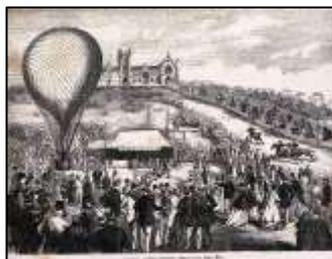


Circuses and Exhibitions – Prince Alfred Park, Surry Hills



John W. Ross



Figure 1 Park playground (flickr.com)

Cover photographs (clockwise from top):

Exhibition Building, 1870 (City of Sydney Archives)

Pat Gregory ice skating, c1969 (City of Sydney Archives)

Jung the elephant, 1870 (Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales)

Thomas Gale, balloonist, 1871 (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 21 January 1871)

“As long as there are children, there will always be a circus” – Doug Ashton (1918-2011).

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Foreword

Prince Alfred Park was once an important meeting place for Aboriginal people where they met for ceremonies and found fresh water, food and shelter. The area was covered in sandhills with tall trees and a stream running through it. The early European settlers named it the Government Paddock, chopped the trees down and grazed cattle on it. The former convict Charles Smith was granted ten acres in the area to cultivate a kitchen garden for the Sydney Market, and the land was renamed Cleveland Gardens.

The wealthy businessman Daniel Cooper acquired the land in 1819 and built a handsome villa named Cleveland House on the eastern side. Subdivisions of the grant intruded into the undeveloped land, resulting in the openings of St Paul's Anglican Church in 1855, the original Redfern Railway Station in 1855 and the Cleveland Paddock School in 1856. The remaining land was finally gazetted as a public reserve in 1865 and handed over to the City Council, preventing any more subdivisions. In 1867 Prince Alfred, Queen Victoria's second son, made the first royal visit to the Australian colonies, and the area was renamed Prince Alfred Park in his honour.

The Agricultural Society's annual Easter show moved from Parramatta to Prince Alfred Park in 1869, to be followed by the much grander Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition in 1870 to mark the centenary of Captain Cook's visit. For this, the whole park was redesigned in the style of European Exhibition Gardens and a large Exhibition Building was constructed. The exhibition was a great success, and was followed by more annual shows and exhibitions until the exhibition moved to the Domain in 1879 and the Easter show moved to Moore Park in 1881. From this time, the City Council leased the building for a wide variety of uses.

The park was used regularly as a cricket ground from the 1850s, then by a succession of circuses from the 1880s until the present era. Playgrounds, tennis and basketball courts were constructed for exercise and a bandstand for entertainment. The Exhibition Building hosted fundraising balls, winter roller skating, and concerts that inspired the current national anthem and introduced the young Nellie Melba to Sydney. Major technological advances were displayed to the public in exhibitions in the building and the park, including ballooning, aeroplanes and wireless telegraphy. The War Memorial Museum was housed in the building for ten years from 1925 before moving to Canberra.

The old building was finally demolished in 1954 to make way for the first swimming pool and an ice skating rink. In recent years, the swimming pool has been modernised and the park remodelled. Concerts and festivals are still held on temporary stages and in marquees, and Prince Alfred Park continues to serve as an important public recreation area for inner city workers and residents.

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Early period

Acknowledgement of country

The author acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora nation upon whose ancestral lands Prince Alfred Park is now located. He would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past, present and emerging, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

First inhabitants

The Government Paddock (present-day Prince Alfred Park) was a part of the territory of the Gadigal clan of the Eora Nation. This territory stretched along the southern side of Sydney Harbour to around present-day Petersham, although the southern boundary is unclear. Following European settlement from 1788, Sydney's Aboriginal population was gradually pushed to the fringes of the city, away from their traditional camping grounds around Sydney Cove at the Domain and Woolloomooloo¹.

The early Europeans noted that the area comprising Central Station, Belmore Park and Prince Alfred Park was used as an important meeting point for Aboriginal people in the early days of European settlement. David Collins, a British Marine officer on the First Fleet, recorded that the area was used as a ceremonial meeting place for some years, and where "they derived many comforts and shelter in bad weather"².

