

HISTORY OF OATLEY MEMORIAL GARDENS

Presented to Oatley Heritage and Historical Society

By Rodger Robertson 2017



Oatley Memorial Gardens

Timeline

1885 Railway comes to Oatley along current park eastern side. Embankment on west side near Neville Street and cutting are most obvious remains. Land all around railway for sale.

1905 Rail line moved to current location. Old land still in Railway ownership.

1929 Railway gives/sells land between Oatley Parade and Oatley Avenue to enable Frederick Street to cross. Also Woonona Parade land crossing point is transferred to the two Councils.

Oatley Hotel buys land from current site to Oatley Parade. The hotel sells it back to Kogarah Council with proviso that there be a path to the station from hotel across the park.

1941 Railway sells land to Council from Woonona Parade to beyond cutting in the south.

1941 Sydney Water built the water pipeline from Woronora Dam to Penshurst along the park.

1943/4 Kogarah Council adds the "Oatley Embankment Park" to its reserves. It is continued to be called the Oatley Embankment Park especially the southern area. Sometimes it was called Oatley Reserve Gardens especially the area to the north of Frederick Street. It is also known as Oatley Reserve.

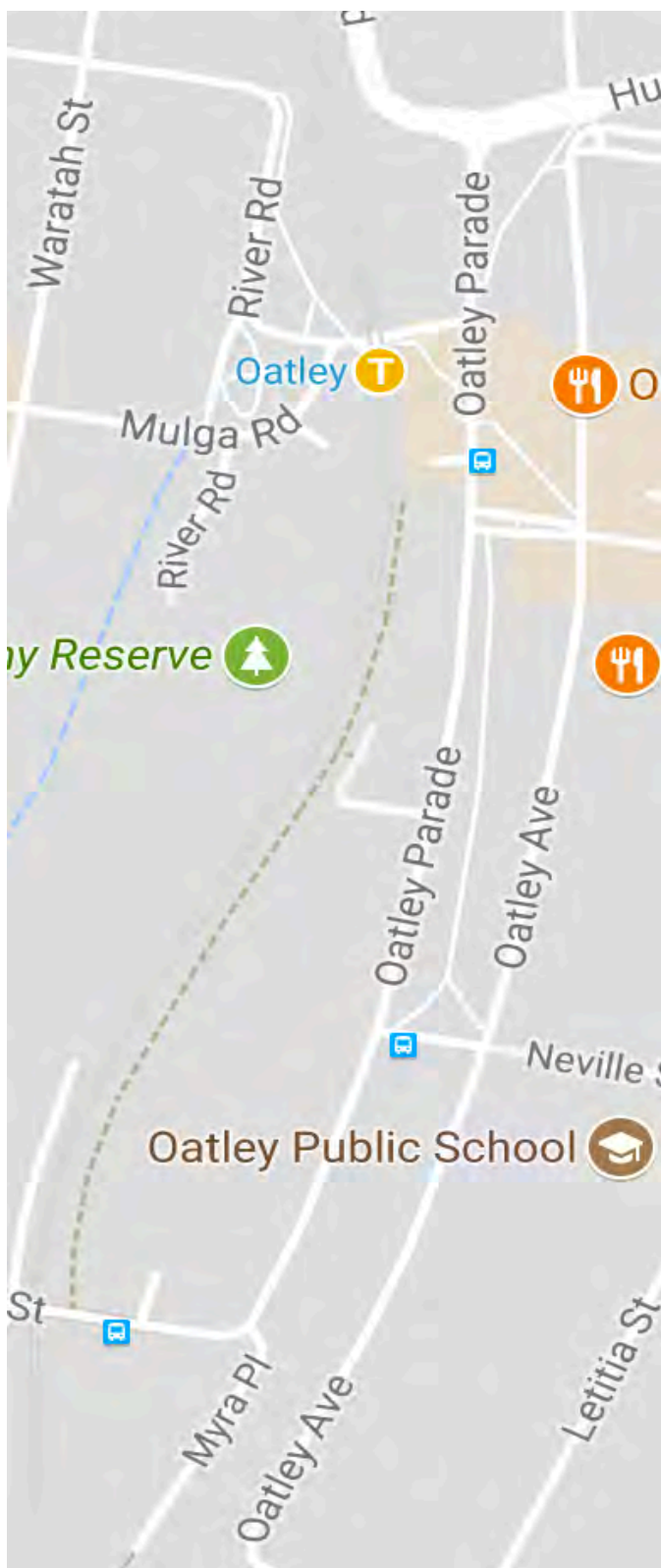
1940 and 50 much work by Council to renovate and make the Park a Community asset.

