

The history of the reserves and parks of Rangiora

One of the consequences of Rangiora's unplanned growth in the 1850s was a complete absence of parks and recreation reserves. When the Provincial Government did lay out reserves after all the best land had been bought, they were some distance outside the town and they became the racecourse, the recreation ground, and a rifle range.

Allen Reserve

Location : between Hawkins and Lowe Place

Eric and Ursula Allen farmed this land 1945-1964.

Ashgrove Park

Location : Kingsbury Avenue

The Rangiora Borough Council acquired Land in the north west of the town in the late 1950's, to cater for a rapidly growing population. New housing subdivisions were beginning to appear. This was the first substantial housing to occur in Rangiora since state housing was provided prior to 1940.

As the roll at the Rangiora Borough School grew, planning a new school was undertaken. Ashgrove School was located adjacent to the park and opened in 1967.

Since the park opened it has been used extensively for recreation by the school, and the wider community, with a variety of sports, social and recreational activities taking place.

In the last few years extensive landscaping has occurred. The existing drain was reformed and re-profiled to improve maintenance and to provide visual variation to the otherwise flat terrain.

Bells Siding

Location : Corner of West Belt and Oxford Road

In 1887, a passenger stop and platform for the Rangiora –Oxford Railway, was built on the northwest corner of West Belt and Oxford Road at the request of the Borough Council. Jonathan Bell was farming in that area. The small station was at the side of his property.

Bush Street Reserve

Location : Bush Street

This reserve was originally part of the Rangiora Bush. After the bush was cut out the area became farmland. Part of the Reserve is leased to the Bush Street Kindergarten and is fenced off from the rest of the park. The Middlebrook Stream is on the northern boundary. In 1977, a plaque inlaid in a stone was placed in the reserve in commemoration of the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

Dudley Park

Location : Between Church and White Streets

Dudley Park originated during the term of Robert McIntosh, Mayor from 1925 to 1927. In 1925 the Rangiora Borough Council bought thirteen acres of land from the Anglican Church Trustees, and named the park after Archdeacon Benjamin Woolley Dudley, the first vicar of Rangiora. It cost the Council £1200 and was initially leased out and sown with potatoes before being prepared for use by the hockey and rugby clubs in 1928.

The land was situated between Church and White Streets but there was no street crossing the front to give access to the park. Mr. McIntosh offered to purchase a strip of land to make a proper entrance so that people could have access from High Street to the park and this was dedicated to the council as a gift. Park Street was formed and Jubilee Memorial Gates were erected after the celebrations in 1928. There are two plaques on the gates:

Borough of Rangiora - This district was first settled by pioneers from Great Britain about the year 1850 – The Borough was constituted on May 4th 1878

The gates were erected as a memorial of the fifty years Jubilee of the Borough of Rangiora – 1878-1928

The park became the premier sports ground for Rangiora from 1928, opening in May of that year. It was home to two rugby grounds, men's and women's hockey, and from the 1930s was also the home of cricket in the Borough. Rugby was played here until 1960, when the club shifted its home to the Showground's.

In recent times, the park was considered to have one of the best pitches in Canterbury for representative cricket, but since 2004 matches have been at the Recreation Ground. The park is the main centre of netball in North Canterbury, and boasts a swimming pool, and squash courts, maintaining the excellent sporting standards the park has had since its beginning.

Elephant Park

Location : Corner of White and Blckett Streets

The Council acquired the land in 1914. Two lots on its eastern side were divided and sold off in 1941. The Rangiora-Oxford Railway line was on the Blckett Street boundary. Until at least the 1950s the section was used for dumping spoil from road works.

The park is named for a concrete pink elephant. In the 1970s a service club built the elephant for children to play on. A suggestion was made to formally name the park as the White Street Reserve but the children in the area protested and "Elephant Park" it became. At about the same time Councillor Winifred Borrell requested that trees be planted to make the park more attractive. The boundary fence on the south side is softened by a colourful mural, as is the toilet block, designed and painted by Caroline Trevella.

Grove Place Reserve

Location : Grove Place

The Council acquired this land in two parts, one lot in 1983 and the other in 1985. It is so named because it is located between Rex Place and Grove Place.

