



# CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

for

## BIRCHGROVE PARK

**Birchgrove NSW**



Prepared for

**Leichhardt Council**

by

**Mayne-Wilson & Associates**

Conservation Landscape Architects

Paddington NSW 2021

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council commissioned Mayne-Wilson & Associates, Conservation Landscape Architects, in April 2005 to prepare a Conservation Management Plan of Birchgrove Park, both to be fully informed of its heritage values and to obtain advice and guidance on the most appropriate way to manage and maintain it. This Conservation Management Plan provides both a comprehensive heritage assessment of the Park and ensuing conservation policies and management recommendations.

Birchgrove Park was formed from part of a land grant of 30 acres by Governor Hunter to Private George Whitfield of the NSW Corps in 1796. From being a small farm with an orange orchard and some dairying, this land evolved into what became known as the *Birchgrove Estate*, so named after Lt. John Birch who built *Birch Grove House* on it in c.1810. Following a series of subsequent subdivisions of the Estate in 1860 and 1878, the Crown purchased 36 lots from it in 1881 to form the Birchgrove Recreation Reserve. The Birchgrove Park Trust was created in 1882 and extra land was created for the reserve through the reclamation of the mudflats at the head of Snails Bay, completed and bounded by a seawall in 1904. The Park has retained the same configuration since that time, as well as the surrounding road system laid out in the 1860 subdivision. It was formally gazetted as Birchgrove Park on 6 July 1894.

The Park's spacious oval has been used extensively for first grade cricket and rugby matches, from 1897 and 1908 respectively. Tennis courts were provided adjacent to Rose Street and a small grandstand on the north-western slopes c. 1902. Substantial tree plantings were undertaken around the Park boundaries between 1905 and c. 1925, adding to the substantial Fig Trees that were a remnant of the *Birch Grove House* garden. Row houses along the southern arm of The Terrace, already built before the 1881 Crown acquisitions, were not purchased, and remain in private hands. The exception was the sole house along the northern arm, which was acquired by the Crown c.1886 and is now used as the caretaker's residence.

The Park is assessed as having a high degree of cultural significance at the local level, both for its association with the original 1796 land grant and ensuing *Birch Grove Estate*, and for the well-executed reclamation of bayside land and its continuous use for active recreation ever since. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century bayside retaining walls and remnant plantings of the Birchgrove estate, and the subsequent sandstone retaining walls built in association with the reclamation have high cultural significance. Other contributory elements such as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century plantings, retaining walls around the oval, tennis courts (one with pavilion), and the caretaker's residence have moderate heritage significance. So, too, does the configuration of The Terrace and the oval itself, together with its fencing (not the fabric but the continuity of its presence and location).

This Plan provides a conservation policy and advice on the management of the Park, including its landscape heritage components. Generally, the Park is being well managed and maintained, and most of the actions required are routine. Guidance is provided on the replacement of the mature trees (based mostly on using the same early 20<sup>th</sup> century palette), and the repair and maintenance of its several sandstone retaining walls.

The following remedial actions are also recommended:

- The relocation of the red brick maintenance and toilet complex because of its ugly form unsympathetic materials, and its unfortunate intrusion into the prime visual catchment between the entrance to the Park and Snails Bay and the City of Sydney beyond.
- A subtle and historically appropriate redesign of the Ferdinand Street entrance to the Park;
- The removal of the *ad hoc* concrete seating and shelter at the eastern end of the 1910 tennis pavilion in the south-east corner of the Park; and
- Repair the sandstone steps and sections of the upper retaining walls on the northern boundary.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Leichhardt Council required a conservation plan to manage heritage-listed Birchgrove Park in a way which would protect and conserve its heritage values while still allowing for present and future uses of the Park for both active and passive recreation. As a prelude to the preparation of the conservation management plan (CMP), a detailed heritage study was required to identify precisely the cultural significance of the Park and the important elements which contributed in a positive way to that significance. As no such heritage study had been previously been undertaken, Council's brief required that this be prepared prior to the formulation of a conservation policy and management strategies. After calling for expressions of interest, Council engaged Mayne-Wilson & Associates, Conservation Landscape Architects, to undertake the preparation of the CMP.

### 1.2 Aims

The purpose of this report is to assess the overall heritage significance of Birchgrove Park and identify those elements which contribute to that significance, followed by the formulation of policies to conserve and manage those values while sustaining public recreational enjoyment of the Park. The latter would include identifying possible scope for change and renewal, while preserving the amenity of the residential surrounds.

### 1.3 The Study Area

The figure below shows the extent of the Park within the context of the Balmain foreshore.



The park is bounded on its south by Grove Street, on its north by private properties along Louisa Road, on its west by Rose and Ferdinand Streets and on its east by Snails Bay of Sydney Harbour. The Rose Street frontage of the park is not continuous, due to the Crown not purchasing a group of allotments between Rose Street and The Terrace in the early 1880s.

## **1.4 Report Structure and Methodology**

This report commences with an overview of the history and context of Birchgrove Park, based on information provided by Council, the Local Studies Unit of Leichhardt Library, the Balmain Association, and other sources such as the Mitchell Library, Department of Lands, and Sydney Water. This is followed by a site analysis expressed largely via a pictorial inventory organised on a precinct basis that identifies elements that contribute to the Park's essential character and significance. This includes key vistas essential to the appreciation of the cultural landscape. Following this analysis, an assessment is made of the heritage significance of the Park, using the various criteria for determining heritage significance outlined in the manuals prepared by the NSW Heritage Office, and is then summed up in an overall statement of significance. The individual elements which contribute to the Park's significance are then tabulated and rated for their heritage value. This information is then summarised on a State Heritage Inventory form. Following that, the CMP identifies the constraints and opportunities that arise from significance, and proposes policies and guidelines for protecting and conserving both its overall significance and the heritage items or elements within it, as well as its landscape values. The CMP concludes with proposals to manage the landscape (especially its plantings), and identifies the degree of acceptable physical intervention, and the priorities for urgent conservation works.

## **1.5 Authorship**

This CMP has been prepared by Warwick Mayne-Wilson, Director of MWA, with assistance from Ari Anderson of his office, who undertook much of the research and data entry.

## **1.6 Limitations**

Given that the history of Birchgrove and Balmain have been so well researched and written up, there are few limitations in the information that we have been able to assemble on the Park's historical development. We have not, however, been able to obtain data from early workbooks or files on the precise date or cost of early works in the Park, since Council officers have not been able to locate them (presumably because they no longer exist). Accordingly, we have had to rely on an analysis of early photographs, plans and aerial photographs to obtain the approximate dates on which some park elements appeared and (in some cases) disappeared. In some cases, even the dates of some early photographs may be approximate only.

## **1.7 Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank Bruce Carter of the Local Studies Unit of Leichhardt Library, Pamela Jeffery and Kathleen Hamey of the Balmain Association Inc. for their assistance in providing historical information, and Lance Joseph for researching old documents and reviewing and contributing to the historical overview.

## **2.0 Historical Overview**

### **2.1 Pre-Settlement History**

The area in which Birchgrove Park is located was inhabited by the Wangal band of the Dharug (Eora) language group for at least 10,000 years before British settlement. 'Wangal country' was known as wanne, and it originally extended from the suburbs of Balmain and Birchgrove in the east to Silverwater and Auburn in the west. Unfortunately, smallpox ravaged the local aboriginal bands, killing over half of them. Few remained living in the area after 1840. Although 16 midden sites have been identified in the Leichhardt Municipality, none has been identified so far within the site or environs of Birchgrove Park. Because the upper slopes of the Park were used for growing fruit trees and dairying in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the lower portion was originally mudflats which were later covered over by land reclamation, these activities scattered or overlaid what Aboriginal remains may have existed in this area. However, an interpretative sign is present at Yurulbin (Long Nose) Point recognising the traditional owners of the Leichhardt area.

## 2.2 European Settlement

The land comprising Birchgrove Park comprises a portion of a 1796 grant to Private George Whitfield of the NSW Corps and an area of reclaimed land from as Snails Bay. Whitfield received a grant of land measuring thirty acres from Governor Hunter on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1796 (Figure H1). The original grant document states that the area was to be known as “Whitfield’s Farm”, although it is uncertain how much of a farm was actually established during Whitfield’s relatively short ownership. One source states that early manuscripts (not cited) refer to Whitfield’s Farm as one “upon which dairying and fruit growing were profitably pursued”.<sup>1</sup>

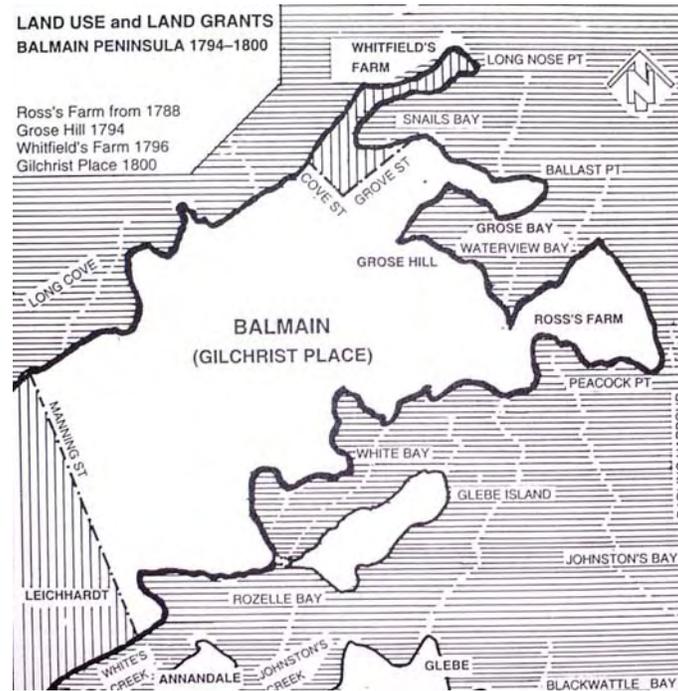


Figure H1 – Plan showing the location of Whitfield’s Farm in relation to the Balmain grant of 1800.  
 Source: Reynolds, P., *William Balmain and John Gilchrist*, Balmain Historical Monograph.

In 1800 Whitfield’s original grant was purchased by a Richard or William Knight who subsequently sold it to Captain E. Abbott of the NSW Corps in 1806. In 1810, Lieutenant John Birch, paymaster of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, purchased the property. Birch was the first to build a permanent residence on the site which he named *Birch Grove* reputedly because of the orange trees growing there at the time.<sup>2</sup> The original house (Figure H2) was constructed of stone, probably quarried on the estate. Its roof was made from shingles split from casuarinas growing on the surrounding foreshore. In 1827, *Birch Grove* was described in the Sydney press as having a garden of about three acres, secured by a strong fence, and containing some five hundred fruit trees. The house was enlarged significantly by subsequent owners, some of these enlargements occurring during the mid to late 1820s (Figure H3 & H4). It was the only house on the estate until 1860 and the first built on the Balmain Peninsula. The house was subsequently demolished in 1967, at which time it was thought to be the second or third oldest residence still standing in Sydney.