1962 Oatley War Memorial moves to the park.

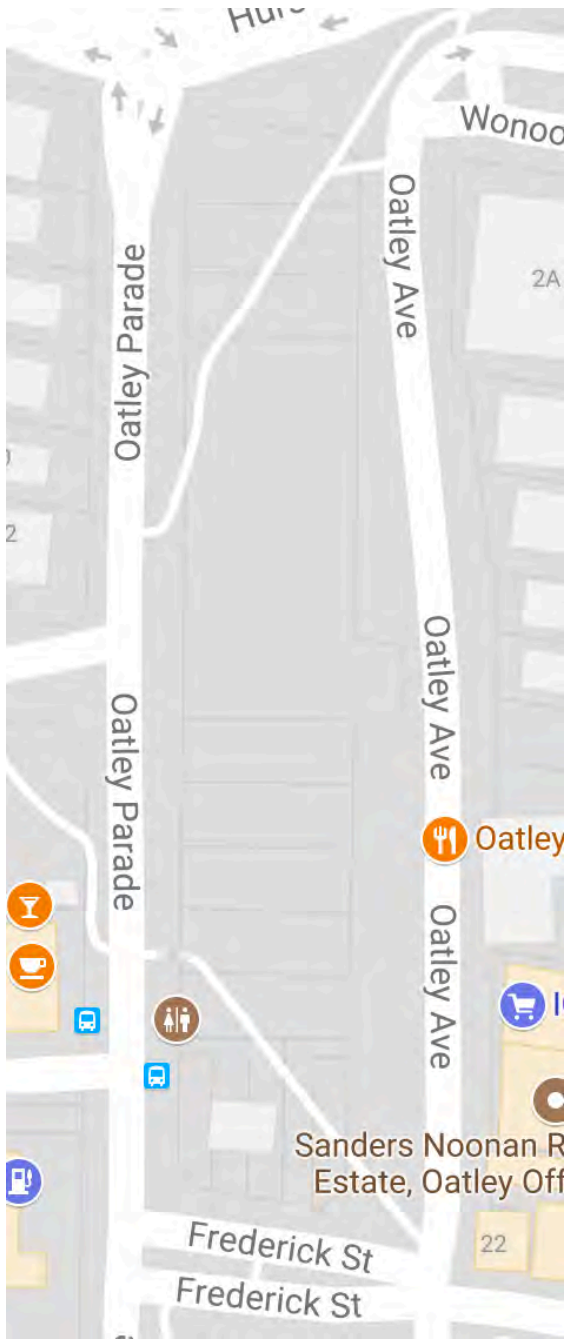
1962 On suggestion of Oatley RSL the park is named Oatley Memorial Gardens.

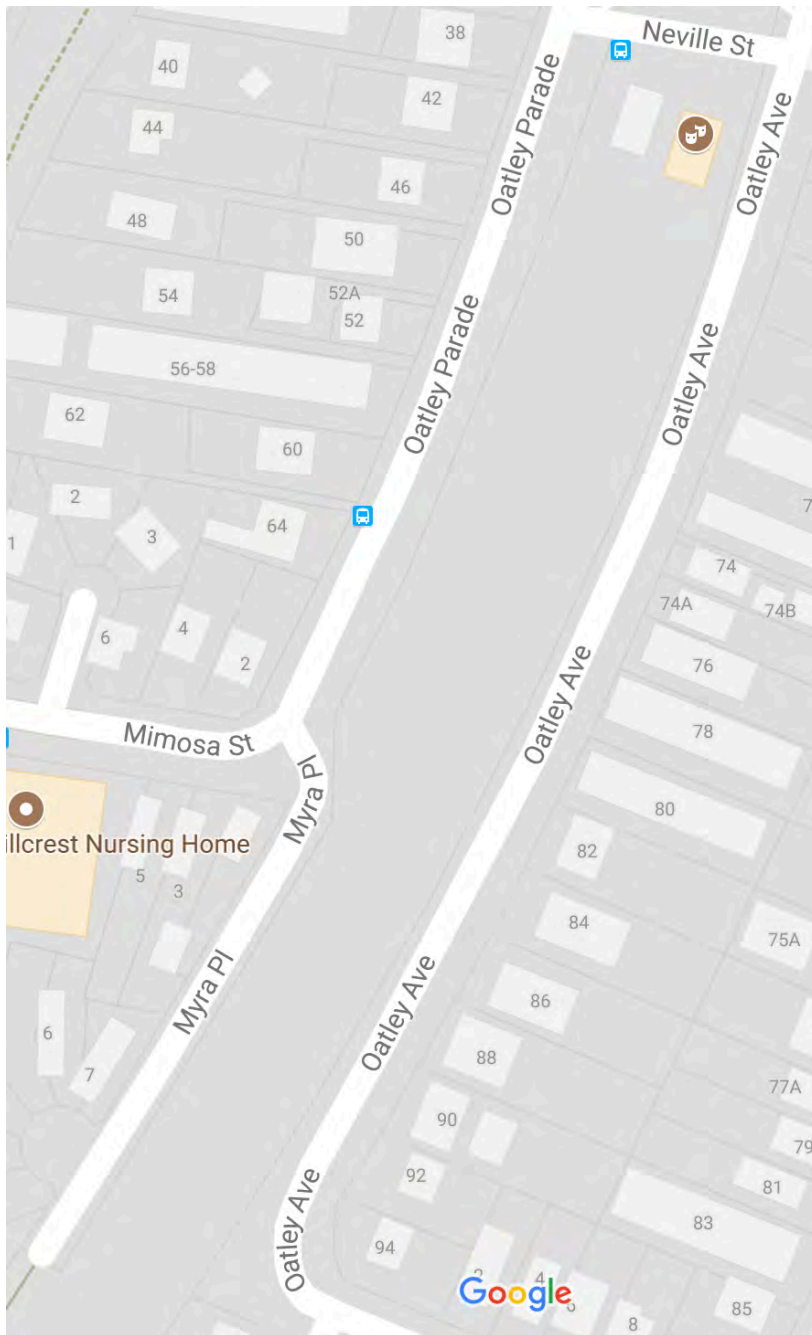
Introduction

This report studies the records of the Park now called Oatley Memorial Gardens. Its history is not always clear and further research may enlighten us more. But the outcome is a unique park so close to the centre of the suburb.



