

## Rotary Athletics Field – some potted research

This research article provides a history of the site of the Rotary Athletics Field in the 1950-1990 period. Previous articles (see the Duck Corner Factory article) have provided history of the general area up to ~1890.

### 1940's

The map below is an early 1940's aerial photograph of the area. Overlaid on the map (orange line) is the original shoreline (high tide mark?) as seen on maps/surveys from the 1800's when the area was first sub-divided. The general area was described as being *"an area of some 10 acres bordering on, and overlooking the Lane Cove River; it consisted largely of swamp, rising to a rock strewn hillside"*.



Source: NSW Government Six Viewer (Images Copyright).

For context, the image below is 'current', to the same scale, and shows the location of the oval, the pontoon and the 'LCRK Shed'

- The land under our shed was around 2-3 metres lower in a small inlet, and exposed to high tides if not actually under water.



Source: NSW Government Six Viewer (Images Copyright).



## 1950's

In the 1950's – the site came under consideration as the location for a Garbage Tip - with a view of reclaiming the land for playing fields (see Newspaper clipping at right). Which might well have delivered a perhaps similar outcome to what we now see at the Field, although with perhaps more questionable contents?

As most would know – the site of Magdala Park (right hand side just past the footbridge when paddling downstream) and Blackmans Park (above Blackmans beach) were instead reclaimed using the 'garbage tip' method. With standards very different from what would now be demanded/expected.

## 1960's

The following is an edited version of the story which forms part of the Rotary Club of Chatswood's 50 Year History (eBook) available on the Chatswood Rotary Club website (<http://www.chatswoodrotary.org.au/our-history.html> )

*... So with the essential assistance of a very enthusiastic mayor of Willoughby (McGinty), the Council suggested 'Whatmore Estate' located at the corner of Mowbray Road and Epping Road be made available. 'Whatmore Estate' was an area of some 10 acres bordering on, and overlooking the Lane Cove River; it consisted largely of swamp, rising to a rock strewn hillside.*

*The Rotary Club of Chatswood, promulgating the idea of constructing a complete Athletic Field on this land, commenced negotiations with the County of Cumberland Planning Authority, and with the State Government of the Day.*

*Early investigative studies revealed that upwards of 15,000 yards of excavation (mainly rock) would need to be removed, and at least 50,000 yards of filling would be required to raise the proposed field base above the high tide level of the Lane Cove River. The surveys, investigations, negotiations with government authorities and attendant work ran right through 1961-62.*

*The project got underway in 1962-63. Willoughby Municipal Council was most cooperative and Council engineers prepared plans; earthmoving equipment was supplied by [Rotary] members Sid and Sam Pearce, general equipment was provided by members of the Rotary Club and their friends and associates.*

*Well in excess of 5,000 cubic yards of earth and sandstone were removed from site at no cost to the Rotary Club! Sid and Sam Pearce and other club members had contacts and could foresee an opportunity for the sales demonstration of heavy equipment here. Two heavy machinery distributors, International and Blackwood Hodge availed themselves of the opportunity to demonstrate 5-ton bulldozers on site and, in the process, effected the excavation! As so often happens, there were major difficulties when the bulldozers encountered hard rock which could not be ripped. But all was not lost. Gardner Denver stepped into the breach in providing heavy compressed air tools to drill the rock and ICI Chemicals supplied the necessary explosives at no cost to the Club.*

### Willoughby Garbage Plan

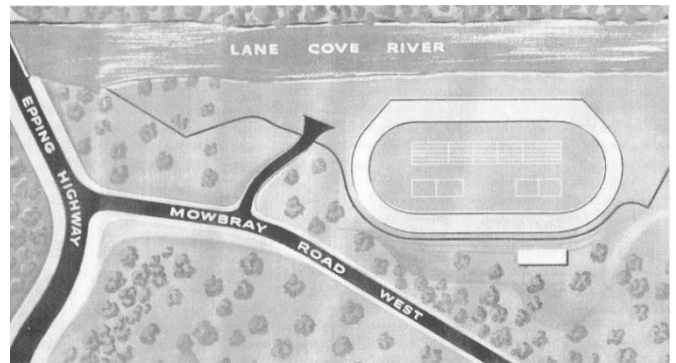
Willoughby Municipal Council will consider the tipping of garbage on a site beside the Lane Cove bridge at West Chatswood.