Birch did not hold onto the property for long, selling the entire estate, house plus the surrounding land grant, to Rowland W. Loane, merchant and settler, in March 1814. It would appear that Loane unsuccessfully attempted a four-lot subdivision in 1833 before selling the property to

<sup>1</sup> Winning, C. 1980. *Cricket Balmainia. Official History of the Balmain District Cricket Club.*

<sup>2</sup> Presumably planted by Whitfield, but possibly by Knight or Abbott, the successive owners before 1810.

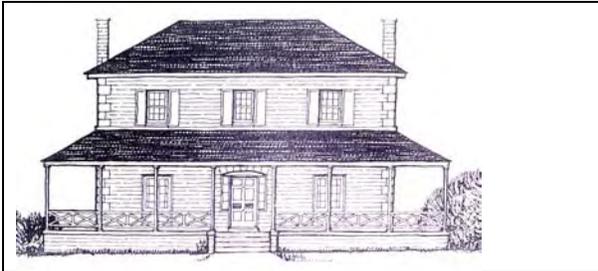


Figure H2 – *Birch Grove House*, c.1810. Source: Leichhardt Historical Journal No. 15, 1986, *Birchgrove 1796-1985*, article by Pamela Jeffery.



Figure H3 – *Birch Grove House*, c. 1840, viewed from Iron Cove. Source: Leichhardt Historical Journal No. 15, 1986, *Birchgrove 1796-1985*, article by Pamela Jeffery.

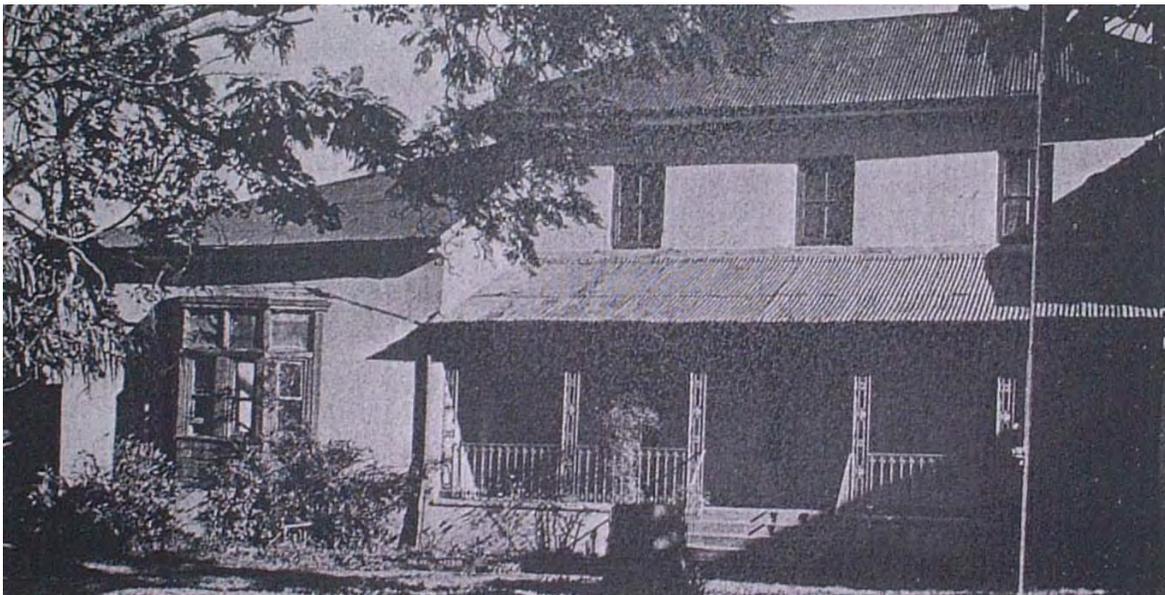


Figure H4 – *Birch Grove House* in 1967, shortly before its demolition.

Captain John McLean in 1838<sup>3</sup>. This sale to McLean is evidently the first registered transaction for the property recorded in the Land Titles Office (Book N No. 565). McLean had borrowed the entire amount for the purchase of the estate and subsequently again mortgaged the property and extra rural land, borrowing over £5000 in 1841. Due to McLean’s substantial debts, the Supreme Court foreclosed on his loans in April 1844.

Things went from bad to worse financially, to a point where by 1849 the then mortgagees - Bloxsome and Turner- applied to the Court of Claims for a new grant. This new grant was issued on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1850 - after what appears to be some complicated conveyancing - to Bloxsome and a Thomas Icton, with the property then being sold on to Henry Watson Parker in 1854 and then again promptly onto Didier Numa Joubert in the same year. Parker was a prominent Sydney political figure, later to become the third (though for a fleeting period) premier of New South Wales. Joubert had arrived in the colony (by way of New Zealand) from France some years earlier and had gone into business with his brother. Neither Parker nor Joubert actually ever took up residence on the estate, instead continuing to lease the house to an incumbent tenant, William Salmon Deloitte (father of Quarton L. Deloitte who was later to play such a prominent role in establishing the Balmain Cricket Club), and later to a Mrs Wilkinson of Balmain. It was during the

<sup>3</sup> South, S., *The Birchgrove Subdivision: A Search Plan*, 1996, *Balmain Association Inc*

brief Parker ownership incidentally that the estate underwent a name change to *Hatherton*, a name which he had written into his purchase contract. Parker's attempt to bind the new owner (Joubert) to this new name was unsuccessful so that the *Birch Grove* nomenclature has survived until the present day.

Joubert in fact laid the foundations of the present day Birchgrove by executing the first residential subdivision. This was undertaken by surveyor William Brownrigg between 1856, following the expiry of Deloitte's lease, and 1860 (Figure H6). Today's street pattern in Birchgrove was largely generated from what was proposed in this 1860 plan, with the streets named after members of the Joubert family. *Birch Grove House* was to be retained on a large waterfront block (see Figures H5, H7 & H8) with an access to its lower garden available from The Terrace. The location of Louisa Road was crucial to the subdivision. It had to be aligned along the central ridge to create the maximum number of allotments with deep water access, while planned so as not to impinge on *Birch Grove House* - hence the placement of the bend in Louisa Road. Otherwise the subdivision allowed for the estate to be cut into ten sections "with many villa lots". In the event, sales of the allotments were to fall well short of expectations, with only seven sold by 1866. These sales included three lots adjoining *Birch Grove House* to its new owner, Jacob Levi Montefiore, who had bought it in 1860. Other sales were made to quarrymen and stonemasons, doubtless attracted by the underlying natural rock on which the Birchgrove estate stood.<sup>4</sup>

The results of this 1860 subdivision must have been disappointing to Joubert. In today's terminology he would be seen as a property developer. He already had a track record with his brother in developing Hunter's Hill and clearly looked at his Birchgrove acquisition as a further commercial property venture. In that regard, he still owed a large sum to Henry Parker on his original purchase of Birchgrove, necessitating that he re-mortgage the property in 1860 to discharge his obligation to Parker. Financing for this was arranged through the Bank of New South Wales and the Liverpool Fire and Life Insurance Company, with the Bank assuming the total mortgage in 1862 when the Liverpool company went into liquidation on 3 December 1862. Seven days later Joubert effectively surrendered his remaining interest in the property to the Bank of New South Wales.



Figure H5 – 1860 painting along the southern side of Long Nose Point and *Birch Grove House* grounds by George P. Slade. *Birch Grove House* is seen at centre left. Source: The Balmain Association.

<sup>4</sup> Leichhardt Historical Journal No. 15, 1986, *Birchgrove 1796-1985*, article by Pamela Jeffery.

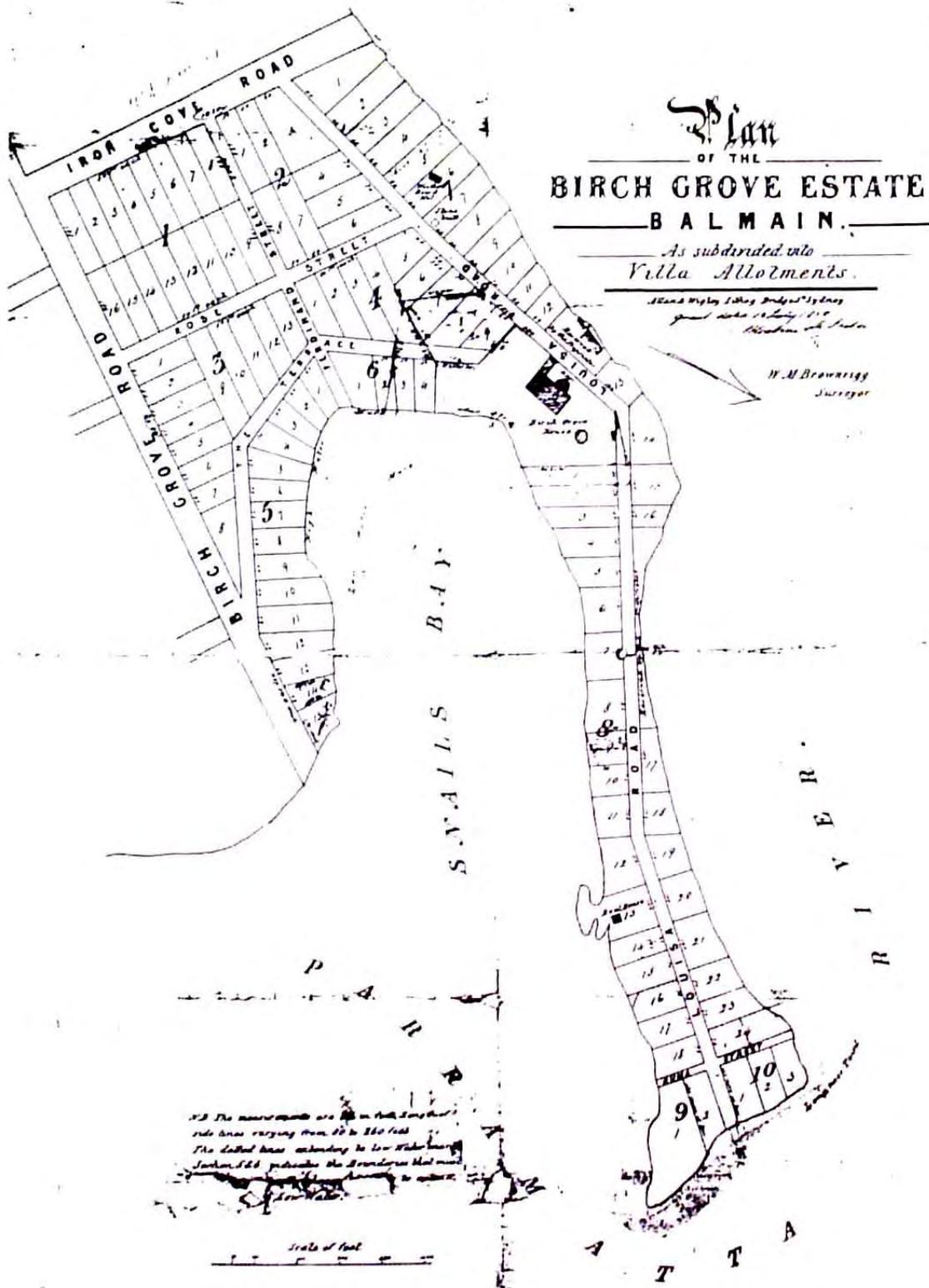


Figure H6 – The 1860 subdivision plan by Joubert, prepared by Brownrigg.

