

Local History Feature



Alexandra Park entrance, 6 Aug 2011. *Photo: K. Browne*

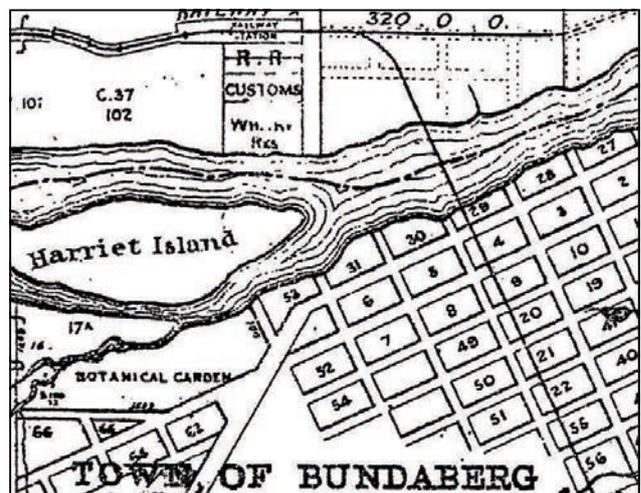
Alexandra Park, on the northern side of Quay Street between Burrum and Branyan Streets, is one of Bundaberg's best-loved parks. It is also one of the City's oldest. The Park features a band rotunda, a zoo and colonial guns and is a favoured recreation spot. It all began with an impromptu public meeting...

Impromptu Public Meeting

On Tuesday 5 February 1878 an impromptu meeting was held at the Custom House Hotel. This meeting was to discuss petitioning the government to grant several sections of riverfront land for recreation grounds¹. Fifteen men attended the meeting and elected to petition the government for sections 28, 30 and 31^{1,2} (see map). In order to ensure the park succeeded the men handed over the matter to the Progress Committee (the day's equivalent of the Council).

1888 Surveyor General's Office (Brisbane) Map, courtesy Bundaberg Genealogical Association Inc.

The following Progress Committee meeting saw some argument about the impromptu nature of the original get-together^{3,4} and Mr Adams thought the petition had a better chance of succeeding if only sections 30 and 31 were asked for.⁴ Mr GT Bell confirmed that they wished the land to be used permanently as public gardens⁴ and the vote ended in favour of asking for all three sections of land (6 votes to 3)⁴. The decision was thus made to forward the petition to the Minister for Lands³.



The Park's Beginnings

At the Progress Committee meeting on Monday 5 August 1878 a letter from the Under Secretary for Lands was read which detailed that the government had allowed land sections 30 and 31 to be set aside for parkland^{5,6}.

Initially, parks and gardens were not the priorities of the early Committeemen as there were so many other civic facilities to set up in the developing town, and very little money to do so. However, from early 1903 there appears to have been a more concerted effort to improve the city's parklands. The newly elected Gardens Committee was asked by Alderman Wyper what they proposed to do to improve the gardens as "...Council's gardens were looking disgraceful". Alderman Redmond responded that "...immediate steps would be taken to improve both the gardens and the trees generally" and that funds were tight⁷.

"...Council's gardens were looking disgraceful"

In March 1904 the Gardens Committee spent a bit of time manicuring the park, watering trees, planting new trees and removing unsuitable trees⁸. The committee also elected to move 13 seats from Queen's Park for placement in the Quay Street park⁹.

Despite endowments from the Department of Agriculture specifically for spending on parks and gardens¹⁰, finding enough money to upkeep the spaces was still difficult. By May 1908 the Parks Committee was reporting that they had been unable to do much with the parks due to "want of funds".¹¹

In order to help Council keep maintenance costs down, they leased the park. In 1909 Mr S. McCracken applied to renew his lease of the Quay Street gardens with the same

terms and conditions of his previous lease¹². This application was initially refused by Council but was later almost successful on the "...condition that not more than five head of stock be depastured at one time, and that should the park be required for band purposes the stock shall be removed"¹², before ultimately being denied¹³.

However, when able the Council did spend time and money on the upkeep of their gardens, and by and during 1909 more work was being done in beautifying these public spaces.^{14,15,16}

Central/Alexandra/Redmond Park?

For many years this area of gardens was referred to as the Quay Street Reserve¹⁷. It was also known as the Quay Street Park,¹⁸ or the Quay Street Gardens¹⁹ and even the Esplanade^{2,12}.

"That this Council decide upon a suitable name for the Quay Street Park"

It was at the Council meeting on 3 November 1909 that officially naming the park was first suggested. Alderman Stevenson gave Council notice that at the next meeting he would move the following motion: "That this Council decide upon a suitable name for the Quay Street Park"^{20,21}. Due to Alderman Stevenson's absence from the next meeting there was a small delay in discussion and decision making²².