The Government Paddock continued to be an Aboriginal camp site until the arrival of the railway in 1855 and the later use of the park as a showground for the Agricultural Society³. Prior to the modifications to the area, a tributary of Blackwattle Creek flowed through the Paddock from east to west.

Early European settlers

The sandhills immediately south of Sydney were originally covered by stands of blackbutt, bloodwood, angophora and banksia trees of immense size, but these were soon chopped down. In the early nineteenth century, this part of Sydney remained undeveloped⁴.



Figure 2 Government Paddock 1850 (New South Wales State Archives)

The land on which Prince Alfred Park stands was originally a ten-acre grant awarded to the former convict Charles Smith (c1758-1818) on 26 December 1809 by Acting Governor Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson for the purpose of cultivating a kitchen garden, partly to supply the Sydney Market. Smith was a skilled gardener and had tended Governor Arthur Phillip's garden in Sydney. The grant was confirmed by Governor Lachlan Macquarie on 1 January 1810, directing that the land would be known from that time as Cleveland Gardens⁵.

The name derived from Macquarie's friend, Major Thomas Sadler Cleveland⁶. Major Cleveland was an officer in Macquarie's 73rd Regiment whose name was invariably spelt "Cleaveland" by Macquarie. Cleveland sailed from New South Wales on leave on 20 October 1811 in the *Providence*, changed passage mid-voyage to the *Worley* but died at sea before reaching England. Macquarie was reportedly shocked to hear of the death of "dear Major Cleaveland"⁷.

Ten acres is about 200 metres by 200 metres, so the grant would have covered the whole of the current Prince Alfred Park, the St Paul's Church and former Redfern Station areas on the western side, and Cleveland House and grounds to Elizabeth Street on the eastern side.

Charles Smith had arrived in New South Wales in 1790 on the *Surprize* to serve a seven-year sentence. The ship was part of the notorious Second Fleet. 1,026 convicts departed England, but 267 died during the voyage, the highest mortality rate in the history of convict transportation to Australia⁸. His good behaviour in the colony was rewarded with an absolute pardon in November 1792.

Smith succeeded in cultivating the land, and advertised produce for sale in 1814⁹. Little more is known of the land until it was mortgaged to brewer Thomas Clarkson in January 1817 for £92. However, Smith must have defaulted on the payments, because the Supreme Court on 24 March 1818 foreclosed on the mortgage and vested the land to Clarkson, who sold it to Robert Lathrop Murray in April 1819 for £180. Murray sold it to Daniel Cooper in September 1819 for the same price¹⁰.

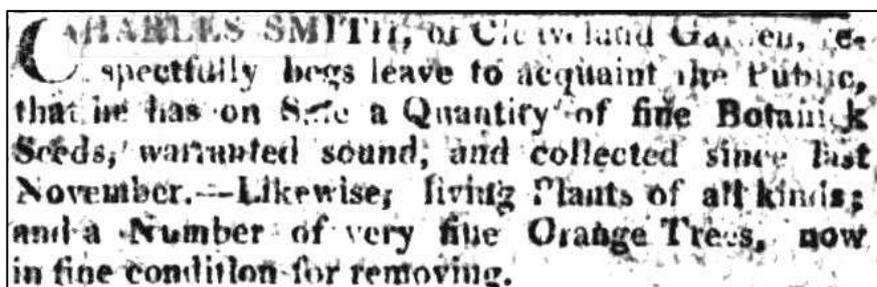


Figure 3 Charles Smith, Cleveland Gardens (*Sydney Gazette*, 26 Mar 1814)

In 1822, Daniel Cooper commissioned the ex-convict architect Francis Greenway to build a large villa in the grounds to the east of present-day Chalmers Street, which was completed in 1823. The grounds extended eastwards to Elizabeth Street and southwards to Cleveland Street. Shields' 1845 map of Sydney shows that Cleveland House was the only building on the original 1809 grant¹¹. When Cooper died in 1853, the estate was sold, including the Cleveland Gardens area.