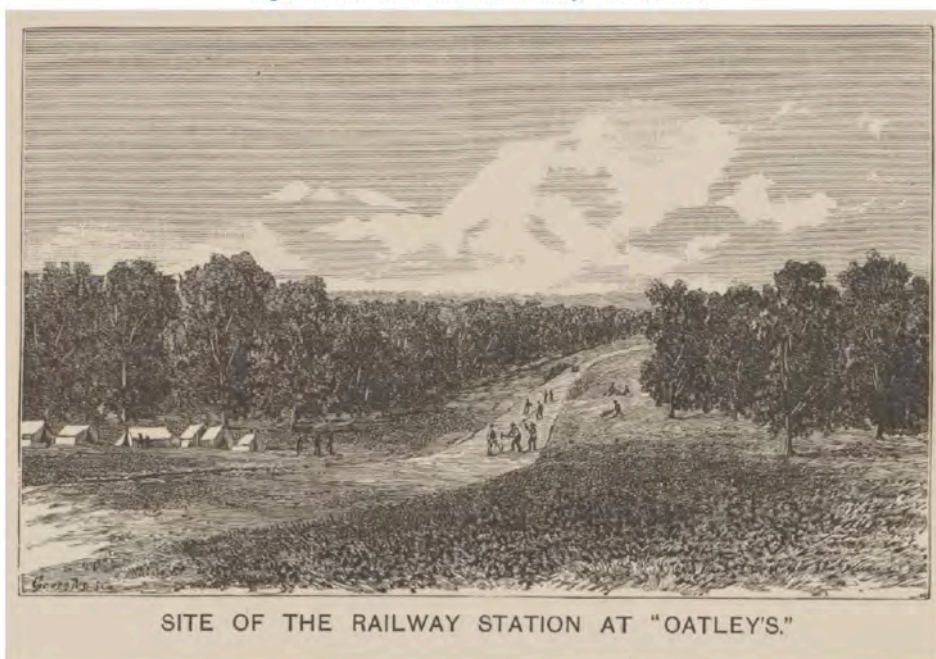
The Oatley Memorial Gardens is defined as all the Council land between Hurstville Road and beyond Myra Place. This includes the area south of Neville Street.



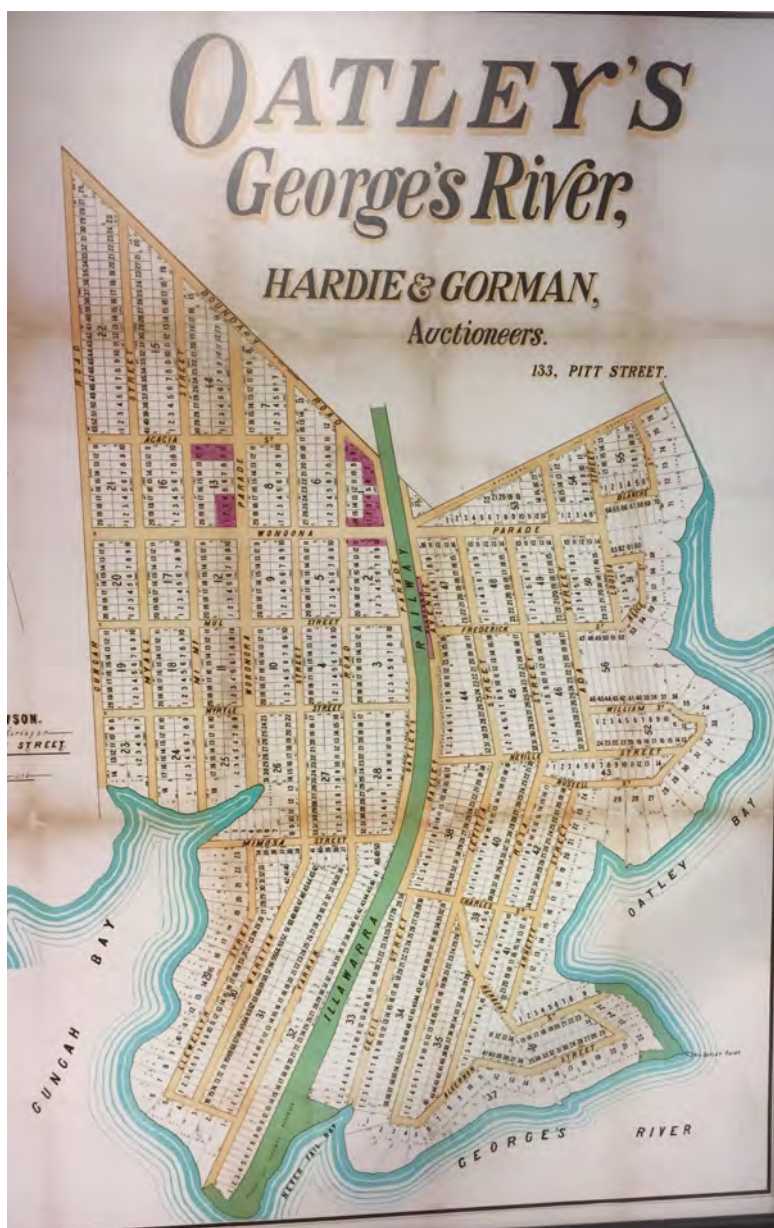


Oatley suburb came about because the railway decided to route its railway to the South Coast via the land owned by Charles Cecil Griffiths. He “gave “ the land to the railways provided they put a platform on his land. It was called Oatley’s Grant in 1885 (and Oatley’s Platform in 1889) and this platform was located at the end of Frederick Street where the Clock is today.