At the Council meeting on 1 December 1909 Alderman Stevenson suggested the area be named Central Park which was seconded by Alderman Nielson. Alderman Maynard thought it should be named Alexandra Park after the Queen^{23,24} (wife of Edward VII, r. 1901-1910)²⁵. This was seconded by Alderman Ruddell. The final suggestion, from Alderman Boreham, was that the American custom of naming parks

after prominent citizens should be followed, and the park thus named Redmond Park - after Alderman Redmond, who was responsible for many of the improvements to the park. However, in the end Alderman Maynard's suggestion was carried and the area has since been known as Alexandra Park.^{23,24} After the motion carried "Alderman Stevenson humorously remarked that he appreciated the honor that had been done him"²³ (his first name was Alexander)²⁶.



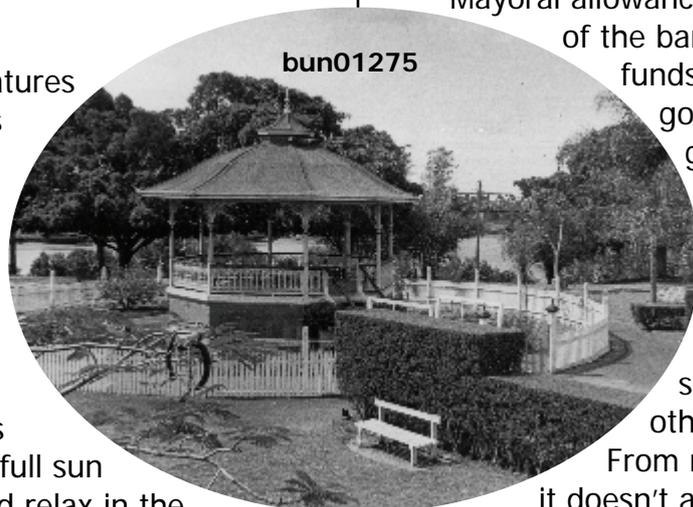
bun01231 - shows seating for listening to bands.

At the Council meeting on 15 December 1910 plans for a band stand were presented. Well-known Bundaberg architect Mr Faircloth drew up plans for a "...handsome and roomy bandstand"²⁹. The *Bundaberg Mail* "...hoped that nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of providing such a very necessary convenience"²⁹.

"...handsome and roomy bandstand"

Band Rotunda

One of the main features of Alexandra Park is the rotunda. Concerts by the Naval Band and others were often held in the park and were well-attended^{27,28}. However, the bands had to stand in the full sun whilst listeners could relax in the shade of trees²⁹.



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The Mayor (Ald. Nielson) donated £50 (his Mayoral allowance) towards the cost of the band stand^{31,32,33}. Other funds came from government parks and gardens grants and the outstanding balance was then initially to be sourced "...from the public by subscription or otherwise"^{31,32,34,35}.

From newspaper accounts it doesn't appear, however, that the public were asked to put their hands in their pockets to contribute to the cost of the band stand itself.

In the Parks Report presented to Council at its meeting on 28 September 1910, Alderman Redmond noted that "...there was one thing lacking..." in the Park - a band stand - which he hoped the Parks Committee would consider³⁰. Alderman Maynard vouched his agreement and maintained a band stand would "...enhance the value of the park"³⁰.



Photo - Bundaberg Regional Council

Tenders for the building of the band stand were called for soon after the Council meeting on 16 December, to be ready for the next meeting on 11 January 1911^{31,32,36}. Two tenders were received but were rejected, and it was decided to call for tenders again at a later date³⁶. This

occurred on 28 March³⁷, and in early April it was announced that the sole tender received in this second round was successful³⁸. Mr John Heaps won the tender with a quote of £160 for a rotunda with iron railings or £158 for wooden railings. The quote for a rotunda featuring iron railings was accepted³⁸.

The band stand was officially opened on Wednesday evening 8 November 1911.³⁹ A crowd of 400-500 was present to hear the Naval Band play in the new rotunda, and Alderman Redmond, in the absence of the Mayor (Ald. Stevenson), performed the opening duties. The new rotunda was "...regarded as a memorial to Alderman Neilson - fitting that he should be remembered in the gardens and his name should be on the bandstand"³⁹.

Aldermen Nielson had died suddenly on 11 October 1911⁴⁰. He had been a great supporter of the Naval Band and of the construction of a band stand⁴⁰. Soon after Ald. Nielson's death the Mayor received a letter from Mr WG Lewis, Secretary of the School of Arts, wishing Council and the people of Bundaberg to honour the late Alderman with "...a drinking fountain or marble tablet in the new band stand"⁴¹. He felt sure that an appeal to Bundaberg citizens would yield the necessary funds and he began the appeal by enclosing a cheque for one guinea with his letter⁴¹. Over time many more people donated^{42,43} and a plaque was added to the rotunda in 1912.

