

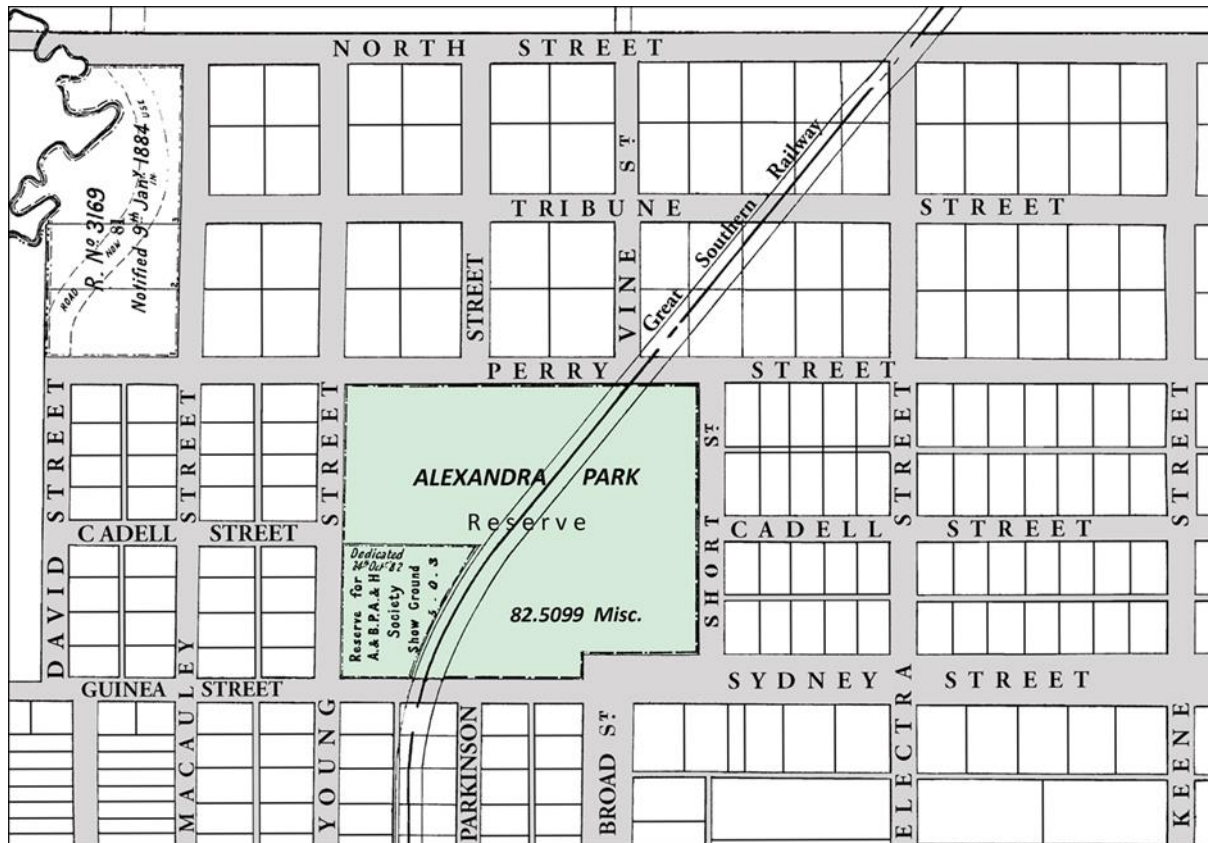
Alexandra Park

Part 1 – Early Days

Joe Wooding

The sport and recreation facilities provided on today's 26.5 hectares (66 acres) at Alexandra Park are a far cry from its humble beginning.

Originally, the park was 37 acres enclosed by Young, Perry, Short and Guinea Streets. Railway requirements saw the park bisected from October 1877. The rail line to Albury was completed in 1881.



1884

The Albury & Border Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural Society saw an opportunity to re-locate, lobbying government for 5 acres at the corner of Young & Guinea Streets. The government exchanged this new site for the Society's previous one on the south-west corner of Dean and Thurgoona Streets.

The first show at the new venue on August 15, 1879, attracted over 1000 patrons. Indoor exhibits were staged at the Mechanics Institute in conjunction with the Industrial Exhibition being presented on the Market Square next door.

The Society prospered so that by 1886 they had, progressively, acquired the remaining 16½ acres west of the railway. This area was to remain the Albury Showground for 48 years. In season, cricket, football, hockey, cycling and athletics were all seen there. The 1924 Hume and Hovell centenary celebrations were a highlight.

