The Centenary Gardens in Bunbury

A Short History compiled by Nicole Azzalini
Centenary Gardens-History

Bunbury Council Chambers were built in 1897 and were remodelled and extended in 1935-36. Alterations occurred in 1964 and in 1977-1978 Bunbury saw the construction of new administrative buildings. During 1991-1992 the Bunbury Council Chambers building underwent further refurbishment and the gardens were landscaped. (http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au)

Figure 1

The Municipal Gardens (Figure 1) were laid out in 1936 to mark the centenary of Bunbury (Please note the Gardens are referred to interchangeably as the Municipal, the Civic, the Mayoral and the Centenary... for the purpose of this short history the gardens will be referred to as the ‘Centenary Gardens’). The original title ‘Municipal’ was given as the Town Council Chambers were near the site.

According to the Street Names Index (1969) the area had previously been a police paddock, a railway siding and a goods shed (Street Names Index in VF 1969). Other evidence suggests that the site was in fact Bunbury’s first railway station. Anthony Barker and Maxine Laurie (1992) reflect on a painting (reproduced below) on Bunbury’s History (Figure 2), ‘Bunbury circa 1890. Photograph of painting-signature possibly A.M Fullwood. Shows a steam train on the original line which terminated roughly where the Centennial Gardens are today’ (South Western Times Exhibition, Bunbury Art Gallery).
The Bunbury Council Minutes of 1936 make mention of a pumping station, at the rear of the Chambers. In May 1936, the Council called for tenders with the intention of clearing the site at the rear of the Council Chambers, with the aim to build ‘suitable buildings ... at the rear of the pumping station to include, if possible, accommodation for a garage and cycles’ (Bunbury Council Minutes, 11 May 1936). B. Clews noted in a publication made for Aqwest (The Bunbury Water Board) that the pumping station was owned by the Electric Light Company; ‘During 1906, the Electric Light Company had been pumping water under contract but the Water Board knew it was becoming a necessity to have its own pumping station. By the middle of 1906 this had happened and in August the Board’s pump was connected to the wells at the foot of the sand hills and to Bunbury’s mains beneath Princep and Victoria Streets’. There has been an ongoing relationship of cooperation between Aqwest and the Bunbury City Council and as a result Aqwest have donated the ‘Floating Stone’ sculpture now seen in the Centenary Gardens today.

Splatt, Wall and Co. private contractors built the first Power Station in 1898 at the Centenary garden site (figure 3) It was coal fired with a smoke stack 84 ft. high. Power supply connections to the public became available in 1903. Council purchased an electric plant May 19 1910. The Second Power Station is sited as being situated on the estuary foreshore and was opened in 1930 (From Ray Repacholi's notes).
To celebrate Bunbury's centenary the facade of the Council Chambers was remodelled in the Art Deco Style in 1936 (Figure 5). At the same time, the area at the rear of the building was laid out as gardens, with a centrally located rotunda, for outdoor functions. The architects for this work were Eales and Cohen and the contractor was J C Hough & Son. The mayor at the time was J Verschuer. The Bunbury Council Chambers are, therefore, inherently linked to the development of the gardens themselves. The history of the gardens, below, are largely appropriated from a report by the Heritage Council of WA on the Bunbury Council Chambers. The photographs included are taken from the Local Studies collection. The previous architectural façade is pictured with John Forrest and other unknown figures to show the comparison of styles (Figure 4).
The Centenary Gardens were planned and planted in 1936. They were re-landscaped to provide an open plan garden to complement the newly refurbished *Bunbury Council Chambers* building in 1991-92, and re-landscaped again in 2004-06. The Centenary Gardens, (still in use) are highly valued for social, cultural and aesthetic reasons; and the gardens are relatively rare in this state ([http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au](http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au)).

Bunbury became popular as a seaside resort during the late 1800’s offering a welcome relief from the summer heat. During the years 1896-97, the Council introduced street tree planting to beautify the municipality and developed the recreation ground. With the construction of the Breakwater (a structure built in order to protect an anchorage from the effects of both weather and longshore drift) Premier Sir John Forrest symbolically tipped the first bucket of granite stone at the base of a memorial to him in the Centenary Gardens ([http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au](http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au)). The area now known as the Centenary Gardens also had recreational value even prior to development, as the Heritage Councils report illustrates below:

> The area at the rear of the building was cultivated with lawn, and the Central Croquet Club gained the use of the lawn area in 1930-32. In 1933, the Council agreed to a request from the Chamber of Commerce to make the greens used by the Croquet Club suitable for bowling and in return they agreed to form a Bowling Club (Bunbury Council Minutes, 1930- 1934). However, this may not have been implemented as there was no mention of such use in 1936, when the gardens were developed (*South Western Times* 25 April, 16 and 19 Dec. 1936)

On 22 April 1936, Sir James Mitchell laid the stone that was dedicated to the details of the occasion. The names of the architects, Eales & Cohen, contractors, J. G. Hough & Sons, and Mayor J. Verschuer inscribed in dedication upon it. At the reception that followed, the Mayor commented that the remodelled Council Chambers would be ‘a great convenience to everybody, especially the staff’ (*South Western Times* 9 October 1935, p. 2). That afternoon, the Governor planted ‘a growth of a tree taken from the garden where he used to play as a boy’, to launch the Council’s effort ‘to convert the unused land at the back of the now remodelled Council Chambers into an attractive garden’([http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au](http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au))