Note the street pattern, which still exists today,

Source: South, S., *The Birchgrove Subdivision: A Search Plan*, 1996, Balmain Association Inc



Figure H7- 1860 painting of Long Nose Point and the *Birch Grove House* grounds by George P. Slade. *Birch Grove House* is seen at left with already mature ornamental trees (Figs, Oranges?) in front of it. Note the post and two rail property fence across Snails Bay in the foreground. Source: The Balmain Association.



National Library of Australia nla.pic-an24459710-v

Figure H8 – Undated early image of Snails Bay, showing the Birchgrove Park site (arrowed) at the far right of the image, with a smattering of remnant Eucalypts on the northern ridge above it. The immediate environs of *Birch Grove House* are at left, bounded by a stout fence, with cultural plantings, including Norfolk Is. Pines and possibly orange trees. It is not clear if any of these plantings were Fig Trees; if so, they are the only ones to survive today. Old orange trees appear in the bare center middleground.

Source: National Library pic-an 24459710 –v.jpg

In the next sixteen years the Bank of New South Wales was to make only twenty three sales of further lots from the estate. This probably reflected the overhang in the market arising from the placement by the owners of large areas of the nearby Balmain Estate on the market at the same time. By 1878, eighty two lots of the original 1860 subdivision in Birchgrove remained unsold. *Birch Grove House* itself meanwhile had been sold again, this time to John Lowry Adams, a Sydney Bank manager, in 1876.

In 1878, a syndicate of three Sydney businessmen (McLean, McGregor and Threlkeld) banded together to purchase all remaining lots of the estate, and then commissioned architect and surveyor Ferdinand Reuss to draw up a new plan for subdivision and sale (Figure H9). (Snails Bay was referred to in that plan as “The Miniature Bay of Naples”.) As recorded in a *Sydney Morning Herald* advertisement for the new subdivision on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1878 (Figure H10), prospective purchasers were promised **a park and recreation grounds**, land set aside for a church (never built) and a government jetty (Figure H12). (This is the first reference to a park/recreation grounds made in the successive land subdivisions at Birchgrove.) Importantly, the roads set out in Brownrigg’s 1860 subdivision plan were to be retained.

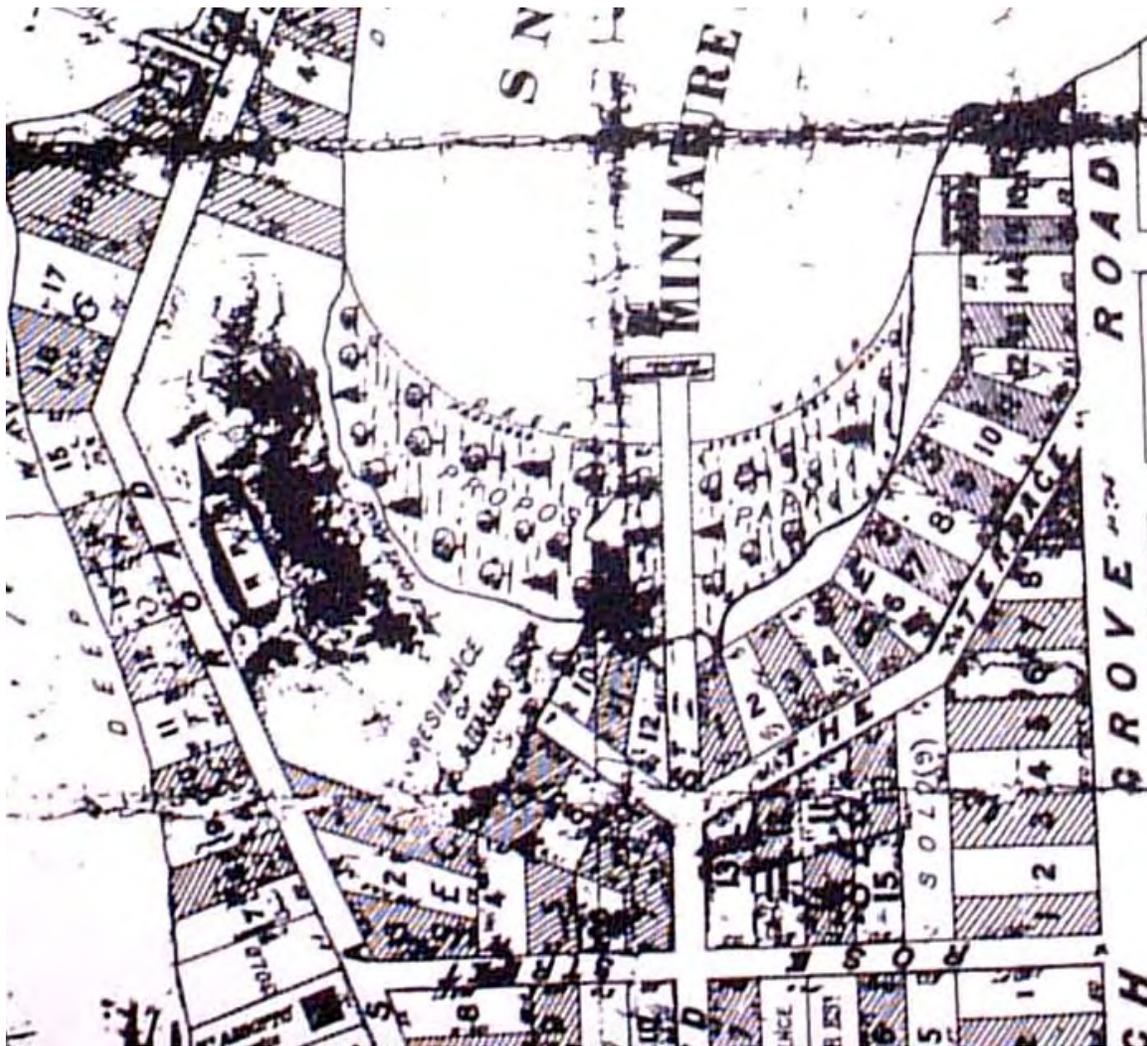


Figure H9 – Extract from the 1878 subdivision plan for the Estate, drawn by Ferdinand Reuss.  
Source: South, S., *The Birchgrove Subdivision: A Search Plan*, 1996, Balmain Association Inc



Figure H10 – 1878 photograph of Snails Bay, with the grounds of *Birch Grove House* defined by the paling fence in the foreground. The mudflats of what was to become the western sector of Birchgrove Park are just visible at far right. Source: The Balmain Association. Original: National Library.

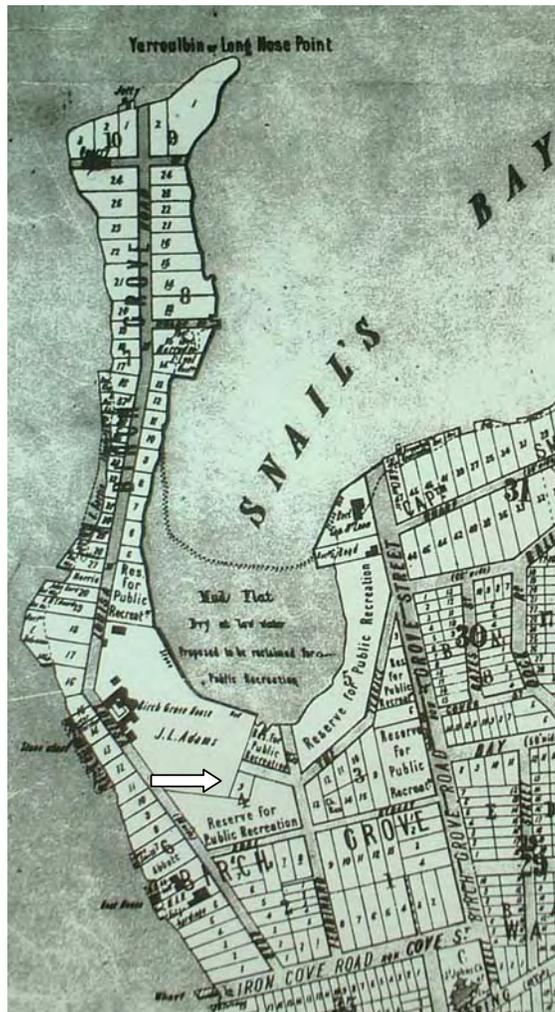


Figure H11 – 1883 plan showing zones around Snails Bay reserved for public recreation and the extent of the mud flat that was proposed to be filled. Source: Leichhardt Local Studies Library.

In comparison with Joubert's abortive effort in 1860, the 1878 subdivision was to prove much more attractive to buyers. Within several years, all lots had been sold off, including thirty six allotments constituting much of what today makes up a large part of Birchgrove Park. These were purchased by the Crown in November 1881 for what was first titled the "Birch Grove Recreation Ground".

With greater effort, the Crown, around the same time, was also able to acquire the lot on which the caretaker's residence stands. This lot, no. 9 of section 4 (arrowed in Figure H11 above and see Figure H13) of the Reuss subdivision, was bought by a Mr. David Muir in December 1879. Muir is likely to have been the one to build what is now the caretaker's house (originally known as *Bay View House*) some time between 1880 and 1885. The proposed resumption was first resisted by the owner, who took the matter to court, where he was eventually awarded one farthing in damages - but was also stuck with the bill for the full costs of the action! The Crown acquired the property soon after anyway.

These purchases and acquisitions for the proposed park came with full local and wider community support. Indeed, the laying down of parklands for recreation and related activities was the object of numerous public petitions in the Sydney of the day, with citizens anxious to preserve open spaces among the subdivisions blossoming throughout the property boom of the 1880s. In 1880 Sir Henry Parkes' Government passed the Land for Public Purposes Act and allocated some monies accordingly. The Public Parks Act followed in 1884. The land preserved for public use was often of the poorest quality, however, as indeed was the case with the Snails Bay waterfront, which was little more than a wide expanse of mud flats at low tide. Reuss was engaged to design the Park, with a picket fenced cricket oval as its centrepiece.

To allow the full development of Birchgrove Park, further land had to be hived off *Birch Grove House* grounds, with J. L. Adams agreeing to surrender a portion of the waterfront-facing land of *Birch Grove House* in 1886<sup>5</sup> (Figure H12).