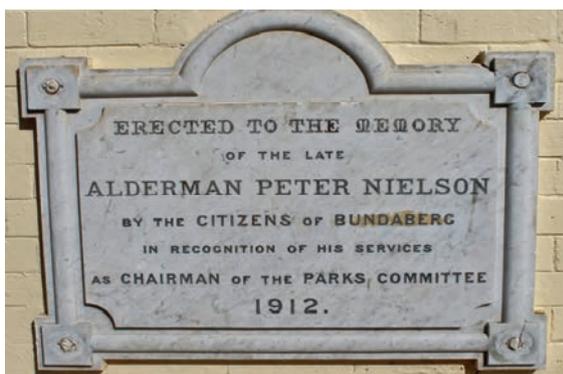


Photo: K. Browne

The Zoo

The first mention found in the newspapers of the beginnings of a zoo in Alexandra Park was in 1911. In July of that year the Parks Committee reported to Council that

*"with regard to making preparations in Alexandra Park for the emu and any other birds or animals, after going into the matter, the committee found that a suitable enclosure could be made at the eastern end of the park, including in the work a pond for holding water..."*⁴⁴

The Aldermen were excited about the "duck pond" and even suggested a fernery. There was some concern over the costs of feeding the animals and the upkeep of the enclosures, but it was believed to not be too expensive⁴⁴.

By mid-September 1911 the enclosure and the pond were completed and the Council decided to let the public know they would accept "...gifts of animals and birds suitable for the gardens"⁴⁵. Kangaroos were introduced to the zoo by mid-1912⁴⁶ and this year also saw the introduction of the zoo's first monkey. A female monkey was purchased from Melbourne Zoo and was delivered to Bundaberg via the ship *Tinana*⁴⁷.

"...the inmates do not thrive, and deaths have been frequent among them..."

However, by 1920 the Zoo's continuation looked a little shaky. Some Aldermen were questioning whether Council should keep the Zoo running due to costs⁴⁸. The Parks Committee Chairman, Ald. RJ Campbell, stated that despite the care and food supplied at considerable cost "...the inmates do not thrive, and deaths have been frequent among them..."⁴⁹. However, when the Parks Committee next reported to Council, they recommended that the zoo continue and "...that to dispense with the attraction would be a retrograde step"⁵⁰.

Thus the Zoo continued to grow and more animals were added, including:

- Cassowary - pre-1920⁴⁹
- Monkey (born at the Zoo) - 1955⁵¹
- Indian Antelope - purchased from Taronga Zoo for £55 - 1963⁵²
- Koala - 1963⁵³
- Rhesus monkeys - 1964⁵⁴
- Rat kangaroo - 1966⁵⁵
- Tortoises - 1964 (Torty)⁵⁶, 1971⁵⁷ & 1972⁵⁸
- Grey kangaroo - 1971⁵⁹
- Crocodile - 1975⁶⁰



upgrade beginning in late 2000 and finishing in June 2002⁶³. New additions to the Zoo included native bird aviaries and a boardwalk which led visitors around the animal enclosures⁶³. The work was completed by Council staff and Work for the Dole members⁶³. This third stage was officially opened on 17 December 2002 by Mayor Kay McDuff^{63,66}.

Torty

Torty was a female land tortoise from Madagascar. After spending much of her life as a pet to one family for five generations she was placed in Alexandra Park Zoo on 20 May 1964. Torty died aged at least 137 years in 1984^{61,62}.

Colonial Guns

Alexandra Park also features three colonial guns. These guns were acquired during the Governorship of Sir George Ferguson Bowen⁶⁷, Queensland's first Governor (1859-1868)⁶⁸. They are not the war trophies/German guns it is widely believed they are⁶⁷.



Zoo & Park Refurbishment

In 1999 Bundaberg City Council decided to redevelop parts of Alexandra Park and Zoo and a three-stage refurbishment took place in the early 2000s⁶³. The first two stages, which included a new park entrance (see photo on p1) and a playground suitable for disabled children, were officially opened on 12 October 2000^{64,65}.



There is no definitive history on these guns at present. However, we do know from the old newspapers that guns were placed into the park in 1913 and further in 1921. When exactly the colonial guns were placed is not known at this stage.

Warrant Officer Pember was instrumental in having naval guns placed in the Park in 1913⁶⁹. Around 1921 war trophies were distributed to towns and cities throughout Australia. Bundaberg received

The third stage, the Zoo itself, received an

its allocation of war trophies and it was resolved to place two field guns in Alexandra Park⁷⁰.