The council last night resolved to refer the matter to a special committee of aldermen.

The area is known as the Whatmore Estate, Mowbray Road West.

The council proposed investigation of the suitability of the area for garbage disposal by "the controlled tip method to conform to a scheme of reclamation for playing fields."

Source: SMH 21 Jul 1959



*The next step was to open the site to the general public for tipping of clean fill. With filling complete the site was levelled and John L. Pierce provided trucks which carried more than 3,500 cubic yards of ash from Corbett's Chemical factory in Epping Road, used as a sub-base. The sub-base was spread by graders, then followed laying of thousands of linear yards of concrete and agricultural pipes supervised by Rotarian Hock Tonkin. Next top soil was carried in and spread.*

*When the area was proclaimed ready for use there remained kerb and guttering, road sealing and parking area. Another club member and highly experienced builder, Ken Ewen, constructed the amenities blocks. After five years of unrelenting and taxing physical work, coupled with the attendant concerns of weather, planning and continuing negotiations with relevant authorities the Athletic Field was finally completed during the Rotary Year 1966-67.*

*The achievement was not without its difficulties, the most poignant of which was finance. The most significant lump sum financial contribution was that of £10,000 from Willoughby Municipal Council after lengthy debate and discussion. Records show that the total cost of the Athletic Field including cash and kind was of the order of £90,000*



Opening of Athletic Field  
by his Excellency Sir Roden Cutler  
15 April 1967



Sir Roden Cutler and Pres. Eric Hughes 15/4/67



Source: <http://www.chatswoodrotary.org.au/our-history.html>

Alternate commentary is provided from alternate sources – such as the following:-

#### Rotary Club War Memorial Athletic Field - 10 acres:

*An area bounded by Mowbray Road, Epping Highway and Lane Cove River. In 1961 the Rotary Club of Chatswood submitted a proposal to Willoughby Municipal Council for the development of the Whatmore Estate and reclamation of part of the river foreshores as an athletic field. The only athletic field at that time in the County of Cumberland was in Moore Park. Over a period of five years Rotary contributed \$27,000 towards its preparation. The intention was to provide, through the numerous track and field facilities, a suitable field for the training of young people in athletics. It was officially opened in 1967 by the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Roden Cutler. The Rotary Athletic Field is part of an original grant to John Jones of 189 acres bordering the Lane Cove River, part of which later came into the possession of S. B. Whatmore. Along the River in this area were wharves and boatsheds used mainly in transporting hardwood timber and sandstone needed for the early construction of buildings and bridges in Sydney."*

Source: **THE WEST WARD of Willoughby by Nancy Booker and Ida Bennett 1988**



Work that was required:

- Provide an estimated 70,000 cubic yards of filling to level the site.
- Excavate 15,000 cubic yards of material, mainly sandstone
- Provide a road 400 feet in nominal length
- Erect a track fence of 1,500 feet
- Install 1,200 feet of 24-inch Armour Pipe
- Prepare the oval and surrounds for grassing and cinder track
- Provide 2,000 cubic yards of soil
- Grass oval and surrounds, also laying of track.
- Provide a man proof fence and gates 150 feet in length to keep vehicles out of the area.
- Reticulate water to the site.
- Provide toilet facilities to both males and females.
- Provide dressing sheds for both males and females.

Source: *The Lighter side of Willoughby - Water, Waves & Wanderings* - Terry Fogarty Chatswood 2003



Above: Rotary Athletic Field – date unknown, perhaps 1970s or 1980's. Amenities shed has since been extended and new buildings constructed. The current Kayak washing facility is on the immediate left of the building.

Source: <http://www.photosau.com.au/willoughby/scripts/home.aspl> Image Copyright: Picture Willoughby