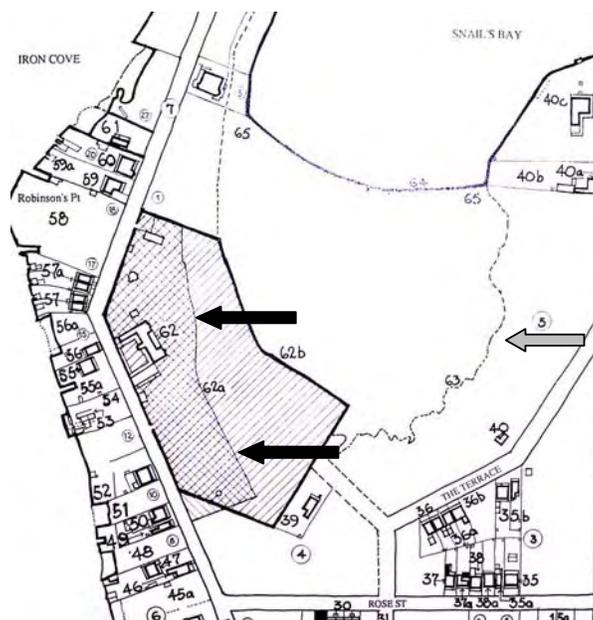


Figure H12 – The single hatched zone of land (black arrowed) was the portion of the *Birch Grove House* grounds surrendered by Adams for the creation of Birchgrove Park. The original foreshore line of Snails Bay is indicated by the dashed line (grey arrow). Source: Leichhardt Historical Journal No. 15, 1986. *Birchgrove 1796-1985*, article by Pamela Jeffery.

<sup>5</sup> *Balmain Observer* newspaper, March 1886.  
Mayne-Wilson & Associates

Initial fencing of the recreation grounds commenced in 1883 and was completed in 1885. A practice cricket pitch was laid out in 1885 (at which time, too, major levelling-off works were carried out). *The Balmain Observer* from September 1885 reported that requests had already been made for construction of toilet blocks and shelters in the park. A dozen bench seats were also purchased around this time for the park. In 1887, Thomas Rose, a man with botanical experience, was engaged to carry out planting and landscape work in the park.

Almost from its foundation in 1882, the newly constituted Birchgrove Park Trust pressed for Government support for a large-scale program to reclaim the mud flats in the bay, using filling from the Sutherland Dock then being excavated on Cockatoo Island. As a result, a large portion of the mud flats was steadily reclaimed from 1886 (see Figures H12 and H16) and a rough dyke wall to support the oval was begun in 1887, and by 1904 this reclaimed land was fully incorporated into the park.

Of passing interest is that, although maps from the early 1880s show the land purchased by the Crown as being reserved for public recreation, it was not until 6 July 1894 that Birchgrove Park was formally proclaimed (page 4351 of the Government Gazette of that date).

The development of the park did not proceed evenly, with an extended hiatus occurring during the depression of the early 1890s. Work resumed again in 1897, however, when further filling using clay from Davison Street (above White Bay) was laid, thus enabling an extension of the line of reclamation beyond the 1887 dyke-wall, and thereby the construction of the sandstone block seawall present today.

Some changes were made to the land surrounding the new park. By the mid 1880s the northern arm of The Terrace had been terminated at its current end point; thenceforth the only vehicular access to *Birch Grove House* was from Louisa Road. Earlier issues of the *Balmain Observer* (from 1885) also record that at that time gates had stood across The Terrace at Ferdinand Street, presumably to limit vehicular access across the park and developing cricket ground. These gates were subsequently removed. The owner of *Birch Grove House* (Adams) meantime had himself moved out of the mansion in 1897, leasing the property to Richard Bennetts in 1899. [This study will not include a full ownership and tenancy record of *Birch Grove House* from this time onward, as it is not relevant to the development of the Park. However, we do note that in 1900 Adams subdivided the *Birch Grove House* grounds into 12 lots<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently, in 1911, Mary Scott, who bought the lot containing the mansion, subdivided it further, into 5 portions.]

The tennis courts near Rose Street were laid out around 1902 and the Birchgrove Tennis Club was launched in 1904 and celebrated its centenary last year. Although on Crown land, it is controlled by Leichhardt Council and is currently leased to the North Western Tennis Association. In addition, a single tennis court with an adjoining pavilion (Figures H20 & HI 4) was built c.1910 at the request of St John's Church at the south-east end of the park near Grove Street, but was not officially opened until 1920. It was known as the Parkview Tennis Club, whose members still play weekly.

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<sup>6</sup> It is also worth noting that, according to Water Board Plans, the large sandstone block retaining wall at the eastern end of the property was already in place by 1893, showing that was part of the Birch Grove House property, and not built as a result of the 1900 or 1911 subdivisions.

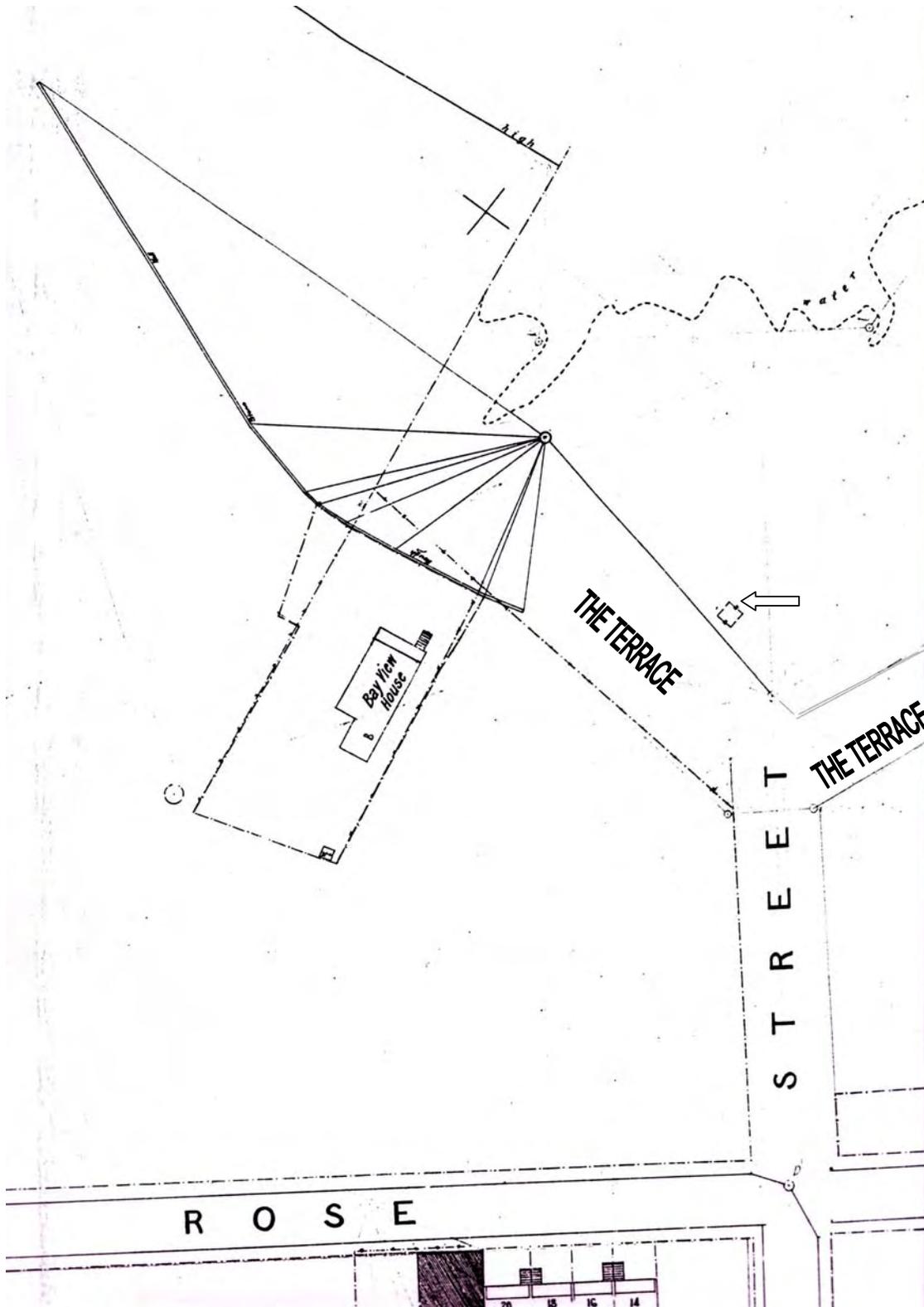


Figure H13 - Excerpt from Water Board plan 'Balmain, sheets 3 & 4', PWD 318, catalogue 1544 of 5.1.1888 showing *Bay View House* (centre) and a small structure (arrowed) in the approximate position of the small shed still present today. Note that the north arm of the Terrace terminates at the northern corner of *Bay View House* (the caretaker's house).

