

3.0 Site Analysis

3.1 Birchgrove Park and Precincts

Birchgrove Park is located at the edge of Snails Bay at the western edge of Sydney Harbour and covers an area of 4.97 hectares. The central sports oval portion of the site was originally mud flats surrounded by Hawkesbury Sandstone landforms, with a steeper benched ridge on the northern side. These landforms would have supported typical Sydney sandstone open-forest containing trees such as *Angophora costata* and the Sydney Peppermint, *Eucalyptus piperita*. It is likely that *Casuarina* species were also found adjoining the mud flats. A creek once ran down the route of present-day Ferdinand Street and flowed into the Bay just south of the caretaker's cottage, as indicated in the plan below:

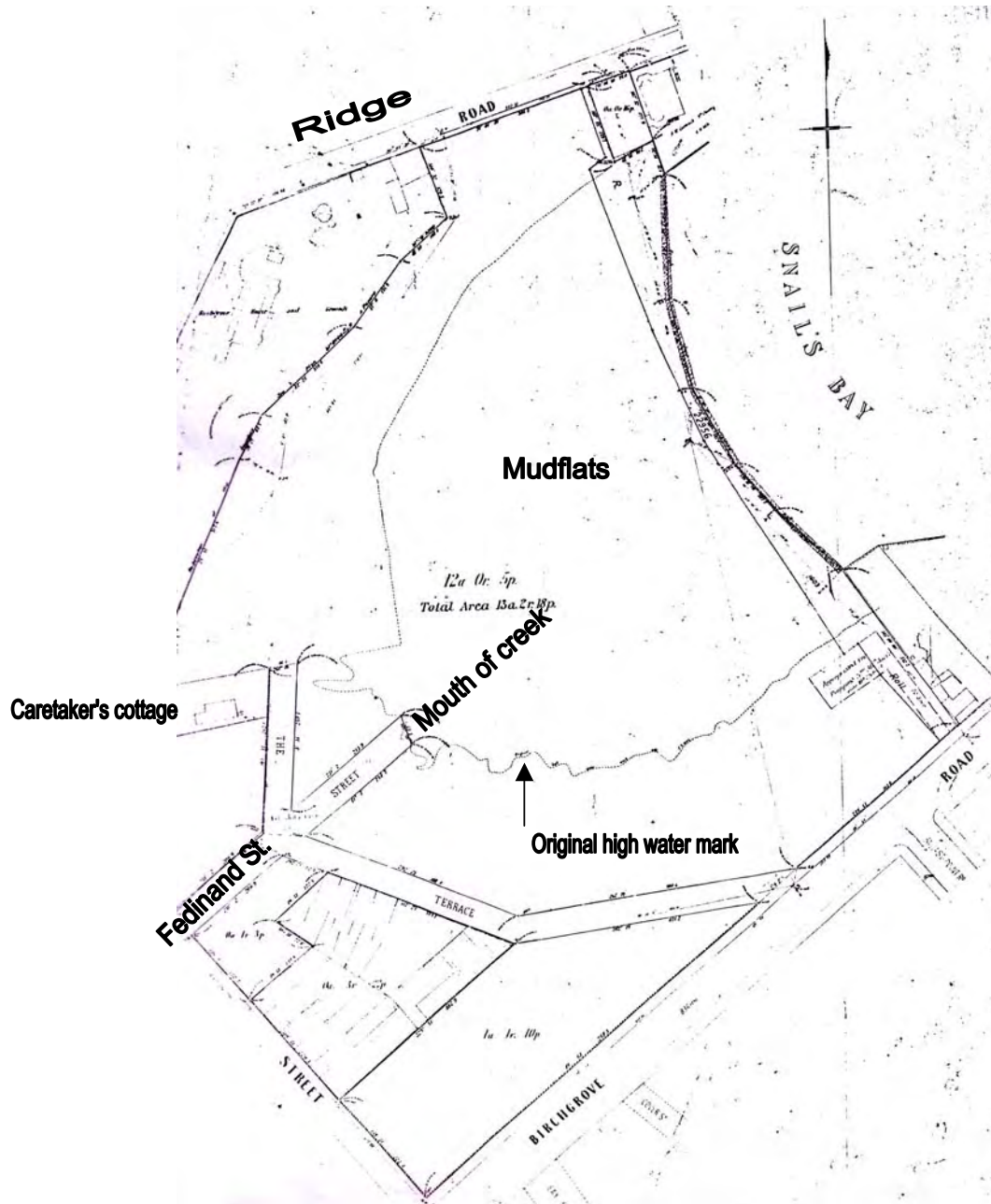


Figure S1: Plan of the Birchgrove Park area, 1893, from Sydney Water Board (MISC. Syd. 510, cat. 3000)

Whilst the park reads as a large amphitheatre, it can be roughly broken up into seven precincts. These are:

- (1) the south-western lawns (2) the southern slopes
- (3) the pocket park (cnr Rose & Ferdinand Sts.)
- (4) the north-western tennis court precinct
- (5) the sports oval (6) the waterfront, and
- (7) the northern slopes.