Figure 7: The site of the future railway, 1880-89. NLA



1880s
building
the new
Platform



1885 the land
was subdivided
at the map was as
left. No park
here!

By 1905 after the
railway diversion
was complete.



Photo of Oatley Parade with Embankment clearly shown and Mortdale brickpits chimney in the background. 1901.

The Councils of Hurstville Kogarah and the NSW Railways could not agree on the issues of the new boundaries and who was responsible for what.

In 1923 there was a proposal to use the Railway land for a memorial site? Also the Kogarah Council was approaching the Railways for land to extend Neville, Frederick and Woonona Pde.

In 1928 the Fredrick street extension is done with money from State Gov. and Kogarah council

In 1929 there was a proposal to move the "Soldiers Memorial" to a square in Frederick St.

In 1925 there was a proposal to transfer railway land to Hurstville and Kogarah Councils for the extension of Frederick Street and Woonona Parade to Oatley Parade and also for a "memorial site".

Railway Land at Oatley (West Ward).

On the 2nd. inst. I met the Engineer to the Hurstville Council, and after discussion have prepared the plan which is now submitted, showing the area which it is desired to obtain for a memorial site, and also the areas which would be necessary to allow of the extension of Frederick Street and Woonona Parade to Oatley Avenue.

By 1929 there was a decision made regarding the extension of Frederick Street. When the railway stations was in its 1885-1905 location, Frederick Street ran down to Oatley Avenue and stopped at that intersection- the station was at the bottom of the street. The Council wished to extend the street to Oatley Parade and it purchased from the Railway the land to do so.

DESCRIPTION OF ROAD OPENED:—Roads and road widening adjoining the railway line from Sydney to Nowra at Oatley, parish of St. George, county of Cumberland, —as shown on plan catalogued R. 17,711-1,603. (Registration No. of Papers—Roads 1927-1,158) Description of lands resumed and dedicated as public road.

HURSTVILLE AND KOGARAH MUNICIPALITIES; METROPOLITAN LAND DISTRICT.

Portion No.	Area.	Parish Name.	Reputed Owner.	Occupier.	Character of Holding.	Width of Land Resumed.	Area Resumed.
Part 249 (now sub-divided).	a. r. p. 300 0 0	St. George	Railway Commissioners for New South Wales.	.....	Freehold	100 links and variable	a. r. p. 0 2 4½
Do ..	300 0 0	do	do do	.....	do	Variable	0 0 0½
Do ..	300 0 0	do	do do	.....	do	100 links and variable	0 0 23½
Do ..	300 0 0	do	do do	.....	do	150 " " "	0 3 9½

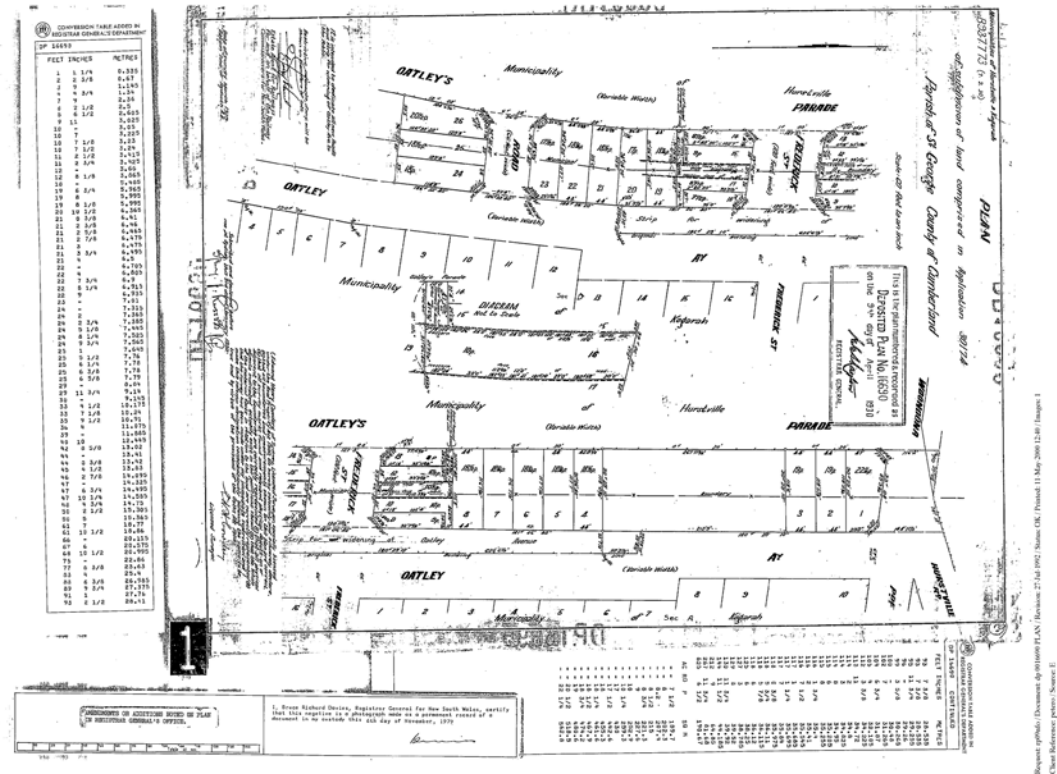
It is interesting to note that the transfer was to both Hurstville and Kogarah Council that reflects the 1885 boundary of the railway line. It seems the resolution of which Council administered Oatley Parade was not resolved. The Deposited Plan below also shows the “municipal boundary” along the old railway line track.