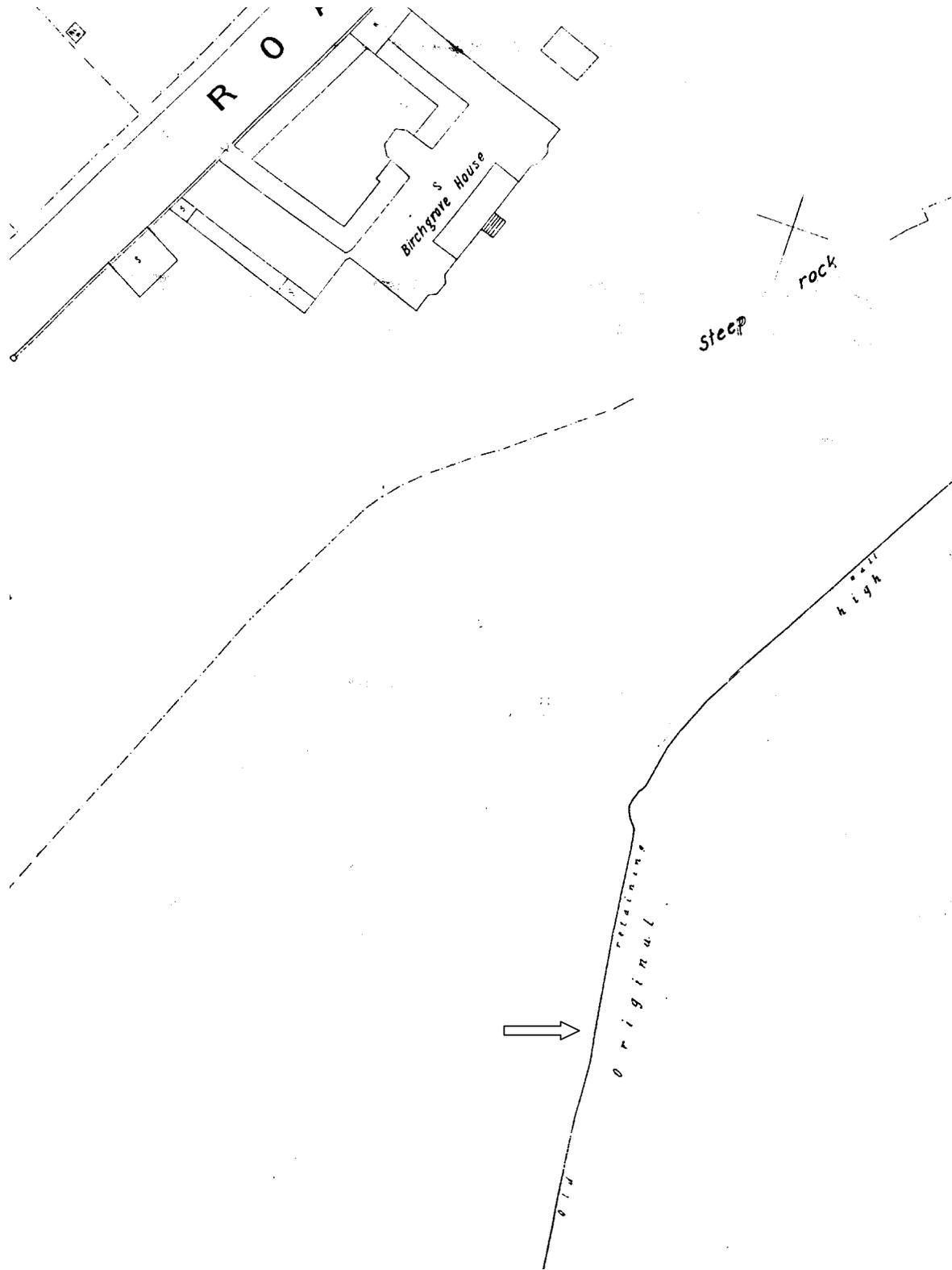


Figure H14 - Excerpt from a Water Board plan Balmain Sheet No.2 PWD 317 catalogue 1544 of 5.1. 1888 showing the 'old retaining wall' (arrowed) above the original high water mark, with the footprint of *Birch Grove House* at the left.

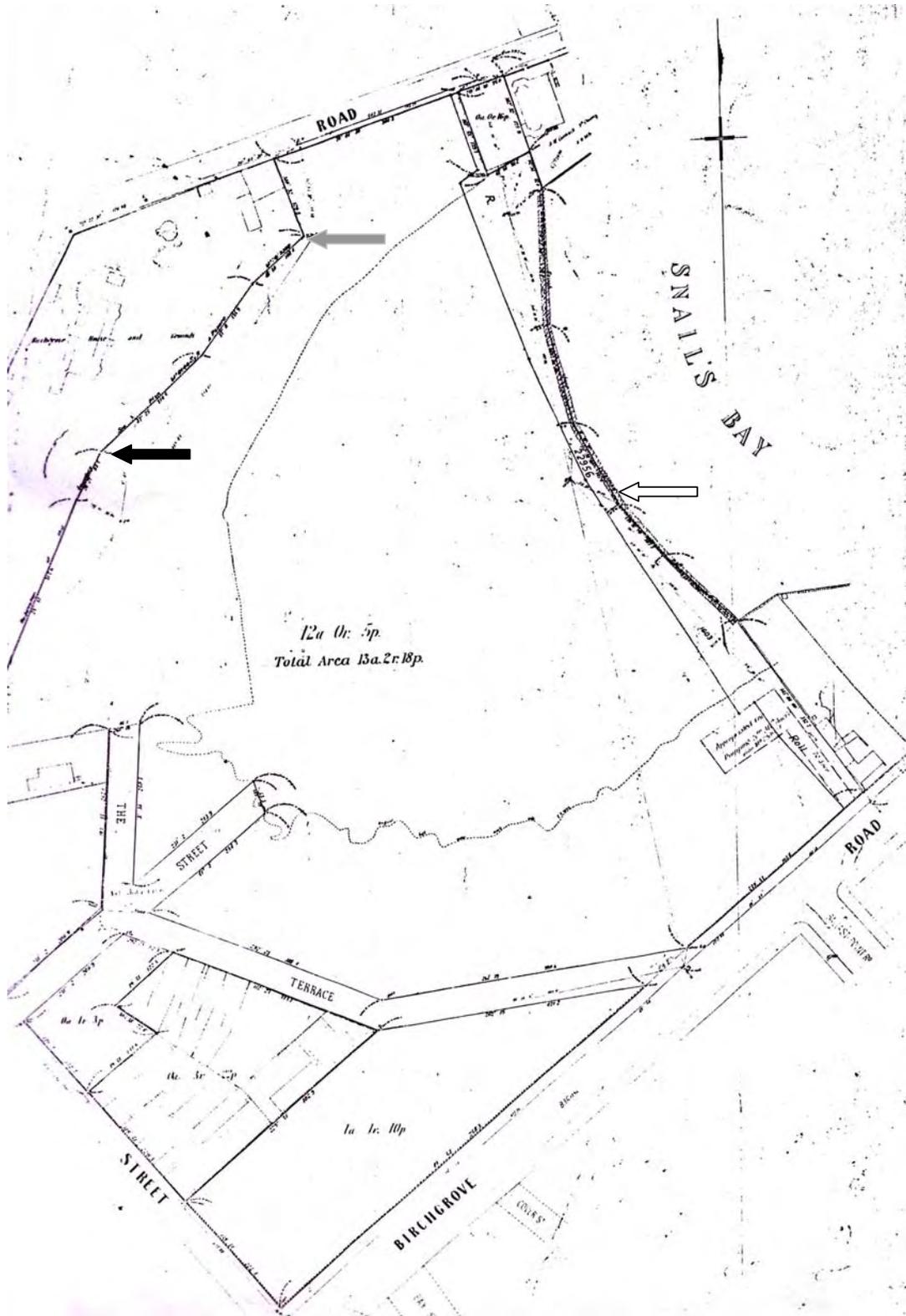


Figure H15 - Water Board Plan of Birchgrove Park, October 1893 (Misc. Syd. 510, catalogue 3000) showing that the rough dyke retaining wall (white arrow) was already in place. It also shows the revised boundary (black arrow) of the *Birch Grove Estate* after its owner Mr. Adams had ceded some land to the new Park. The squared corner on the north-east (grey arrow) is a section of a sandstone block retaining wall still present today, built before the 1900 and 1911 subdivisions.



Figure H16 – Looking north across Snails Bay c.1891, at which time the reclamation and sea wall works were under construction (beyond the right side of this image). The original sea wall and the sandstone retaining wall upslope from it are also visible on the far side of the bay. *Birch Grove House* is at the top left of the image. Note the mature Norfolk Is. Pine and (probably) Fig Trees that surround it. At the foot of this image a white picket fence is already in place along the southern boundary of the park.

Source: Mitchell Library small pictures file.

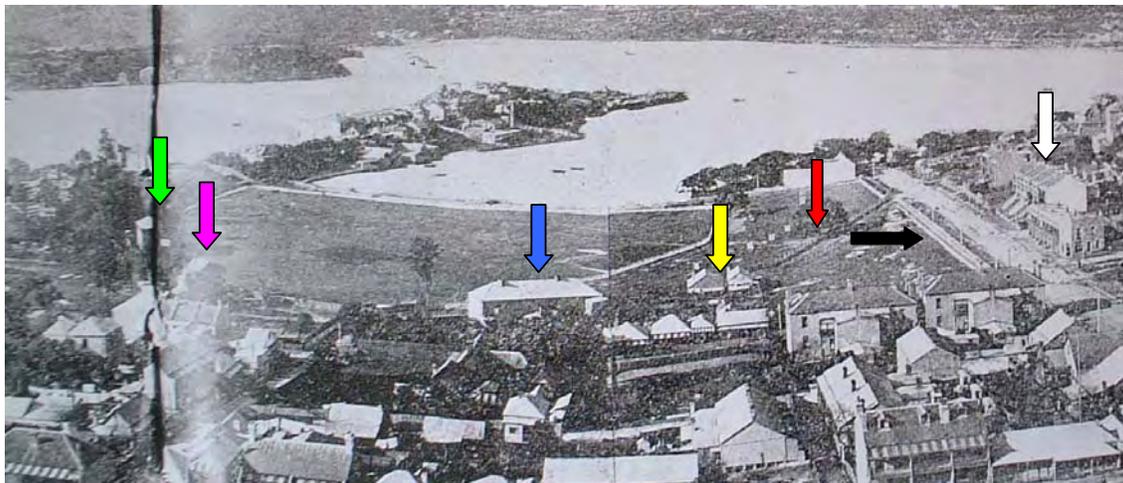


Figure H17 – Birchgrove Park in 1902. The reclamation for the oval was almost complete by this date, and it was surrounded by the picket fence (although at least some of the park as a whole was surrounded by a paling fence). The large sandstone retaining wall (black arrow) along the southern edge of the park is also visible. Some of the sandstone blocks at the eastern end of this wall reputedly came from the Balmain Cemetery<sup>7</sup>. The row of terrace houses (white arrow) and the corner store on the south side of Grove St. still exist (though much modified), while the terrace houses (site indicated by the blue arrow) along The Terrace (red arrow) are very prominent. The two cottages (yellow arrow) to the south appear in Sydney Water diagrams from the 1880s, as do the terrace houses. The purple arrow indicates the caretaker's cottage (first known as *Bay View House*) and the green arrow indicates the first grandstand, on the northern edge of the oval. Source: The Balmain Association from *The Sydney Illustrated News*.

<sup>7</sup> Kath Hamey – The Balmain Association  
Mayne-Wilson & Associates



Figure H18 – Photograph by the McLean family, said to be in 1910 but quite possibly earlier, looking north across the park, showing the reclamation works finished and the existing sea wall completed. Note that there are no significant trees along the foreshore zone, although it is possible that the square structures along it are tree guards for early plantings. Deloitte Avenue has also been laid out along the seawall. *Birch Grove House* is arrowed. Source: The Balmain Association.