In May 1936, the Council called for tenders with the intention of clearing the site at the rear of the Council Chambers, with the aim to build ‘suitable buildings ... at rear of Pumping Station to include, if possible, accommodation for a garage and cycles’ (Bunbury Council Minutes, 11 May 1936). A. Nilsson was granted the contract at a cost of £411 (Bunbury Council Minutes, 8 June and 10 August 1936). During June 1936, George Clarke, former Mayor of Bunbury, proposed commemorating the town’s centenary. During August, the Council agreed to build a monument for the centenary. The only tender submitted was for a brick kiosk, which A. Nilsson constructed in the garden at the Municipal Chambers (Figures 6 & 7). (Bunbury Council Minutes, August-Sept 1936).
The planning and planting of the Centenary Gardens remodelled the corner of Wittenoom and Princep Street. A report from the South West Times in 1936 observed:

The barren aspect which once characterised the rear of the council chambers is gone and the ground has been converted to a picturesque plot, surrounded by a low ornamental wall. Grass and flowers have been planted, paths laid out in attractive design, and the kiosk in the middle of the ground has been completed, with the tablet to the memory of Lieutenant Bunbury built into the western side (South West Times 16 and 19 Dec 1936, p.5-6)

On 21 December 1936, Foundation Day celebrations included a re-enactment of the arrival of the Scott family and unveiling of a monument to the failed venture at Australind. In the region of 500 pioneers of the locality and their descendants were in attendance, together with members of State and Federal Parliaments and other official guests. Chief Secretary W.H. Kitson conveyed a congratulatory message to the people of Bunbury on realizing its centenary. Lieutenant-Governor Sir James Mitchell (figure 8)
unveiled the memorial tablet to Lieutenant Bunbury which was built into the west wall of the kiosk, and Dr Battye gave an address (South Western Times 22 Dec. 1936).

![Figure 8](image)

In 1952, APEX erected a wishing well (removed) (figure 9) in the Centenary Gardens as shown in the figure below. Wishing wells were enormously popular garden features in the Post WWII period and were erected in numerous parks and gardens, including Kings Park. The main purpose for these features was to raise funds for various charities. The well was eventually removed (Bunbury Council Minutes 1991-1996).

![Figure 9](image)

On 3 March 1968, the Mayor of Bunbury, Dr Ernest Cosmo Manea, unveiled a memorial at the Centenary Gardens on the site of the first railway station at Bunbury in 1893. The plaque ‘to honour the courage, endurance and enterprise of Western Australia’s early settlers’ is inscribed with details of its unveiling of the railway (Barker and Laurie 1997 p. 310).
The Council determined to tear down the kiosk in October 1991. The demolition was done in order to make way for an open garden plan that correlated and coincided with the refurbishment of the Council Chambers. There was a contestation to the destruction of the structure from a Joint Heritage Group who argued that the building had historical significance, however, the Council decided to proceed, preserving only the plaques.

In May 1992, Premier Carmen Lawrence laid the stone to commemorate ‘the reconstruction’ of Bunbury Council Chambers, carried out by Perkin Bros (http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au).

On 6 June 1995, the place was classified by the National Trust (WA). In 1996, the place was included in the Municipal Inventory for Bunbury, which also recommended entry in the Register of Heritage Places (Bunbury Municipal Chambers, Art Deco Significant Building Survey, 30 June 1994; Assessment National Trust (WA), 6 June 1995; Bunbury Municipal Inventory Adopted 31 July 1996).

In 2004, prominent Perth architect Peter Hunt prepared plans for Bunbury Civic Centre. These plans indicate the removal of some structures, walls, paths, and trees, and the trees and paths that were to be retained in the gardens. In 2006, Aqwest Water Board, Bunbury, donated a floating stone (figure 10) created and installed by Richard Williamson, to honour and remember one hundred years of service by the Board to the municipality and highlight its united relationship with the City of Bunbury. (in Centenary Gardens, Bunbury http://floatingstones.com.au/)

Figures

1. Municipal Gardens, Bunbury, Local Studies Collection, (Container P2059 Digital Copy)
2. Bunbury Museum & Heritage Centre ref number: (MUS.2015.14)
3. Power Station on the Site of the Municipal Gardens 1898?, Battye Library Photo 20371P, (our ref A1173)
4. The Municipal Chambers 1897 with John Forrest, (Container P3355 Digital Copy)
5. The Municipal Chambers, Bunbury, Local Studies Collection, (Container P1920 Digital Copy)
6. Postcard of the Municipal Gardens with Rotunda, Bunbury, Local Studies Collection, (Container P3324 Digital Copy)
7. Municipal Gardens Rotunda, Bunbury, Local Studies Collection, (Container P3419 Digital Copy)
8. Photograph of Sir James Mitchell, Local Studies Collection, (Container P1364 Digital Copy)
9. Wishing Well in the Centenary Gardens, Local Studies Collection, (Container P3126 Digital Copy)
References

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Bunbury Council Minutes 1930-1936

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South Western Times 1936

Street names index-Local Studies Bunbury