Figure S2 – Precinct Plan

Precinct 1 - The south-western lawns

Located at the junction of Grove Street and Rose Street, this elevated lawn precinct contains a children's playground and access path towards the sports oval. It is framed along its frontage with Grove Street by a mature line of cultural plantings including Brush Box, Pepper trees, Camphor Laurel and Fig species.

Precinct 2 - The southern slopes

Located between The Terrace and the sports oval, these sloping lawns contain a small irrigation shed for the park, and the tennis court and pavilion abutting Deloitte Avenue. The precinct also contains various mature plantings including a Holm Oak, Umbrella Tree, Jacarandas, Brush Box and Camphor Laurels.

Precinct 3 - The pocket park (corner of Rose and Ferdinand Streets)

In the 1878 subdivision, the south part of this precinct was reserved as the site for a church, but one was never built, because the Crown acquired this and the neighboring lot adjacent to Ferdinand St. for part of the Park. This area does not read as part of Birchgrove Park, however, as it is separated from the body of the Park by the row of residences along The Terrace. Also, its northern edge is surrounded by mature trees, which act as a visual closer for views between it and the sports oval.

Precinct 4 - The north-western tennis court precinct

As with the above precinct, the tennis court precinct in the north-west corner is not readily identifiable as belonging within the boundaries of the Park. The upper courts, adjacent to Louisa Rd., were also developed more than half a century later than the lower ones near the Ferdinand St.-Rose St. intersection. The precinct has a longer frontage with Rose Street and Louisa Road than it does with the lawns of the Park, with which there is no pedestrian connection.

Precinct 5 - The sports oval

Formed as a result of the reclamation of the mudflats of Snails Bay, the oval is at its broadest along Deloitte Avenue. It is used during the winter season for soccer and rugby and during the summer for cricket matches.

Precinct 6 - The waterfront

Composed essentially of Deloitte Avenue, this zone provides access from Louisa Road to Grove Street and contains Fig plantings from c.1920s. It is bounded on its harbour side by a sandstone block seawall, which dates from c.1904, and the picket fence of the oval on its western side.

Precinct 7 - The northern slopes

This precinct is composed of a gently sloping lawn bank just to the north of the caretaker's residence rising to steeper slopes and benched sandstone terraces which support mature cultural plantings further to the north. These slopes would have once been part of the homeyard grounds of the former *Birch Grove House*, in which the variety of Fig Trees still present were planted. While some of the ashlar sandstone block retaining walls may have been built to provide a platform for *Birch Grove House*, others would have been built to support the new housing built along Louisa Road following the 1878 subdivision and the later further subdivision of the *Birch Grove House* core land.

3.2 The following photographic inventory depicts the character and main elements of the Park's seven precincts.

Precinct 1 - The south-western lawns

	
<p>Figure S3 – View looking east down the southern side of the park, with Grove St. on its right and mature Camphor Laurels in the south-west corner, near the junction with Rose Street. Photo: MWA.</p>	<p>Figure S4 – The recent children's playground abutting the pathway through the southern sector of the park from the junction of Rose Street and Grove Street. Photo: MWA, 2005.</p>

Precinct 2 - The southern slopes





	
<p>Figure S5 – Looking south-east along the southern arm of The Terrace from its junction with Ferdinand Street (right foreground). Photo: MWA, 2005.</p>	<p>Figure S6 Houses along the west side of the southern arm of The Terrace. The two on the left have been remodelled in recent times. Photo: MWA, 2005.</p>
	
<p>Figure S7 – The artificial grass tennis court in the south-eastern corner of the site, with its old weatherboard pavilion behind it. Photo: MWA, 2005.</p>	<p>Figure S8 – The southern portion of the sports oval, with the single tennis court and pavilion in the background. Photo: MWA, 2005.</p>



Figure S9 – View west along the southern perimeter of the park, with garden bed in foreground, tennis court (far right) and Camphor Laurels at boundary (left).



Figure S10 – The eroded lawn zone to the south of the pumping station (extreme right), abutting Deloitte Avenue. Photo: MWA, 2005.

Precinct 3 - The pocket park (corner of Rose and Ferdinand Streets)



Figure S11 – Elm, Fig, Brush Box, and Camphor Laurel plantings along the vacant block abutting the entrance to the Park from Ferdinand Street, opposite the tennis courts facing Rose Street. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S12 – View across the vacant lot on the eastern side of Rose Street. The row of terrace houses in the background face onto The Terrace. Photo: MWA, 2005.

Precinct 4 - The north-western tennis court precinct



Figure S13 – The old, lower tennis courts adjacent to Rose Street, near Ferdinand St. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S14 – The later tennis courts seen from Louisa Road Street. Photo: MWA, 2005.