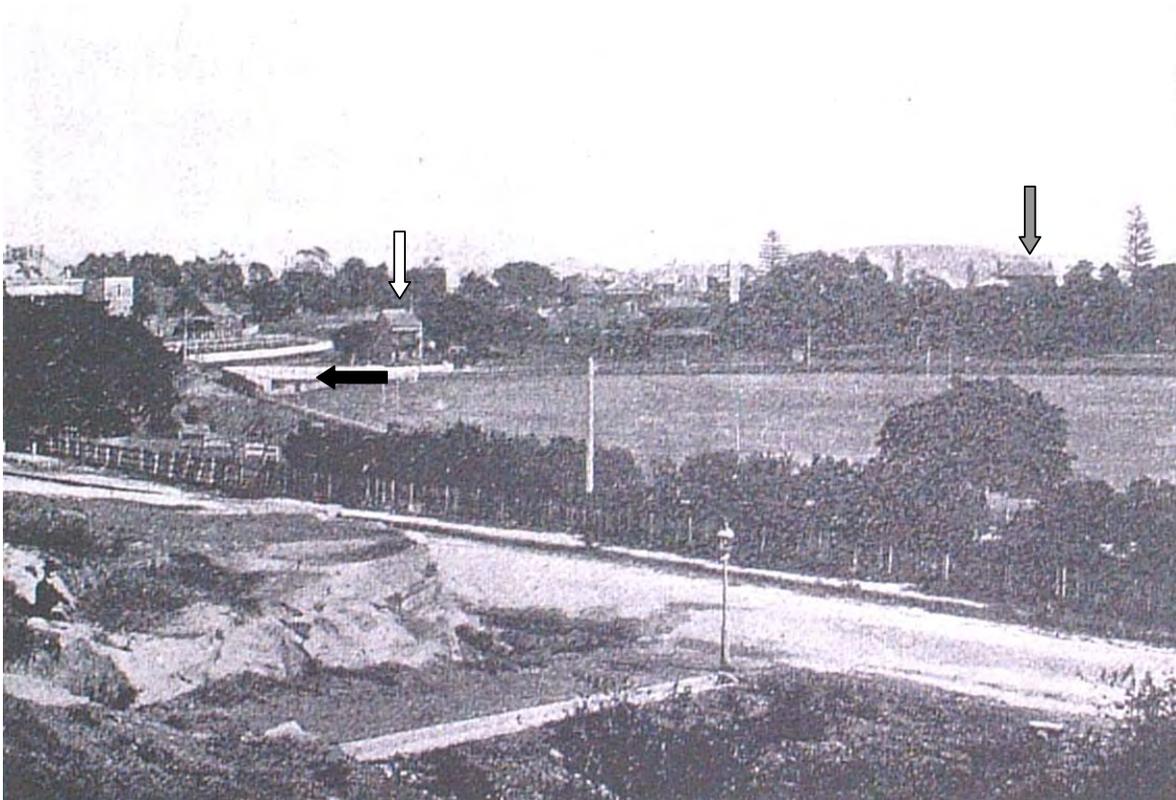


Figure H19 - A view across Birchgrove Park in 1910, taken from the junction with Ballast Point Road. The caretaker's house (white arrow) is in place, and a high wall to the south of it, apparently close to the point where Ferdinand St meets The Terrace. A shed or changeroom is located to the front of it (black arrow). Note the sturdy paling fence along the boundary. *Birch Grove House* (and grounds) are indicated by the grey arrow.



Figure H20 – View east through Birchgrove Park, likely to be c.1910, with no trees yet visible along the foreshore zone. The picket fences along the Snails Bay and southern boundaries of the park are in place, while a white post and two rail fence marks the western boundary (to enable spectators to see through it to watch the sports matches). Note the simple bench seating for spectators, and the drinking fountain in the centre foreground. The Parkview tennis court and pavilion are visible at top right. The building arrowed was a dressing shed for referees, which appears to have been located straddling the oval and fence. It no longer exists, having been replaced a little upslope by a brick one, with crude concrete step seating in the early 1960s. Source: *Municipality of Balmain – Retrospect 1860-1935*, courtesy of The Balmain Association Inc.

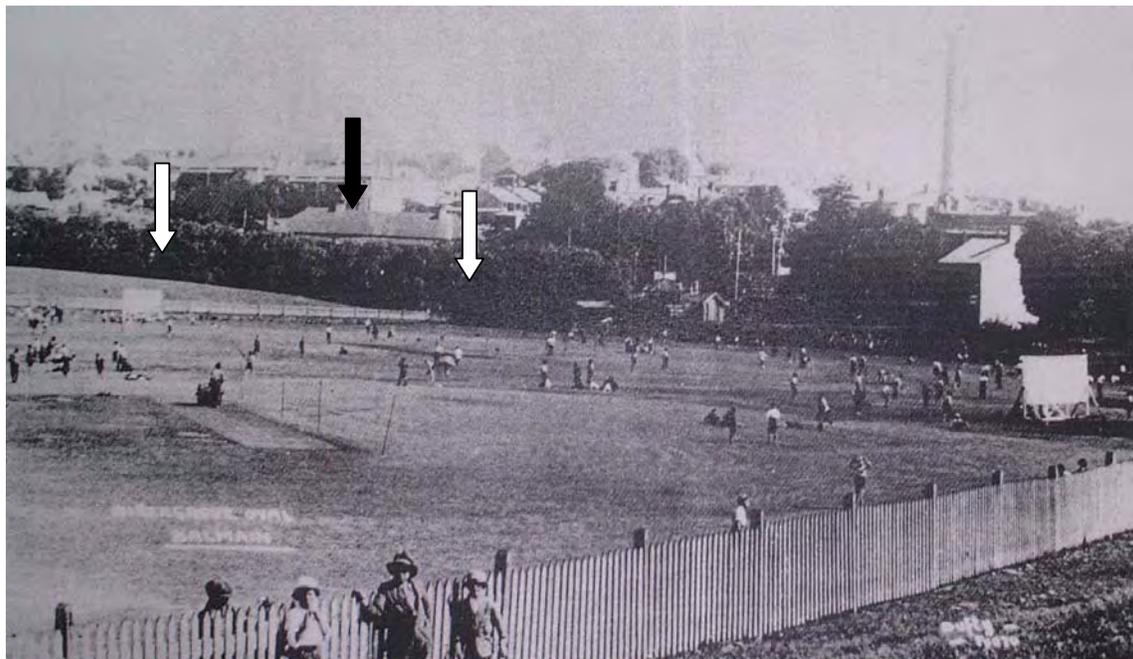


Figure H21 - A view looking south across the park toward the properties along The Terrace (arrowed black) in the early 1920s. Note the density of trees (arrowed white), said to have been Pepper Trees along the edge of the Park with The Terrace. Source: Winning, C., *Cricket Balmania*, Official History Balmain District Cricket Club.

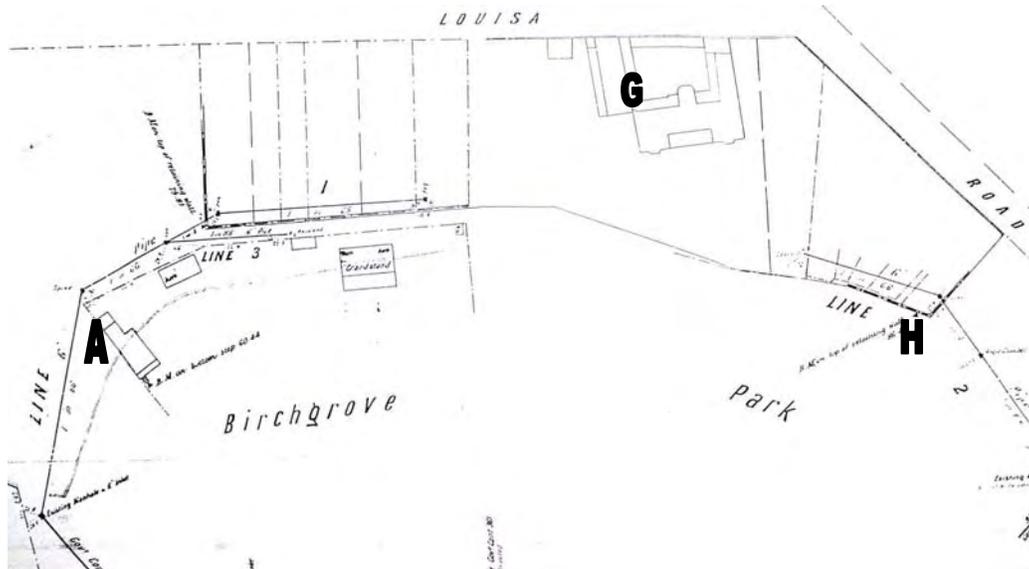


Figure H22 - This Sydney Water Plan BC 625B, WAF of 1 Feb. 1907, shows the caretaker's house (marked A), and the various park structures north-east of it, plus the footprint of *Birchgrove House* (G). Note the presence of the stone retaining wall (H) at far right.

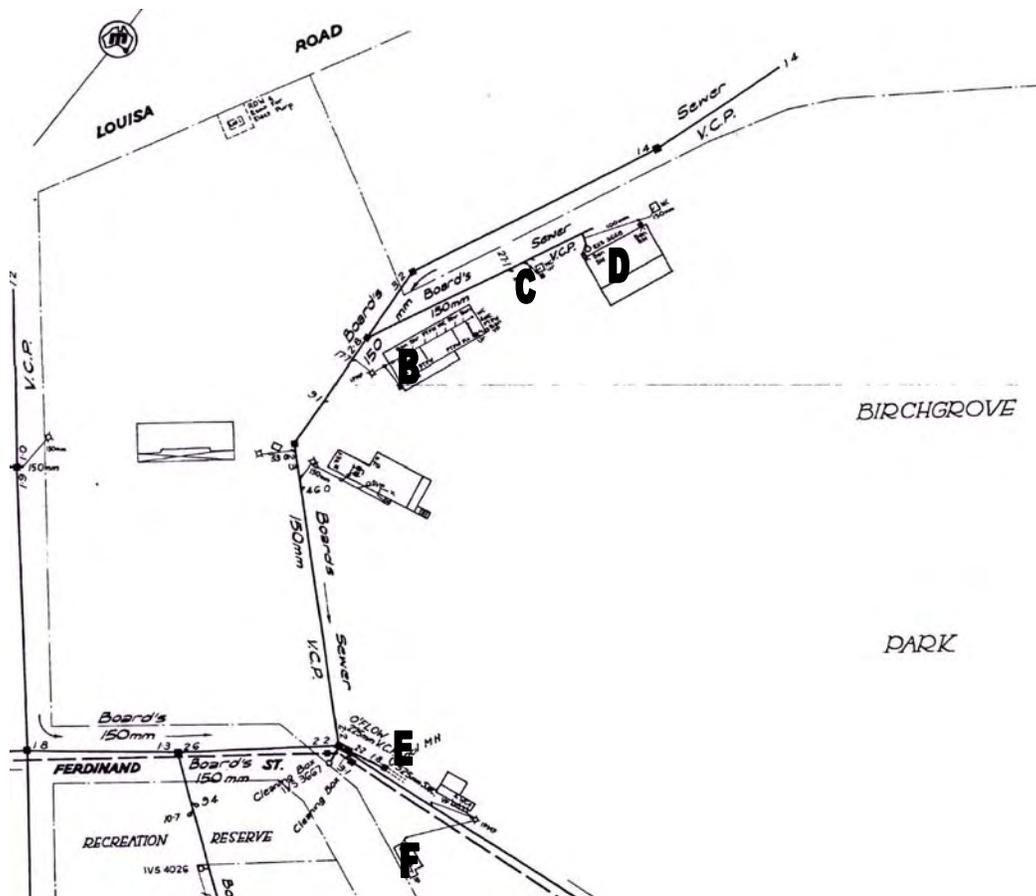


Figure H23 - Detail of structures on the western slopes of the park, c. 1950. Note the change rooms (B), toilets (C), small grandstand (D), and to the south, the maintenance shed & toilets (E) & public men's toilets (F)