The Plan shows the “Park” from Frederick Street north as Lots 1 to 13 with a large gap of unspecified land between Lots 3 and 4. (about 212 feet) Lots 1 to 8 go right across to Oatley Avenue and are 44 feet by around 116 feet. Lots 8 to 13 face south along the Frederick Street frontage. On the south side of Frederick street in the Park are 5 Lots fronting Frederick street facing north – Lots 14 to 18. Lots 19 to 23 then align east west as for Lots 1-8. Then we have a road shown between Oatley Avenue and Oatley Parade opposite 11 Oatley Avenue. This road never materialised as the extension Of Neville street some time later would have made it redundant. The DP finishes with Lots 24- 26 aligned north south. On the northern side of Lots 19 is a plan for an easement 10 foot wide going between the two streets.

Also on the DP is shown a wall or walls- it crosses Frederick Street and extends each side- the total length is about 85 m which is about the length of a platform. This looks some remains of the old station.

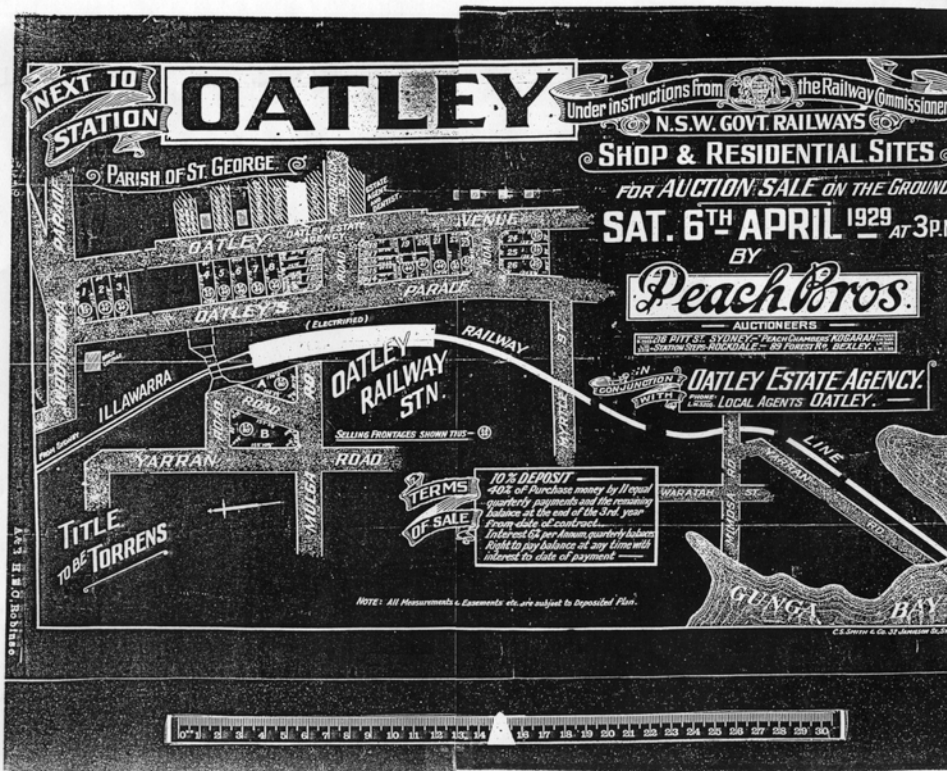
To the south of Neville Street are the two halls and the pipeline. This is all Council land down to a point near the start of the walkway to the bridge.

Deposited Plan 16690- still no park!



December 1930 - the Railway historian reported that all the railway land (now Memorial Park and more) was sold to Kogarah Council. ?? But it is not clear that the two Councils had agreed which Council owned the land that was previously split between them? Indeed the sale was not finally agreed until 1940.

1929 Real estate map- no park here!



Extract from ?local history report.

I will conclude the story by reading a portion of a paper written by Jim Nicholson who lived in Oatley from 1925 and who can tell first hand of the development of the Memorial Park which adds so much grace to Oatley's streetscape.

“when the Nicholsons moved into the newsagent in October 1925, the old platforms were still in place, and we boys caught many tadpoles in the pools where the tracks had once been. It was in the depression years that Frederick Street was extended between Oatley Avenue and Oatley Parade, by voluntary labour using horses and drays. If you dug down, the old platform would still be there. Prior to the extension of Frederick Street it was necessary to cross to the present station at the end of the platform about where the hardware shop is today. The land either side of the extended Frederick Street was auctioned by the Railways, but because of the Depression, all purchases but one defaulted. (Ed this piece sold was to the Oatley Hotel) . “He” was bought out when all the former railway land was converted to parkland.

Between Neville Street and the station and northward to Hurstville road were high railway embankments, well covered with blackberries which we used to pick. These embankments were still there on Black Saturday 1939, when bushfires jumped the station burning the signs and a fire engine parked in Oatley Avenue. Later, with modern machinery, the embankments were flattened to the present gentle slopes to form the park as it is today.”

In 1933 there was relief work being done in the park- levelling and filling on the reserve between Oatley Ave and Oatley Pde. It was reported that material between Oatley Parade and Oatley Avenue (about 450 tonnes) was removed and taken to Bruce Street, Souter Avenue, Bellevue Rd, Railway Parade, and Laycock Road Penshurst. The material was “small sandstone, coarse sand, sufficient clay to give a slight pugginess”. And it was noted that there was more material to be moved. Now where exactly this was taken from is not clear- was it from the northern or southern section of the Park?