The exact provenance of the guns currently in Alexandra Park is difficult to determine, as is what happened to the guns placed in 1913 and 1921.

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- ⁴ *Bundaberg Star and Burnett River Times*, 16 Feb 1878, p2.
- ⁵ *Bundaberg and Mt Perry Mail*, 9 Aug 1878, p2.
- ⁶ *Bundaberg and Mt Perry Mail*, 16 Aug 1878, p2.
- ⁷ *Bundaberg Mail*, 20 Feb 1903, p3.
- ⁸ *Bundaberg Mail*, 21 Mar 1904, p4.
- ⁹ *Bundaberg Mail*, 10 Jun 1904, p3.
- ¹⁰ *Bundaberg Mail*, 19 Jul 1907, p5.
- ¹¹ *Bundaberg Mail*, 21 May 1908, p2.
- ¹² *Bundaberg Mail*, 8 Apr 1909, p2.
- ¹³ *Bundaberg Mail*, 22 Apr 1909, p3.
- ¹⁴ *Bundaberg Mail*, 14 Jan 1909, p3.
- ¹⁵ *Bundaberg Mail*, 15 Jul 1909, p3.
- ¹⁶ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 4 Nov 1909, p3.
- ¹⁷ *Bundaberg Mail*, Fri 2 Nov 1900, p3.
- ¹⁸ *Bundaberg Mail*, Fri 8 Aug 1902, p2.
- ¹⁹ *Bundaberg Mail*, Fri 1 May 1903, p3.
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- ²¹ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 4 Nov 1909, p3.
- ²² *Bundaberg Mail*, 18 Nov 1909, p3.
- ²³ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 2 Dec 1909, p5.
- ²⁴ *Bundaberg Mail*, 2 Dec 1909, p3.
- ²⁵ The Official website of the British Monarchy - <http://www.royal.gov.uk/HistoryoftheMonarchy/KingsandQueensoftheUnitedKingdom/Saxe-Coburg-Gotha/EdwardVII.aspx>
- ²⁶ Council Records
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- ²⁹ *Bundaberg Mail*, 15 Dec 1910, p4.
- ³⁰ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 29 Sep 1910, p3.
- ³¹ *Bundaberg Mail*, 16 Dec 1910, p4.
- ³² *Bundaberg Daily News*, 16 Dec 1910, p4.
- ³³ *Bundaberg Mail*, 9 Feb 1911, p5.
- ³⁴ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 3 Mar 1911, p3.
- ³⁵ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 23 Mar 1911, p3.
- ³⁶ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 12 Jan 1911, p3.
- ³⁷ *Bundaberg Mail*, 28 Mar 1911, p2.
- ³⁸ *Bundaberg Mail*, 6 Apr 1911, p3.
- ³⁹ *Bundaberg Mail*, 9 Nov 1911, p3.
- ⁴⁰ *Bundaberg Mail*, 12 Oct 1911, p3.
- ⁴¹ *Bundaberg Mail*, 18 Oct 1911, p2.
- ⁴² *Bundaberg Mail*, 19 Oct 1911, p3.
- ⁴³ *Bundaberg Mail*, 24 Oct 1911, p3.
- ⁴⁴ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 13 Jul 1911, p4.
- ⁴⁵ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 14 Sep 1911, p2.
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- ⁴⁷ *Bundaberg Mail*, 27 Nov 1912, p3.
- ⁴⁸ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 4 Nov 1920, p4.
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- ⁵² *Bundaberg News Mail*, 14 May 1963, p4.
- ⁵³ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 17 Jul 1963, p1.
- ⁵⁴ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 24 Jul 1964, p3.
- ⁵⁵ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 12 Feb 1966, p4.
- ⁵⁶ Godwin & Cavander. 2009. *Bundaberg in Print: 110 Years of News*.
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- ⁵⁸ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 14 Jan 1972, p2.
- ⁵⁹ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 21 Oct 1971, p 6.
- ⁶⁰ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 26 Apr 1975, p2.
- ⁶¹ Godwin, S & L Cavander (eds). 2009. *Bundaberg in Print: 110 Years of News*, p172.
- ⁶² bun01022 *Greetings from Bundaberg tortoise postcard*. Donated to Picture Bundaberg by John Wood.
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- ⁶⁴ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 23 Aug 2000, p4.
- ⁶⁵ *Bundaberg News Mail*, 13 Oct 2000, p4.
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- ⁶⁷ Email correspondence, Bundaberg Regional Council Parks Planning & Design Technical Office
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- ⁷⁰ *Bundaberg Daily News*, 6 Apr 1921, p3.

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