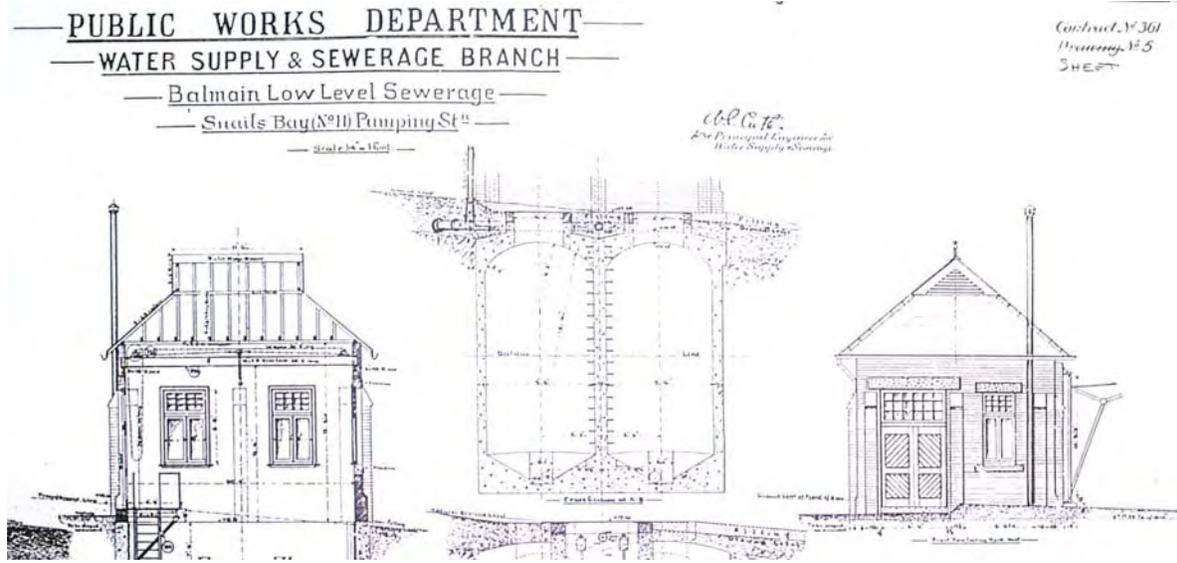


Figure H24 - Plan of the Balmain Low Level Sewerage Pumping Station at Snails Bay, dated 5 Dec. 1902, which was installed in the south-east corner of the Park.

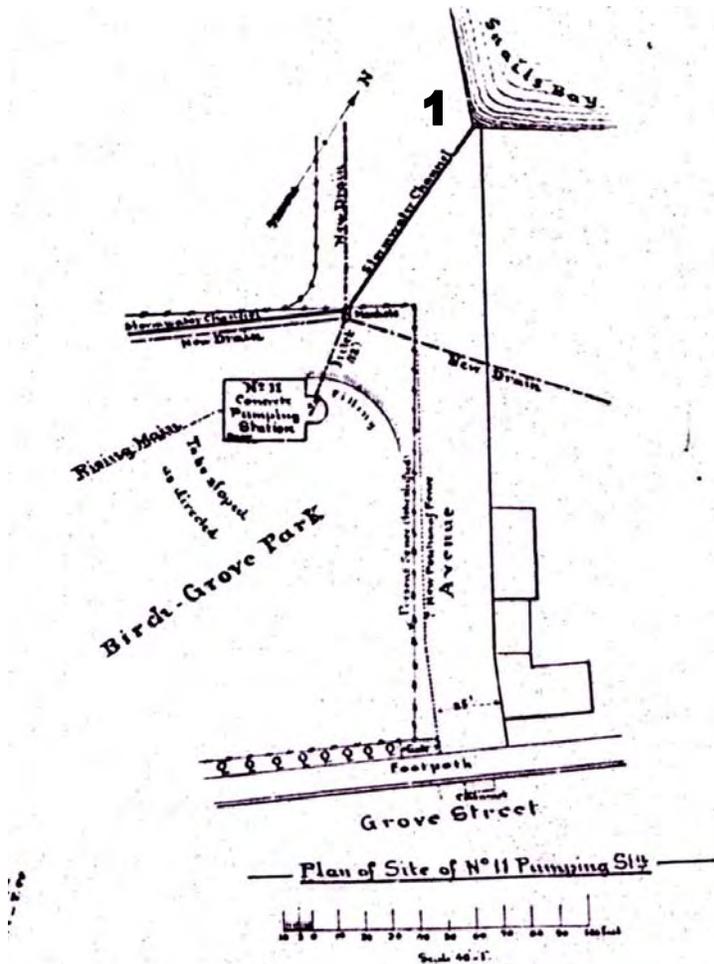


Figure H25 - Section of the above plan showing the actual location of the pumping station (and the discharge line into Snails Bay (1)). The avenue at centre is Deloitte Ave.

The Balmain District Cricket Club was founded in 1897, with an inaugural match held in September that year, captured in the image below. (Source: Winning, C. *Cricket Balmania, op cit*)



Figure H26 - The inaugural cricket match 1897, viewed from the south slope of the Park near The Terrace.

In 1910, the Secretary of the Park Trust was able to describe Birchgrove Park as covering seven acres and containing three cricket or football spaces. Already, by 1902, a small grandstand near the caretaker’s residence had been built, the remnant of which is depicted in the images below. It was finally demolished in 1989.

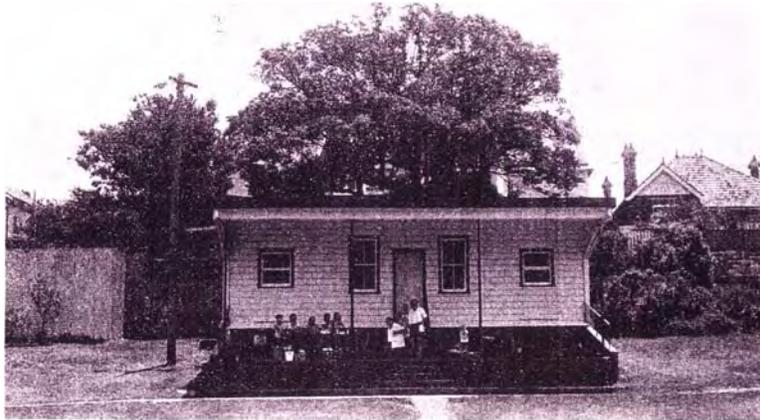


Figure H27 - “All that’s left” in 1980 of the small grandstand/change rooms on the northern slope beyond the oval, with houses of Louisa Rd. in the background. Source: Winning, C. 1980. *Cricket Balmania. op..cit*



Figure H28 - Side view of the small grandstand, with the oval at right and trees of the grounds of former *Birch Grove House* at centre. Note the old stone sea wall, at centre right. Source: Winning, C. *op. cit.*

From the very beginning, then, it is evident that the park's *raison d'être* was as a venue for substantial sporting activities. Indeed, it is probably no exaggeration to see the development of the Park through the first half of the twentieth century as pretty much synonymous with the development of the Balmain District Cricket Club. A number of prominent Balmain identities associated with the Club were also associated with the Birchgrove Park Trust.

One of these was Quarton L. Deloitte, president of the cricket club in its very early years.<sup>8</sup> Earlier, Deloitte Avenue, which had been laid down in 1904 after completion of the reclamation, had been named after him, partly in appreciation for his leading role in the Park Trust since 1884. He contributed both a great deal of time and money to the Park. With Mr A. H. Fitzhardinge, he is credited with having been instrumental in the planting of some 300 trees and palms in the park, presumably in the period 1905-1925.<sup>9</sup> Deloitte was to become one of the most prominent sporting identities in Sydney, making a major contribution to the establishment of rowing on the river. However, he maintained his close links with Balmain Cricket Club until his death in 1929. The Deloitte Gates were erected in his honour the following year at the entry to the park off the jetty - see Figure H29m - but they were melted down during World War II for use in the war effort. Today, the only reminder of the Deloitte Gates is the plaque fixed to the edge of the sea wall for image, see section 4.5).

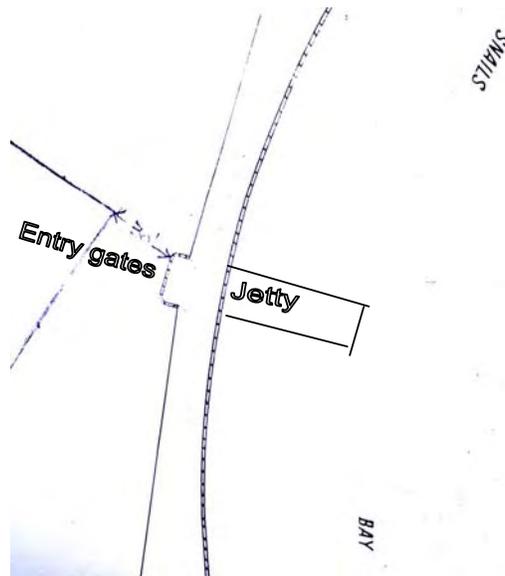


Figure H29 - Excerpt from undated Council Plan showing the entry gates in the boundary fence with Deloitte Ave. which were opposite the jetty.

Rugby League was also played there, with the first First Grade League game actually being staged at Birchgrove Park on 20 April 1908. The game was between North Sydney and South Sydney, with Norths defeating Souths by 11-7. A second game the same afternoon was between Balmain and Wests (Balmain won 24 to nil), with other games simultaneously being played between Newtown and Eastern Suburbs and Glebe and Newcastle at nearby Wentworth Park. Birchgrove Park remained the home ground of the Balmain Rugby League Club until 1933.

In 1932, plans were drawn up at Birchgrove Park for a high picket fence along the water side of the park (probably to replace an older, lower one) and during this time a toilet block was also constructed, which is unlikely to have been the first in the park.

<sup>8</sup> William Salmon Deloitte, his father, was a tenant of *Birch Grove House* from about 18150 to 1856,

<sup>9</sup> The Sydney Botanical Gardens provided 24 trees to the Birchgrove Park Trust in July 1911, for example.

In 1932 Birchgrove Park eclipsed the previous record for hosting a local cricket match when, over two Saturdays, a crowd of some 20,000 attended to watch Donald Bradman play for St George against Balmain. Special trams had to be laid on to bring the large crowds to the oval for the match. Cricket (and Rugby League) continued to figure prominently in usage of the park through the twenties and thirties and, indeed, after WWII, into the fifties and sixties.



Figure H30 – c.1960 photograph through the southern portion of the oval, donated by Mrs. Latta, of the caretaker's family at the time. Note the number of cars on the oval and that the southern side of the oval appears to have had a white post and rail fence around it at this time. Source: The Balmain Association.