1937 aerial photo- shows



1943 aerial shot

1943 2



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1941- Council Engineer drew up plans for restoration of OMG. State Gov. puts in £3500 and Kogarah Council £1000. One councillor

objects to the spend of Council money and accuses Mr C J Munro local MLA of using money just before an election.

In 1941 the pipeline from Woronora dam to the Penshurst Water tanks was constructed. It comes up from Como Bridge, through the old railway cutting south of Neville street- thence underground through the Park.

Lot 6 of the DP had been sold to Tooth and Co sometime in the years previous to 1941. The 1938 Kogarah rates show Lots 1-5 and 7 to 26 all belonging to the Railways. The note says Kogarah Council Purchased Lot 6 in 1940/41 as it did the rest of the DP from the railways in 1941 for around £2500. In 1940 it was reported in Council that they should offer £2000 for the railway land as it was commercially worth £6000.

The Propeller reports in March 1941 that Kogarah Council has acquired the land from the Railways and it will be converted into a Park. It remarked, "The eyesore will be removed".

It is not clear from the records who was the main mover in making it a Park. It was wartime and so likely no sales would be successful. The Councillors were at this time
Sydney Robert Bell (Mayor),
Guy Edwin Moore,
Ernest Theophilus Marx,
Roy Westbrook Harslett,
Patrick Joseph Ferry,
Harry Leonard Poulton,
Nicholas James Lobb,
John Charles Sydney Battye,
Wilfred Neil Todd,
Norman Russell Bertram,
Nehemiah Hardman,
Edwin Henry Trollope.

By 1944 the area was being called Oatley Embankment Park and was quoted as 10 acres. This name was still being used in 1958 although Oatley Reserve was also being used.

Lot 1 Oatley Avenue – the estate of A A Ward was granted £10 for the Council taking part of the land for road purposes- they rebuilt the fence as well.



In 1948 a bus turning circle was constructed for £627 – is this the circle that cuts into the Park today.

In 1950 the Council spent £138-12-0 on trees for the Oatley Embankment Park. This was repeated with another £429-19-9 in 1958

In 1965 it was proposed to built the Baby Health Centre at the southern end of the Park- clearly this proposal was defeated at the Centre built next to the School of Arts.

Oatley District Improvement Association also East Oatley Progress Association

East Oatley Progress Association started in around 1936 but seemed to disappear. Maybe the Oatley District Improvement Association (ODIA) grew from it.

In 1936 the EOPA asked Council to support its application to the Railways to renovating the park- Council said it supported the proposal.

In 1940 they had their AGM in the School of Arts.

In 1940 the ODIA asked for a bubbler to be installed at the corner of Frederick and Oatley Avenue. (photo 2017)

The ODIA that wrote to Kogarah Council throughout 1940s and early 1950s asking that improvements of various descriptions be made to the park

1946 asking for better pedestrian access to the bridge over railway line at Mimosa and more staff on the ODIA.



Post Kogarah Council takeover of the Oatley Embankment Park

Whilst it is not entirely clear why the area became a park and not sold off after Kogarah council did the takeover, it was clear that the area was being set aside for a park. There could have been some pressure from the Railways (for the State Gov.) but nothing is explicit in the records seen.

But as early as December 1941 a garden layout for the Oatley Embankment Park had been submitted- we don't know what it contained. It was drawn by the Council Engineer Mr Brewer.

Events approved or not in Oatley Embankment Park

Since 1940 the Park was under the full control of Kogarah Council and all uses of the Park needed to be approved by them. The list below does not include all events but is indicative of the use of the Park over this time. The list shows the various organisations that have come and gone over time. It also shows some of the improvements and aspects that are familiar today.

1958 School of Arts Pony rides in Reserve refused

1958 Oatley West Boys Club field sports day approved

Model aircraft approved Saturday 130pm-530pm Oatley Embankment Reserve.

1960 Toilet block approval and building £888.

1961 £ 525 on top dressing of the Oatley

November 1962 Oatley Bay Sea Scouts Fete held Embankment Park

February 1963 Kogarah Municipal Band played in Park

Girl Guides Hall- is it Council or Railway land?

11/6/1963 Oatley RSL asks Council to change the name of the park from Oatley Reserve to Oatley Memorial Gardens.

Oatley GG and Scouts have Fete in southern side of Oatley Reserve.

1964 Oatley RSL Youth Club asks Council to build two basketball courts at Southern end of Park.

1965 Girl Guides Fete in park.

Oatley RSL youth club has display of physical education in park.

1969 SM Herald Garden Contest and also Douglas Cross gardens

1970 \$7788 spent on trees in park and \$2000 in improvements in the rockery

8/11/1970 Remembrance Day in park

Georges River District Scouts annual Cub and Scout First aid course

1970 Kogarah Municipal Band in Oatley Memorial Gardens.

1972 Oatley West Scout Group Fete

1972 W Wheeler appointed Honorary Ranger for OMG and DC gardens

1972 Oatley Senior scouts have a "sit a thon" on towers in the park. It made \$1000 for the Spastic centre. They lasted 116.5 hours on the pole perch.

1972 Oatley Brownie pack has fete

1972 Kogarah Municipal band again

1972 Oatley Park and Oatley Memorial Park oil painting

1973 Oatley Lodge 381 has Fete

Mr A Leach of 24 Ada Street wrote asking for a clock to be built at the end of Frederick Street to commemorate James Oatley.