Albury Grammar School purchased land west of the railway line from the Show Society in 1938 and started construction of classrooms.

The park's name has royal connotations. Princess Alexandra of Denmark married the Prince of Wales, Albert Edward (later King Edward VII) on March 10, 1863. For years, authorities throughout the colonies named numerous parks, lakes and other facilities after her.

East of the railway line, progress was more circumspect. More acreage was added but it remained a wilderness. From 1882, moves were undertaken to have Council made trustees of the park for public recreation. By 1887, fencing was installed and Council set aside 30 acres for a night soil depot. For over ten years, hundreds of chains of trenching were excavated to bury the town's sanitary waste.

Change was forced upon Council in 1900. Government Medical Officer, Dr Arthur Andrews, had long been critical of sanitation practices by Council. Acting on the GMO's reports, the Board of Health inspected and ordered Council to cease, within 42 days, using the cesspits at Alexandra Park, to use the new approved area on the common (Glenroy) and steam clean all pans. Council's response was tardy and termed "effete" by the Health Department.



The Albury Showgrounds occupied a large slice of Alexandra Park 1879-1942. In 1944, the Presbyterian Church bought this section of the site for the expansion of Albury Grammar School (now Scots School).

Part 2 – Post 1900

With sanitation issues out of sight, Council set about other uses for Alexandra Park where weeds abounded. On June 20, 1903, 200 head of cattle were being temporarily depastured. When 49 died, consumption of capeweed was blamed.

On April 5, 1906, James Steven, Secretary of Albury Golf Club offered Council £15pa for playing rights if the stinkwort was eradicated. The offer was withdrawn after unsatisfactory negotiations. In 1908, Council cleared 40 acres, planting a crop for hay which realized about

£200. The Golf Club again made an offer but Council put that on hold. The park was ploughed and leased for grazing and cropping through WWI.

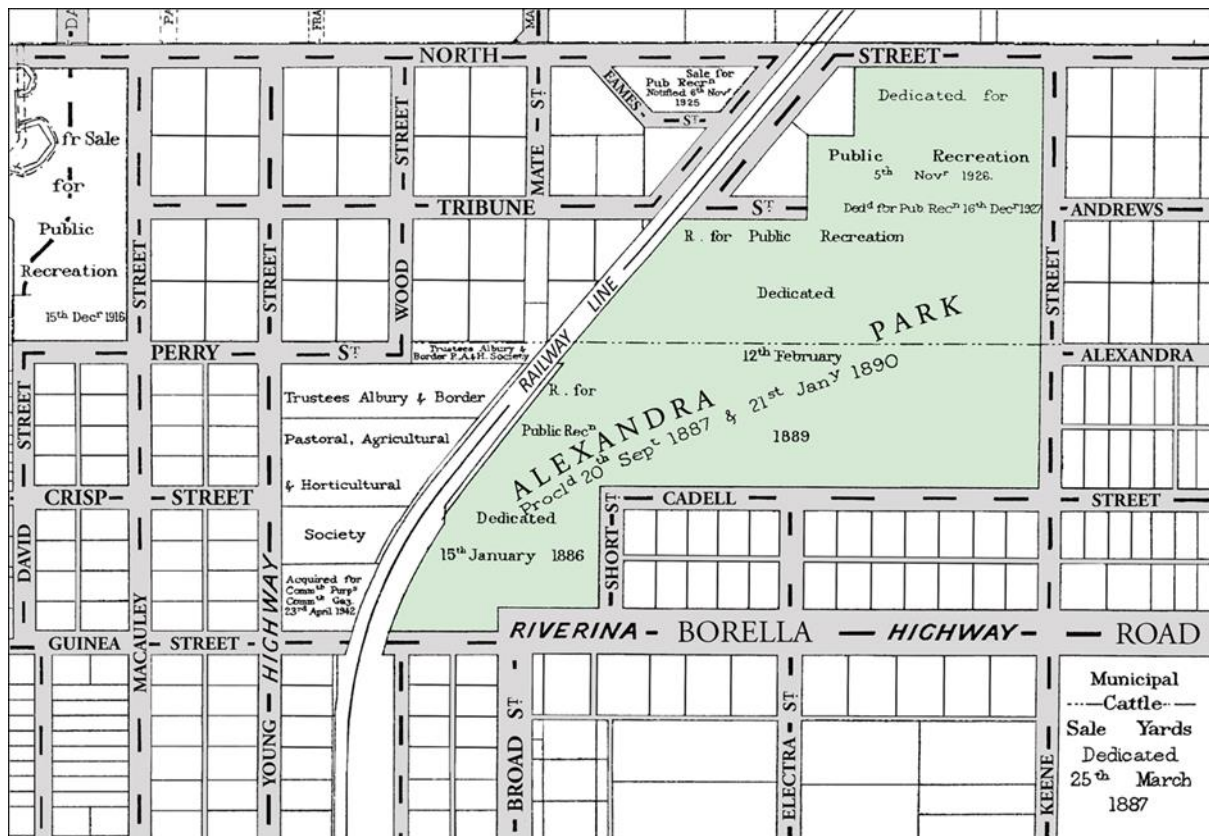
In November 1919, the Aerial Transport Co sought landing rights. In a first, flying from Sydney to Melbourne, Mr NB Love, landed on the park on April 15, 1920. The first sightseeing flights were on May 19, 1920. In June, Captain Roy King of the Larkin Sopwith Aviation Co, with a companion, while flying Melbourne to Brisbane, 'dropped in' but mistook the Showground for Alexandra Park. They took out some electric light wires, plus a picket fence on landing. Neither were hurt.