The Birchgrove Park Trust ceased to exist in 1948 because of limited funding available, and management of the Park was taken over by Balmain Council until the latter was subsumed into Leichhardt Council the following year. In 1953, Council also took over management of the tennis courts adjacent to Rose Street, leasing the land to the Balmain Tennis Association for twenty-five years. In 1954 the courts were changed from lawn to a clay/loam surface, making it a less exclusive club. From 1962 Council undertook a four year plan of improvement to the courts, which included replacement of the original timber clubhouse and turning the courts into a truly hard surface. A new lease was negotiated in 1976 when the Balmain Tennis Association amalgamated with the North-Western Tennis Association, still the current lease holder.

A new toilet block, discreetly tucked away into the footslope just to the north of it, was erected about 1970. At about the same time, the two tennis courts adjacent to Louisa road were constructed in what was formerly a passive landscape space at the north-west corner of the Park.

Plans for a substantial upgrade of the caretaker's house were prepared in 1988-89 by architects Windass Hamer. These were carried out, and it is now in good condition. At that time too, the old, small grandstand was removed, and although proposals were made to replace it within the same general footprint, this did not occur. The old timber change rooms nearby were also demolished and not replaced, as was a picket fence along The Terrace. However, a new picket fence was constructed around the entire oval in the early 1990s, replacing one of a succession of earlier fences in that location. (Some of these, however, had been post-and-rail fences, as the historical images show.) Council agreed that an expert in heritage colour schemes be engaged to advise on appropriate colour schemes for structures in the Park, and that a landscape architect should be engaged to prepare a landscape plan for embellishment of the carpark at the corner of Rose Street and Ferdinand Street and for general improvement in the Park.<sup>10</sup> This, however, did not occur (which is why such a recommendation has been repeated in this CMP).

<sup>10</sup> Minute to Town Clerk from Municipal Engineer, 16 February 1988.  
Mayne-Wilson & Associates

In addition to the works on the caretaker's house, other proposals made by the Architects in 1989 included:

- landscaping around the house, the changing shed, and the proposed new grandstand to integrate the appearance of the three buildings;
- renovation of the stores and toilets adjacent to the main gate to unify their character and rectify defects;
- construction of an archway to the (entrance) gate with appropriate signwriting;
- replacement of the paving to the area between the main gate and the grandstand with a material consistent with the character of the Park. This area should be arranged to limit the movement of vehicles, and to formalise parking arrangements; and
- a surveyor be commissioned to provide a survey of the area from the main gate to the [previously] existing grandstand.

It is noted that, apart from some landscaping north of the caretaker's house, these proposals were not implemented by Council, apparently because of shortage of funds.

### 2.3 Naming of streets surrounding the park

Notes from Davidson, B and Hamey, K., *Streets, Lanes and Places 1836-1994*, The Balmain Association, 1994.

**The Terrace.** Resulted from the 1860 Brownrigg survey. Later renamed Birchgrove Avenue in 1915, but reverted to its original name in 1985.

**Deloitte Avenue.** Built in 1904, following the reclamation of the mud flats for Birchgrove Park, and named in honour of Quarton L. Deloitte.

**Grove Street** (formerly Birchgrove Road). Formed the boundary of the Birchgrove Estate and William Balmain's 1800 land grant. The Balmain Municipal Council Minutes of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1881 show that the Snails Bay end of Birchgrove Road was to be called Grove Street.

**Louisa Road, Rose Street and Ferdinand Street.** Joubert's 1860 subdivision of the Birchgrove Estate created these roads. Louisa Street was laid out along the ridgeline of Long Nose Point to create the maximum number of allotments with deep water access, whilst not impinging on the grounds of *Birch Grove House*.

It is assumed that Ferdinand and Reuss Streets were named after Surveyor Ferdinand Reuss who laid out the 1878 subdivision of the *Birch Grove estate*.

### 2.4 Aerial Photo Analysis

Whilst modifications have been made to Birchgrove Park since its original layout completed around 1904, the composition of the park has remained largely consistent, this due largely to the fact that the bulk of the park is made up of a sports oval. Whilst some significant trees have been removed from the park, probably since the 1950s (including several around the caretaker's house), many of the key cultural plantings evident in the 1930 aerial image (Figure H31) remain today. Active recreation zones have remained in the same locations that they were constructed in during the late 1800s and early 1900s, for example the tennis courts in Rose Street. Accessways around the park and pedestrian and vehicular access points from surrounding streets have remained as existed in the first decade of the twentieth century.



Figure H31 - 1930 aerial photograph. Both the tennis court near Grove Street and the three first ones adjacent to Rose Street had already been in use for some decades by the date of this image. Note the immature size of the plantings (c. early 1920s) along the foreshore zone and the distinct band of trees extending along The Terrace. The boundary plantings along Grove and Rose Streets (bottom left) Ferdinand St. (center left) and Louisa Road (top right) considered to have been planted in the period 1905-1925, also appear relatively young. The toilet-cum-maintenance shed (black arrow) just below the junction of Ferdinand St. and The Terrace is already in position, though a smaller, weatherboard structure than the red brick one present today. Source: Lands Department.



Figure H32 - 1951 aerial photograph. The zone to the north of the three tennis courts adjacent to Rose Street (at left) had not yet been converted for tennis court use. There are large mature trees (since removed) directly south of the caretaker's residence, as well as some to the north of it, but some trees around the Rose St. courts have been removed. The small, square weatherboard maintenance shed is not yet in its present position between the (expanded) toilet-cum-maintenance block and the caretaker's residence. The rough brick and concrete pavilion, with Camphor Laurel at the back of it (black arrow), is now in place on the eastern edge of the tennis court pavilion. By now, most of the boundary trees, planted c. early 1920s, have acquired large canopies. Additional plantings have been added along the foreshore zone and the Pepper Trees along The Terrace are maturing. The white arrow indicates *Birch Grove House*. Source: Lands Department.



Figure H33 - 1970 aerial photograph. By this date the site on the corner of Rose Street and Louisa Road had begun to be developed for an extension to the tennis court complex. *Birch Grove House* had been removed and replaced by apartments. The tree line in front of The Terrace residences had been 'thinned out' by this date. The structure arrowed white was the grandstand (built by 1902, but since removed.) The site of the present cream brick toilet block just north of the caretaker's residence appears to be under preparation, while the small square weatherboard maintenance shed is in its present location. Source: Lands Department.



Figure H34 - Aerial photograph of Birchgrove Park taken in 2003.

## 2.5 The following time line summarises the principal developments in the Park

Date	Event
Pre 1788	The Birchgrove area was known to the Aboriginals as Yerroulbin, meaning “swift running waters” around the spit (Long Nose Point) where the waters of Port Jackson and the Parramatta River meet.
1796	Governor Hunter grants 30 acres to George Whitfield, known as Whitfield’s Farm
1800	Farm sold to a Richard (or William) Knight
1806	Property is on- sold to Captain Abbott of the NSW Corps
1810	Onsold to Lt John Birch, paymaster of the 73 <sup>rd</sup> Regiment
	Birch sets about building a permanent residence that he calls <i>Birch Grove</i>
1814	Birch sells the estate, including house, to Rowland Loane, a Sydney merchant
1814-25	The house is left vacant for periods but Loane returns to the house in 1825 and refurbishes and enlarges it; and then leases it to tenants.
1833	Loane attempts a four lot subdivision of the estate but it is unsuccessful
1838	Estate is sold to Captain John Mclean, superintendent of convicts, who is subsequently dispossessed when unable to meet his mortgage commitments
1850	Following a series of complicated title transfers, a new land grant is issued to the then mortgagees, with the property continuing to be leased to tenants, including for six years Captain William Salmon Deloitte, father of Q L Deloitte.
1854	Property is meantime sold to Henry Watson Parker, a significant Sydney political and in the same year, on- sold to Didier Joubert, a prominent property developer.
1860	Following survey and first residential subdivision prepared by W. M. Brownrigg – today’s street pattern was largely laid down by him - estate was offered for sale but few lots were sold.
1862	Joubert relinquishes his interest to mortgage holder, Bank of New South Wales.
1876	<i>Birchgrove House</i> (plus that part of the Brownrigg subdivision that represented the grounds of the House) is sold by the Bank to John Lowry Adams.
1878	Remaining unsold lots from the Brownrigg plan are put up for auction by the Bank in one parcel and purchased by syndicate of three Sydney businessmen.
	A new subdivision is drawn up by Sydney architect and surveyor, Ferdinand Reuss. Advertisement promoting sales from the plan refers for the first time to an intention to establish a <b>park and recreation ground</b> in that part of the subdivision constituting the immediate foreshore of Snails Bay.
1881	Crown acquires 36 of the 82 lots and two previously reserved areas of the Reuss subdivision in order to establish the “Birch Grove Recreation Ground”.
1886	Further land for the park was hived off from <i>Birchgrove House</i> and a little later still from one of the adjacent lots. What is now the caretaker’s house, built on one of the 1878 lots, was also acquired at that time.
1882	Birchgrove Park Trust is established and begins to lobby the Government for program to reclaim the mud flats adjoining the newly acquired park land.
1886	Reclamation work begins using fill from Cockatoo Island. Construction of rough dyke wall begins the following year, followed by appropriation of land in the south-east corner for the installation of a sewerage pumping station.
1894	Birchgrove Park formally proclaimed as such on 6 July
1897	Line of reclamation extended beyond the dyke wall.
1897	Balmain District Cricket Club founded and began hosting first grade matches at its Birchgrove home ground.
c.1902	Two grass tennis courts laid out adjacent to Rose Street.

1904	Construction of sandstone block seawall completed. Esplanade/accessway laid out beside wall and named after Q.L. Deloitte, local sporting hero & Trust member.
1904	The Birchgrove Tennis Club was inaugurated (and is still going).
1903-4	Sewerage Pumping Station installed at south-east corner.
1908	First Grade Rugby League commences in Sydney with matches at Birchgrove Park on 20 April between North Sydney and South Sydney, and Balmain and Western Suburbs. First grade rugby continues to be played there until 1933.
1910	Single tennis court laid out near Grove Street at the south-eastern end of the park. Not officially opened until 1920. Associated with St John's Church.
1932	Record crowd of 10-11,00 attends local cricket match at Birchgrove Park on two Saturdays to see Donald Bradman play for St George against Balmain.
1939-1945	War years
1948	Birchgrove Park Trust wound up with management of the Park devolving to Balmain Council (later Leichhardt Council).
1940s	Old referees' change room shed replaced with one of red brick adjacent to Parkview tennis club pavilion; crude concrete step-seating pavilion tacked onto it.
1953	Council takes over management of tennis courts. Leased for 25 years to Balmain Tennis Association. Courts converted to clay/loam the following year.
c.1970	Present cream brick toilet block constructed just north of caretaker's house.
c. 1970	Additional tennis court built corner of Rose St and Louisa Road; second one added later.
1976	Balmain Tennis Association amalgamated with North West Tennis Association, which took out a long lease. It still manages the Birchgrove Tennis Centre.
1989	Upgrade of caretaker's house undertaken.
1989	Old grandstand removed and not replaced. Old change rooms also removed.