Good Street Reserve

Location : Good Street

The southern half of this reserve was originally a shingle pit and dump. When the railway to Oxford was being constructed, shingle from several sites in Rangiora and to the west of the town was excavated to form the line. The Rangiora Museum, an historic cob cottage and the Bridge Club now occupy that part of the reserve. The museum was originally the top half of the Bank of New Zealand building that was on the corner of High and Ashley Streets.

The northern part of the park was purchased in 1977 from the Pulley family for future pensioner housing as it adjoined the other flats, although this building has not occurred. It is now a children's playground.

Hazeldean Reserve

Location : Top end of Durham Street

R. L. Grigor of Hazeldene Developments subdivided the area about 1977. The two-storey dwelling on the west boundary was previously owned by the

March family, and later their daughter, Mrs. Alex MacDonald. This reserve area with the large trees was part of their garden.

Kippenberger War Memorial Reserve

Location : corner Ivory and High Streets

In 1924, a cenotaph was erected at the corner of Ivory and High Streets, as a memorial to those who died in World War One, paid for by Rangiora Borough Council and Rangiora County Council grants, and public subscriptions. The land was donated by Charles Leech. The base of cenotaph is blue granite, the cenotaph itself is Sydney sandstone and the inscribed tablets are made from Aberdeen granite.

It was renamed as the Kippenberger War Memorial Reserve for Major General Sir Howard Kippenberger, one of New Zealand's foremost military commanders in World War II. Before the war he was a barrister and solicitor with an office in High Street, and served on the Council from 1927 to 1935.

Kowhai Avenue Reserve

Location : Kowhai Avenue

Situated on Kowhai Avenue and bordering the railway line, the Council acquired this land in 1979. It features established landscaping and a good playground for children.

Lillybrook Reserve

Location : Corner Percival and Victoria Streets

In the late 1800s, a triangular piece of land at the corner of Percival and Victoria Streets was purchased for a reserve. About 1876, Mr. John Lilly, a prominent butcher and businessman in early Rangiora had retired early and in some comfort to a new cottage on the Northbrook Stream which he named "Lillybrook." That corner has been named Lillybrook since then.

Five Wellingtonia trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), supplied by nurseryman William Ivory were planted. These are now protected, but unfortunately are beginning to die.

Maria Andrews Park

Location : Coldstream Road

The Borough had been given a dubious asset on the Ashley River bank in 1880. Thirty acres of land was donated to the Borough by Mr Samuel Andrews before he returned to England. It was to be known as Maria

Andrews Park, in memory of his wife. Because it was so far out of the Borough, it was difficult to use the park for any special recreational purposes, and it was planted with trees and leased for grazing. It burnt many times and often flooded which involved the Council in disputes with the Railways Department, the Road Board and neighbours. The decision was made to sell the land and use the proceeds to buy land for a park within the Borough. It was found that the original gift deed was unsigned and this was dispatched to England for Mr. Andrews to sign, but Mr Andrews would not agree to the sale.

The Borough had been in search of suitable land for a public cemetery and in 1940, part of the park was changed by Order in Council from a recreation ground to a reserve and prepared as a lawn cemetery. It was declared open in June 1942 as the Maria Andrews Lawn Cemetery, otherwise known as the Rangiora Cemetery, and continues to be used today. In 1977, another part of the park was developed into a football ground and is now the home of Association football in the town.

Matawai Park

Location : King Street/William Streets

From its origins as a bare swampy paddock and an unformed road, Matawai Park, meaning source of springs, has become one of the largest planted areas in New Zealand dedicated to our native flora. In 1970 the Rangiora Borough Council bought this low-lying site for dumping soil from a nearby road upgrading. The land was very wet and unsuitable for housing, and there were no parks in that particular area of the Borough. In an enlightened move, it was decided to devote the area to a park for native plants.

Between 1971 and 1972, a pond on the land was dug, three springs were cleared, the drain running through the park was realigned to make it more stream-like and contouring of the land was done, giving the park the look it has today. As a result, the ecology in the park changed and allowed a wider range of plants to be added to the park.

