

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Melville Oval Precinct Hamilton



Location:

HAMILTON, Southern Grampians Shire

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Stage 2 Heritage Study Complete

Precinct:

Melville Oval Precinct Hamilton

Statement of Significance:

The Melville Oval has local significance because of its historical associations as Hamilton's chief recreational reserve, planned originally as a Market Square but never used for that purpose. The early twentieth century beatification scheme was a major municipal achievement and commemorates one of Hamilton's most distinguished servants and citizens, William H Melville. The Edwardian grandstand adds grace and dignity to the reserve.

The Oval illustrates the importance of sport and recreation in this typical Victorian country town. Notable buildings in the area include the Shire of Dundas offices and the former Alexandra College, a companion girls' school to Hamilton and Western District College for Boys, with which it was amalgamated in 1862. Nearby plantings support the wide range of notable trees within the Oval reserve.

Description

The focus for this Conservation Area is obviously the oval. The land, originally reserved for market purposes, was too swampy. About the turn of the century there were moves to improve the area. The beautification scheme included ground works, extensive planting and the construction of buildings, gates and a fence. The beautification scheme has been eroded over the years by ad hoc "improvements" most of which were the removal of plantings and to accommodate increased traffic.

Within the oval's grounds there are several notable trees. The most striking are the *Washingtonia robusta*, Mexican or Washington palms. These trees are landmarks and relate to the significant avenue of *Washingtonia robusta*, Mexican or Washington Palm, in Alexandra Avenue, one in the garden of The Bungalow, 8 Dryden Street, and to others elsewhere in the town. There are various other trees some of which are in very poor health, particularly the *Calodendrum capense*, Cape Chestnut, the only example found in Hamilton. On the other hand the *Waterhousea floribunda*, Weeping Myrtle, which is next to the Brown Street fence, is in good condition and could be used as a species for further planting. There are also two *Quercus robur*, English Oaks, which are reasonable. Improved planting along this side of the oval would benefit the streetscape. Because of the overhead powerlines the planting should be inside the Oval fence.

On the other side of the Oval, there is a drinking water fountain erected by the Caledonian Society in 1910 for children, no doubt prompted by the beautification scheme. It is surrounded by several trees; *Quercus palustris*, Pin Oak; *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra', Purple Cherry Plum and *Aesculus hippocastanum*, Horse Chestnut, the most notable tree in this part of the Oval. Other trees which are notable are a *Eucalyptus ficifolia*, Red Flowering Gum; the *Acmena smithii*, Lilly Pilly and *Arbutus unedo*, Strawberry Tree, either side of the Thompson Street memorial entrance gates.

The trees mentioned above almost certainly date from the beautification scheme at the beginning of this century. They have a considerable collective significance. Their conditions are almost all good. Their retention is paramount.

In a sense the oval is based on Lonsdale Street which seems to have been narrowed for the sake of the oval. This flat area is now used for fire training and hose drying. There is an avenue of *Ulmus X hollandica*, Dutch elms, outside the fence with angle parking in between them. See the schedule of street trees for comments on their size and condition and for recommendations on their management. The cream brick public toilets are now the major feature of this section of the park. There is no street tree planting on the opposite side of the road which has become something of a take-away food "strip".

Avenues of trees in Lonsdale Street stretch away from the oval in both directions. On the east the elms continue and are interplanted with *Eucalyptus citriodora*, Lemon Scented Gums. To the west there is a significant tree, a *Eucalyptus globulus* subsp. *bicostata*, Eurabbie. ([1]) This tree which is extremely old and the only one left of an avenue which stretched as far as Kennedy Street may have been sent to Hamilton by Baron Ferdinand von Mueller from the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne. Close by there are four *Phoenix canariensis*,

Canary Island Palms, which would date from early this century and are likely to be part of the beautification of Melville oval.

Traffic is a major issue in this part of Lonsdale Street being between two roundabouts and on the through route from east to west of the town. Its improvement as an avenue would ameliorate the blight caused by the traffic. The roundabouts, if they are to be permanent, could be better designed. This part of the city does not show off Hamilton to its best advantage which is all the more ironic since the Tourist information Bureau is located under one of Hamilton's most significant trees.

The land rises away from the oval towards the Shire Hall in Market Place and St Ronan's at 5 Dryden Street. The Manor House, also in Dryden Street, has enjoyed the view down and across the town since 1862. The most dominant building in this Conservation Area is the former Alexandra Ladies College. Its curtilage has been seriously compromised by the construction only a few years ago of several two storey units. The units could not be described as good infill architecture. Two memorials, one to Major Mitchell and one to the soldiers who fell in the Boer War complete the picture. The latter is associated with two *Quercus robur*, English Oak. ([2]) This whole residential area now forms a backdrop to the Melville Oval Conservation Area. The radial pattern of streets is an important characteristic of the area which distinguishes it from the rest of Hamilton. The planting in these streets is mediocre and does not date from the beautification scheme. Bluestone gutters survive.

[1] The precise identification of this specimen is uncertain until more material can be examined. It is most likely subspecies *bicostata* but this subspecies intergrades with subspecies *pseudoglobulus*, Victorian *Eurabbie*, within which this specimen might fall. It is not *E. globulus* subsp. *globulus*, Tasmanian Blue Gum.

[2] This was a popular view in early twentieth century postcards held both at the Hamilton Historical Society and in the Picture Collection at the State Library of Victoria.

Heritage Study / Consultant	Southern Grampians - City of Hamilton Conservation Study, Timothy Hubbard with Carlotta Kellaway & Michael Looker (plus Francis Punch), 1991
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	24247
Property number	

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online