Precinct 5 - The sports oval



Figure S15 – Looking west across the oval from Deloitte Avenue. The picket fence is in the same location as the original one, which would have been built c. 1904. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S16 – The north-east corner of the oval, with the cricket nets at center and children's sandpit at far left. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S17 – The north-west corner of the oval, with the caretaker's house at right. Photo: MWA, 2005



Figure S18 - The south-west corner of the oval, with maintenance sheds and tennis courts beyond at left.

Precinct 6 - The waterfront



Figure S19 – Looking north along the seawall, with Deloitte Avenue at left. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S20 – Looking south-east along the seawall toward the city of Sydney. Photo: MWA, 2005.

Precinct 7 - The northern slopes

Figure S21 – The stairs at the northern end of Deloitte Avenue, which mark the main northern entry into the Park from Louisa Road. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S22 – A lawn platform between Louisa Road and the northern slopes of the Park. The house in the background covers part of the grounds in which *Birch Grove House* formerly stood. Photo: MWA 05



Figure S23 – The sandstone retaining wall adjoining the northern pathway along the Park, upslope to the north of the oval. Photo: MWA, 2005



Figure S24 – Part of the sandstone block retaining wall resting on the rock bench which together support the grounds of the properties to the north of the Park. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S25 – Looking west along the dirt track on the north of the Park, with the retaining wall supporting properties facing Louisa Road. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S26 – Looking east along the same dirt track, which skirts the northern side of the sports oval. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S27 – The lawns to the north of the caretaker's residence. The old grandstand once stood in this area. Photo: MWA, 2005.



Figure S28 – The western portion of the sports oval seen from the northern side of the Park. The row houses along The Terrace are at upper left and the caretaker's house at upper right. Photo: MWA 2005



Figure S29 – The lawns to the north of the caretaker's residence (centre left), with the early 1970s toilet block at right, tucked well into the slope below the Louisa Road.



Figure S30 – Remains of sandstone foundations for former Park weatherboard changing sheds below the main block wall that supports the gardens of the properties fronting Louisa Road. Photo: MWA, 2005.

Comment

As will be evident from the images above, and from the images in section 3.3. below, some of the old structures in the Park are excessively plain and functional. Or, to use the words of Architects Windass and Hamer in January 1989:

“... the visual and physical quality of the buildings within the Park do not contribute to the Park in a positive way. In particular, the inconsistent appearance and poor quality of the buildings adjacent to the main entry have a strong adverse effect on the appearance of the entire park.”¹¹

They continued that:

“A number of other elements detract from the appearance of the Park. The loss of enclosure caused by the tennis courts near the main entrance and the unattractive nature of the tennis court fencing seriously affects the character and quality of the adjacent area. In addition, the existing landscaping shows little co-ordination with built elements and paving materials; elements such as rubbish bins have not been properly controlled and do not contribute to the appearance of the Park.”

¹¹ Windass Hamer Architects, Jan, 1989. Preliminary Study – Birchgrove Oval Caretaker's Cottage and Grandstand
Mayne-Wilson & Associates

3.3 Visual Analysis

The following images depict the principal view corridors and visual catchments into the Park and from it out to the Harbour beyond. As is evident, there are many carelessly sited, poorly designed and intrusive elements present which need to be either redesigned and/or relocated.



Figure V1 - This entrance to the Park from the junction of Rose and Ferdinand Streets is of poor visual and aesthetic quality. It has evolved that way over time, in an *ad hoc* manner, without thought as to the cumulative impact of the changes made. Trees once flanking the tennis courts at left were removed when the entrance roadway was widened, leaving a lopsided effect and greatly increasing the proportion of hard to soft surfaces. The ugly and intrusive red brick maintenance shed and toilet block are already visible at center, and intrude on the potentially attractive view to the Bay. The entrance requires careful landscape redesign in a manner which enables visitors to enjoy the unfolding visual catchment through the Park down to the Bay without ugly foreground distractions. Source: MWA 2005



Figure V2 - The ugly red brick maintenance shed and toilet at the entrance to the oval quite spoils the visitor's view across it to the Harbour and City beyond. It should be removed and a substitute building located in a corner well out of people's sight-lines.



Figure V3 - This image from the center of the oval captures its generous expanse and the most attractive visual catchment extending from it out to Balls Head and the City of Sydney. Source: Leichhardt Council






Figure V4 - This view westward into the Park from the Bay edge reveals its amphitheatre configuration, with mostly terrace houses and some vegetation on the rising slopes providing a visual closer at the far end.

Other attractive views to and across the oval are seen in Figures S15 and S17 in section 3.1, Precinct 5 above.

VISUAL ANALYSIS MAP SHOWING SERIAL VIEWING POINTS AROUND BIRCHGROVE PARK.



KEY

-  Serial views out to Snails Bay and City of Sydney
-  Serial views from edge of Snails Bay into Park
-  Serial views looking across the Park