1973 A photographic of OMG was proposed to become a 1974 Calendar.

April 1973 Marquee erected for painting exhibition for Masonic Lodge

1974 RSL had Anzac day and Memorial Day at the park- this continues throughout the period.

1974 Sydney Morning herald has competition and OMG plus Douglas Cross gardens seems to win.

1975 The Rose Pergola donated by K R Patrick

Oatley Infants conduct a "walkathon" on 31 May 1975

Oatley St Josephs runs a playgroup for school kids during August holidays on OMG.

Oatley RSL Women's Auxiliary has a bazaar

1977 Oatley Lions have a fete 12/11/1977

1983 29/10/83 Clock Opening. Money was \$7800 plus \$2000 for future maintenance – organised by the Oatley Committee.

1984 Proposed to built a draft board table with 4 chairs.

1984 29/7 The Oatley Fun Run held.

1987 Additional playground equipment added near Neville Street

1988 OMG gets a Community Facility Suburban award

1991 Bubbler installed in OMG near 20 Oatley Ave and Frederick Street

By 1960 these photos were taken





1960 ?



O'Grady memorial





Tiled path 2003?

1962 War memorial.



Lion's festivals
1983



Our member and main organiser
of the clock! Alec Leach.





Frans Felten – an immigrant family C1955 with Park and Pub in background.

Heritage and Plan material.

2017

The recent development at Oatley Railway station was the cause of a study of the local history and especially of the sites of the old station and the new.

Current Status of Oatley Memorial Gardens

Georges River Council administers the gardens. The most recent Kogarah Council Local Environment Plan had the following points to make about the Park

. It is included in the State Heritage Inventory as an urban park. *“the Gardens are an historical layering of development over the site of the original Oatley railway line and platform. It is indicative of the*

progress of the district with growing suburbanisation of the suburbs and the development of the community at the time. The Gardens have historical significance at a local level because of the association with the early Oatley community and development of civic pride. The Gardens make a positive contribution to the character and quality of the townscape and to the heritage of Kogarah. Some aesthetic value but primarily amenity value for the local community. The Gardens have been a focus for the community. Locally rare, Central Gardens rare in Municipality.

The Oatley Memorial Gardens is listed in the Kogarah Heritage Study and the Local Environmental Plan. Oatley Memorial Gardens is included in the State Heritage Inventory (SHI Number 1870248 Study Number 7.42 Group 2). It is included in the category of Urban Park, group of Parks and Gardens, and item type of landscape. Its current and former use is for recreation. It has an assessed significance of local, and a statement of significance as follows.

The Gardens are an historical layering of development over the site of the original Oatley railway line and platform. It is indicative of the progress of the district with the growing suburbanisation of the suburbs and the development of the community at the time. The Gardens have historic significance at a local level because of the association with the early Oatley community and development of civic pride. The Gardens make a positive contribution to the character and quality of the townscape and to the heritage of Kogarah. Some aesthetic value but primarily amenity value for the local community. The Gardens have been a focus for the community. Locally rare, Central Gardens rare in municipality. (Heritage Inventory 2002, p. 1).

There is a detailed description in the form of historical notes or Provenance of the site provided in the Inventory. Physical description of the site is as follows:

The Memorial Gardens are set on an elongated site bound by Oatley Avenue, Frederick Street, Oatley Parade, and Hurstville Road. A diagonal decorative painted concrete path crosses the gardens from Frederick Street shops to Oatley Parade. The path features mosaic panels. The central path is lined with Prunus sp. There is a brick amenity block on Oatley Parade. The gardens are informally planted with mature trees (concentrated at perimeter) including Brushbox and Eucalypts. There are specimen plantings of Araucaria, plantings include Canna, Abelia, Agapanthus, Rose, Azalea, Spirea and Prunus. The grounds fall to the centre and a water feature and Cocos Palm grove and established at the lowest point, also marked by parking bay and set of steps opposite Mulga Street. At the northern end there is triangular pergola supported by twisted columns. (Heritage Inventory 2002, p. 3)

The recommended management for the site is:

The gardens should be included in the Heritage Schedule of the LEP and should be protected. The character of the area should be protected by Urban Design Controls. Subdivision should not occur. Existing use of the site should continue. (Heritage Inventory 2002, p. 3).

Under the Kogarah Local Environment Plan 1998, the subject area is currently zoned 6(a) Open Space (Public). This is indicated in diagram 2 on page 22.

The site is included within the Kogarah Green Web - a metropolitan wide initiative to establish a green web of native vegetation and habitat corridors. The site is included in an area designated as Existing Habitat Area (northern section) and Habitat Reinforcement (southern section). Council requires the planting of native trees and vegetation to establish a green web link for migrating birds and habitat opportunities. This is particularly relevant to the contiguous open space corridor which includes Oatley Memorial Gardens, and specifically the area of native vegetation within the southern section.