In 1926, all land east of the railway was dedicated to Council. The park was then enclosed by North, Keene, Cadell, Short and a little of Guinea Streets. On the corner of Keene and Cadell was a 12-acre swamp and dam. In 1922, Patrick Byrne, 60, a drover, was found drowned in the dam. An inquest could not determine the circumstances.

In August 1931, East Albury Golf Club formed, using a 9-hole course on the high side of Schubach between Mount and Vallambrosa Streets. May 1933 saw the club relocate to Alexandra Park where a compact 9 holes had been laid out. In June, an aerial circus was staged which included a parachute jump from the wing of one of the three aircraft involved.

In July 1937, work began to provide facilities for cricket, football, hockey, golf and tennis at the park. Much of the project was done by relief workers at the expense of government.

A crowd of 200 witnessed a football match, CYMS v Wangaratta in June 1938. With no amenities of any sort at the ground, no competition football could be played. East Albury Junior FC also formed, playing at the old showground.



Mid 20th Century

The first "A" grade cricket match on the new concrete wicket was between Colts and St Matthew's in October 1938.

Part 3 – Post World War II

At wars end, golf was gone and East Albury Cricket Club (EACC) was formed in October 1945. East Albury Rovers Football Club (EARFC) formed in 1946, playing at the showground in the Albury & District League.

1948 saw Council outlay £75 for a tin shed at Alexandra Park, Newmarket Cricket Club formed and a second concrete wicket was laid at Alexandra Park Number 2. In June 1949, EARFC, now in the Hume League, played Burrumbuttock in their first match at the park. A brick toilet block, electricity, water, and a tin shed had been provided. Two rudimentary flood lights were installed for training.

In 1950, cricket grounds Numbers 3 and 4 were added. As with Number 2, none had any facilities other than a concrete wicket.

In 1952, a turf wicket was laid at Number 1 oval and hockey arrived. They used two fields on Number 1 oval and four on Number 2. It was not long before the Hockey Association acquired an army hut for their headquarters. It was located at Number 2 oval.

East Albury/Newmarket Progress Association was granted land by Council in Short Street for tennis courts. They were ready for play in June 1953.

The first Easter hockey carnival was staged in April 1954.

When Council began excavating enormous trenches in the early 1960s across the northern half of the park, few realised what lay ahead. For nearly ten years, this was to be the Albury tip. It was not until 1978, after backfilling, leveling and allowing years for the land to settle, that the full concept of a large sporting complex was revealed.

An athletics track was established in 1978 and in 1981, a new concept in building a sports oval was seen. This entailed laying thousands of metres of gravel over drainage trenches before topsoil was installed. In 2020, this is the home of EACC and the Steamers' Rugby Union Club.

As a bicentennial project, the Hockey Association established a synthetic hockey field on the old Number 1. This was upgraded in 1992.

With a massive outlay, the athletics track was upgraded in March 1997.

Today, Ian Barker Field in the north-east corner of the park, is the location of a number of soccer pitches, while the south-east corner has an enclosed off leash dog park.

Many hectares have been lost along the western boundary for a freeway and bicycle path corridor.