Under the leadership of Councillor Dudley Franklin, volunteers and service groups planted over 20,000 shrubs and trees. Early plantings came mainly from the Canterbury region, as well as some hardier species from other parts of the country. However, initial plant establishment was quite difficult as the site had poor exposure and poor soil quality. Student labour carried out plantings until 1979 and then in 1984 Rangiora High School pupils also did some major work. More recently, mainly local plants have been added in the hope of representing the native plant communities of the Canterbury region, ranging from those found near the sea to those near the mountains.

To mark the New Zealand Sesquicentennial in 1990, the Waimakariri District Council and the Rangiora Lions decided to further upgrade the park and open it to the public. The Lions timbered one side of the lake to help stop erosion, built a footbridge across the lake outlet and laid down a bark track.

The Hon. Margaret Austin, Minister of Internal Affairs, officially opened Matawai Park on October 14 1990.

As well as being a nature reserve, the park also has trails and recreational areas that people can enjoy. It is intended that the park will be able to be ecologically self-sustaining in the future.

Neil Aitken Reserve

Location : Kingsbury Avenue

This reserve is located in Kingsbury Avenue and was acquired by the Council in two parts, one in 1994 and the other in 1996. It is nicely landscaped and features a brass plaque on a schist wall commemorating the opening of the reserve by the Mayor Janice Skurr in November 1996. The reserve is named after the developer and previous owner Neill Aitken.

Newnham Street Reserve

Location : Newnham Street

The Newnham Street Reserve was acquired in 1978 as a result of subdivision. The banks of the Northbrook Stream have been landscaped, and a garden seat and play equipment added, creating a peaceful atmosphere.

Oak Tree Reserve

Location : Strachan Place

This reserve was acquired by the Council in 1975 and named for a very large old oak tree. It is likely that the preservation of this tree is the reason the reserve was created.

The original name of the property was "Bush Farm." For 70 years the farm was owned by the William Williams family. Mrs J. W. Foster, a daughter, and then her daughter continued the family association. The large dwelling "Fleetwood" built in the 1880s by Hugh Boyd is still standing.

Oxford Line Reserve

Location : Junction of Blackett, Ashley and Edward Street corners

The Rangiora to Oxford Railway Line left the Rangiora station at this point.

Parkhouse Reserve

Location : Parkhouse Drive

Parkhouse Reserve was acquired by the Council in 1976 and named after the street it is on, Parkhouse Drive. The street is named Parkhouse for Jaynie Parkhouse, gold medallist in swimming in 1974 at the Christchurch Commonwealth Games.

Recreation Ground, now known as MainPower Oval

Location : Coldstream Road and East Belt

The ten-acre reserve north of the railyards that had been set aside by the Provincial Government was claimed by the Rangiora Cricket Club, which formed in 1869, and became known as the Recreation Ground.

A cricket ground was developed there and it was the home of local cricket until the 1930s when the club shifted to the new Dudley Park. Between 1874 and 1880, the club levelled the surface and laid a permanent turf wicket, put in a pump and built a pavilion.

For many years it was the home of other local sports teams and used for community events. From 1883, sports days were held on New Year's Day to get new local families meeting one another. In 1885, the North Canterbury Bicycling Club built a banked racing track encircling the cricket field, at a cost of £60 and reputed to be one of the fastest in New Zealand.

The Recreation Ground was also the site of celebrations for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in June 1887, with a procession through town, a flag raising and a picnic.

Into the twentieth century, other sports were played there, such as seven-side rugby, basketball and school sports. By the mid-1920s, growing new sports and clubs in the Borough began to overtax the Recreation Ground, and many of the lower grade games began to spill over in to the surrounding paddocks. The North Canterbury Rugby Football Club used the ground from 1920 but transferred its headquarters to Dudley Park in 1928.

With the completion of Dudley Park in the late 1920s, many sports shifted there. Cricket remained at the Recreation Ground until the 1930s, then also moved to Dudley Park. After World War Two, the ground lay abandoned for many years, but was restored for Rangiora High School teams to use, and then for Association Football which started in the town in 1965.

