples of mature exotic trees remnant from the Asylum period

History & Description *

The development of the asylum over its 128 years of occupation of the site saw the emergence and growth of a major institution comprising numerous buildings of various shapes and sizes, houses, gardens, agricultural areas, and domestic and institutional landscaping. A propensity to extensively use exotic tree species appears to be characteristic of this development.

By the time of the Asylum's closure, the site contained numerous specimens of mature exotic and native trees. Generally these were incorporated into the design and development of the new Park by Linaker where possible, and form the basis of the mixed exotic and indigenous species character of the park which survives today.

Significance

Apart from the Gate Pillar, the Park's exotic trees are the only remnant tangible indication of the former existence of Victoria's earliest asylum on the site. As people who use the park are mostly unaware of its history, the trees evoke a curiosity of an unknown past.

The trees are also fundamental to the design character of the Park, and exemplify the fashion both in the asylum and park development periods for the use of non indigenous landscape elements.

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Physical Condition

Apart from a minor student research project in 1996*, there has been no comprehensive identification and analysis of the remnant asylum vegetation in the Park. A preliminary assessment suggests that in general most specimens arguably identified as more than seventy years old appear to be in remarkably good condition, probably indicative of the fact that ailing specimens have been readily removed in the past.

Conservation Actions

- Undertake a plantings survey of the Yarra Bend section of the Park to identify the occupation activity associated with the major tree specimens.
- Preserve and protect all major plantings identified as dating to the Asylum period of Yarra Bend, as long as an acceptable condition of each specimen can be reasonably maintained. Ultimate loss of specimens through senescence or unavoidable disease however should be accepted.
- Provide interpretation of the origin of the exotic plantings within the park.

Financial Considerations

No substantial expenditure is required for conservation works to the asylum period trees in the foreseeable future, beyond that required for normal care and maintenance purposes.

A budget estimate in the order of \$2,000 would be ample for a professional Plantings Survey of the Park's exotic trees.

* A more detailed survey identifying and assessing the surviving asylum period plantings is provided in the student report "Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum, Yarra Bend Park, Melbourne - Conservation Analysis and Plan" prepared by Amanda Ryan, (Landscape Heritage 705\676) Melbourne University, November, 1996.