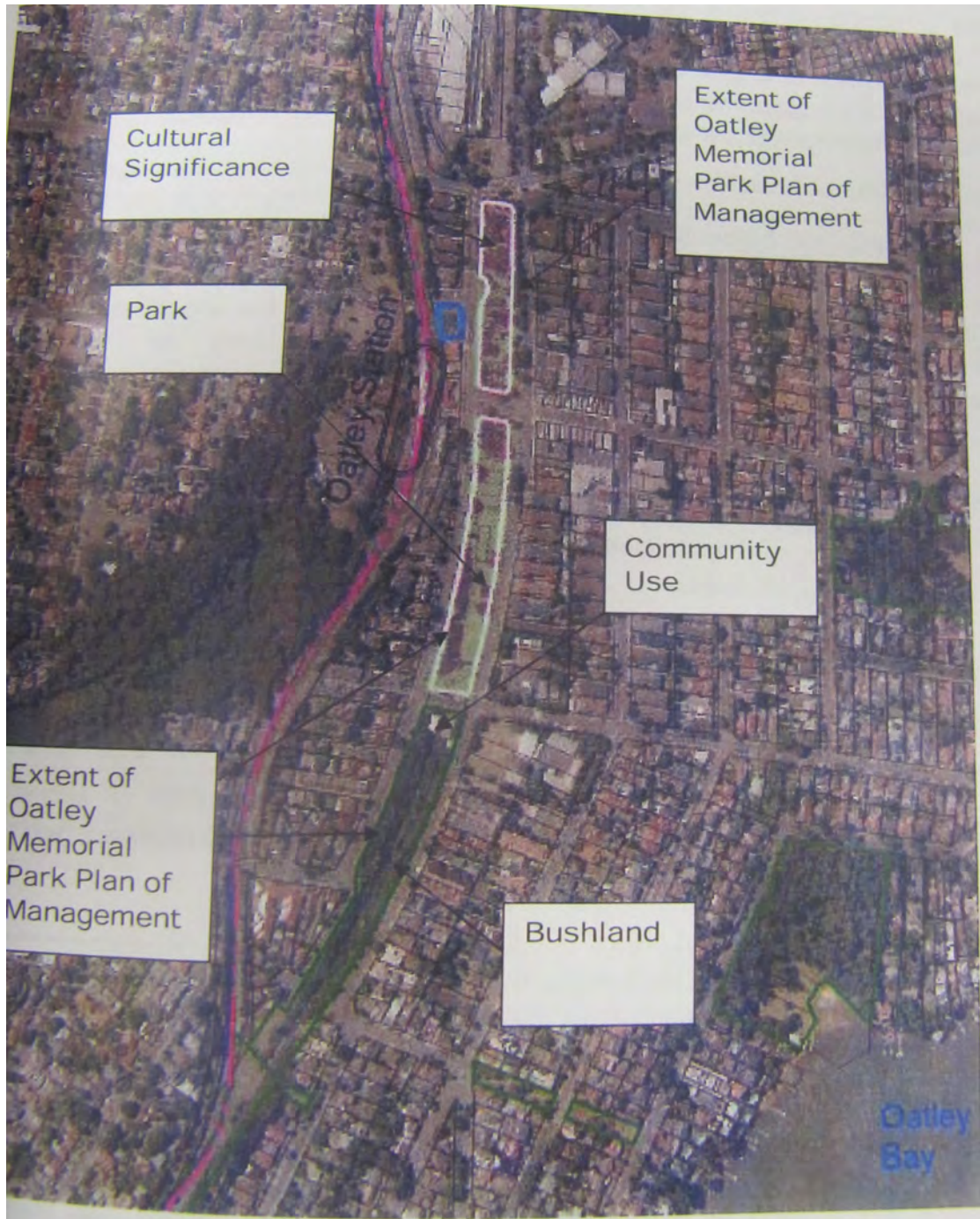
The site has a significant amount of vegetation that contributes to the visual and environmental value of the park and this has been reviewed in section 3.1.

The Sydney Water Corporation Woronora Pipeline is located above ground within the southern section of the Gardens. Kogarah City Council does not have jurisdiction regarding those portions of the Gardens occupied by the Corporation. The Corporation's land is managed in accordance with the objectives and principles of the Sydney Water Act, 1994, Sydney Water Corporation Act 2004 and the Sydney Water Catchment Act, 1998 section 14 which states in part:

Sydney Water Corporation

Advice was obtained from Sydney Water Corporation on 9th February 2011, and confirmation obtained when the Service Location Plan was also inspected on 10th February 2011, regarding the status of the Woronora Pipeline. While Kogarah City Council does not have jurisdiction regarding those portions of the Gardens occupied by the Corporation and the Corporation's land is managed in accordance with the objectives and principles of the Sydney Water Act, 1994, Sydney Water Corporation Act 2004 and the Sydney Water Catchment Act, the balance of the site is owned and managed by the Kogarah City Council. It is understood that the Corporation is responsible for the maintenance of a corridor of land 6.1 metres wide along the pipeline, although this does not appear as a formal easement on the Service Location Plan.

There is 6.1 m wide strip of the Park that is not under Council control. This is where the pipeline goes under the park and is under the control of the water Authority.



Cultural Significance

Park

Extent of Oatley Memorial Park Plan of Management

Community Use

Extent of Oatley Memorial Park Plan of Management

Bushland

Oatley Bay

Oatley Station



Don Kibble painting of park included in 2017 Oatley calendar.

Conclusion

Oatley Memorial Gardens is a superb asset to the suburb but is so only by accident. It also likely took some will of Councillors from Kogarah in 1940 not to continue with the plan to sub divide and sell the land. The tale is not complete but maybe some of the details will never be known. I trust the above provides some new light and reinforces some others that were known.

References

Trove for Propellor and St George Call 1906-1957

GR Council library at Kogarah- John Johnson for assistance in researching all Council minutes and other material from 1900-2012

Various OHHS studies and many photos of the Park over the years- see oatleyhistory.org.au.

Plan of Management for Oatley Memorial Gardens 2011.

Oatley Railway Station Group- NSW Environment and Heritage document

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Appendix

Path Mosaics 2004



2017 Photos