The ground has recently been upgraded, the pavilion extended, and a car park formed and sealed, The playing area is surrounded by mature trees and gently sloping embankments. Representative cricket is now played there,

having moved back from Dudley Park. The Rangiora Miniature Rifle Club meets in the pavilion for small-bore shooting.

In 2005, Mainpower signed on to become the sponsor of the Canterbury Country Cricket Association, an agreement that included the renaming of Recreation Ground to Mainpower Oval.

Regent Park

Location : Kensington Avenue

Regent Park is a sprawling reserve with frontages on four streets, including Regent Avenue, which it is named for. From 1991 to 1996, the Council acquired the parcels of land that now make up the reserve, through reserve contribution.

Southbrook Park

Location : South Belt

Southbrook Park came into existence when the Southbrook Sports Club Inc. bought land from the Griffin family in 1946 with money raised by public subscription and fund-raising ventures, including weekly dances at the nearby Coronation Hall. The Council's initial purchase was from the Cassidy Family and the Goodman Estate in 1995 and 1996. In 1999 the Council purchased the Sports Club's land to make a total area of approximately 11.2 hectares.

The second clubhouse on the grounds was originally the Town and Country Club premises on the corner of West Belt and Johns Road. When that club closed the building was dismantled and shifted to Southbrook Park by the Rugby and Cricket Clubs and erected in 1997.

Torlesse Park

Location : Johns Road

The Council purchased this park in 1971, when the land was subdivided for housing. The area was on the northern edge of the extensive Rangiora Bush, and it was here in 1851 that Charles Torlesse, an early explorer and surveyor for the Canterbury Association, built his house of timber and sod.

A plaque mounted on a cairn commemorates Rangiora's first settler.

"Canterbury Centenary 1850-1950. This is the site of the first house in Rangiora erected by C. O. Torlesse."

The plaque was originally near the roundabout at Johns Road and King Street corner, until moved when Johns Road was extended to Percival Street and the Reserve created.

Town Hall Reserve

Location : Next to the Rangiora Town Hall

A small reserve to the north of the Town Hall. There is a cairn of river stones with a photograph and description of the site. "This photograph was taken in 1935, shows two cottages on the site of this reserve. These were built between 1860 and 1880. The files of the Rangiora Early Records Society reveal that the two-storied cottage nearer the Town Hall was occupied in the 1920s by the O'Neill family of ten children, while the smaller cottage housed the Purdon family. The cottages were demolished in the early 1950s and the land purchased by the Rangiora Borough Council."

Victoria Park

Location : corner Percival and Victoria Park

In 1895 the Borough Council asked Sir Westby Perceval¹ if he would donate part of the unsold Percival land for a central park, but he refused. However, in 1902, Perceval put the remnants of the old Percival section up for auction and the Council bought a little over two acres adjacent to the fire station for £410 as a belated memorial to mark Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887.

It was named Victoria Square, fenced and planted with potatoes. Gates were erected to mark the coronation of Edward VII. These original wooden gates are still in place. A pedestal lamp was put at the entrance to the park as a memorial to two Rangiora men, Sergeant Rule and Trooper Sansom, who died in the Boer War. The lamp is no longer there, but a sundial was later erected and the names of the soldiers added, and an inscription commemorating Edward VII's coronation.

In 1907, a band rotunda, built by local builders Wadey and Efford, was erected. The first gas lamps with gas from the new gasworks were turned on at the opening of the rotunda. After World War One, an artillery piece was placed as a memorial to those who died, although this has since been removed. Gradually, trees and gardens grew in the park and it became a small haven for peaceful leisure in the middle of town.

The park has been the gathering place for residents on significant occasions – the Proclamation of Elizabeth as our Queen in 1952, and visits by Governors-General, being among them. A number of the trees were planted as a memorial for events, or prominent citizens.

¹ The father (Percival) and the son (Perceval) spelt their names differently

Ward Park

Location : Ward Place

The Council acquired Ward Park in 1968 through reserve contribution. The Northbrook Stream runs along the southwest side of the park, with many bridges crossing it into private properties. The park is named after Ron Ward, Town Clerk of the Borough 1956-1972.

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Acknowledgements

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