Subdivisions of the grant by the 1850s began to intrude into the undeveloped land, resulting in St Paul's Anglican Church, the original Redfern Railway Station and the first Cleveland Paddock School.

St Paul's Anglican Church

Apart from Cleveland House, the first subdivision of the original grant was a parcel of land in the south-west corner of the Cleveland Paddock. St Paul's Church of England Chippendale was designed in the Victorian Free Gothic style by Edmund Blackett, the diocesan architect for the Church of England in Australia. While the church was begun in 1848 when Bishop William Broughton laid the foundation stone¹², it did not open until 1855¹³, and the tower was not completed until 1875¹⁴. Financial difficulties halted construction on numerous occasions, and meetings were often held to raise funds for the next phase of the project¹⁵.

A wooden school building was constructed in 1854 and the original Gothic presbytery in 1864¹⁶. The church is an imposing sandstone building with a square tower over the main entrance, surrounded by a turret. Funeral services were often held there prior to the departure of the funeral trains from the nearby Mortuary Station to the Rookwood Necropolis¹⁷.

In the 1960s, the Greek Orthodox Church entered into negotiations with the Anglican Church to purchase the site, and the sale was finalised in 1969. As the St Sophia Cathedral in Paddington was approaching its capacity by this time with a growing congregation, the purchase gave the Archdiocese the opportunity to combine a cathedral and the institutional offices of the Archdiocese all on the one site. St Sophia's has since become a parish church¹⁸.

Sydney Railway Terminal

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, people travelled around the Australian colonies by horse-drawn transport or coastal shipping services. The first steam railway began operation in 1854 between Melbourne and Port Melbourne. After that, the colonial railway system developed rapidly. Initially all track and rolling stock was imported, but from the 1880s most of the equipment was being made locally.



Figure 4 First Sydney Railway Terminal, 1856 (National Library of Australia)

In New South Wales, proposals began in the 1840s for a railway linking Sydney and Parramatta, with an eastern terminus close to the Sydney city centre. The site decided for the station, called Sydney Terminal, was on the western side of the Cleveland Paddock with Devonshire Street as its northern

boundary. The Devonshire Street Cemetery was located to the north of the street. The station site was a further subdivision of the original grant.

The Sydney Railway Company began in 1849¹⁹ and started building the first track between Sydney and Parramatta (a distance of 22 kilometres) in 1850²⁰. From the start, competent and experienced staff were hard to find, and by the end of the following year, newspapers were reporting problems with the project: money had been wasted, time had been lost and very little progress had been made²¹. When additional capital proved to be difficult to obtain from the public, the Government was forced to loan funds to the Company. Subsequently, an Act of Parliament was passed to allow to Government to take over the whole project²².

The line finally opened to the public in September 1855. The festive occasion was marked with a public holiday, and all public offices, banks and most shops were closed²³. The terminal building was a temporary timber and corrugated iron building, constructed rapidly in the weeks before the opening, with one platform. It was often but unofficially called Redfern Station, while the present Redfern Station was then called Eveleigh. When the station became inadequate for the traffic it was carrying, a new station was built in 1874 on the same site, also called Sydney Terminal. This was a more substantial brick building with two platforms.



Figure 5 Second Sydney Terminal 1874 (Australian Railway Historical Society)

All major metropolitan areas tend to have their rail terminal located within the heart of the city, and Sydney Terminal was inconveniently located to the city's south. When the third rail terminus was eventually built in 1906, it moved one block north, closer to the city, on a site occupied by the cemetery. Also finding themselves in the way of the great iron horse were the South Sydney Morgue, the Convent of the Good Samaritan, the Sydney Female Refuge, the police barracks, Christ Church Parsonage, the Benevolent Asylum, a steam train depot and some residential properties. The old terminal in the Cleveland Paddock was demolished on completion of the new Sydney Terminal.

Cleveland Street Schools

Early education

Schools in the early colony were run by the different Christian denominations, and by the 1830s almost all of the churches were seeking financial aid from the State. From 1848, in the interests of efficiency and hopefully religious harmony, the colonial Government created its own system of National Schools. This system was based on the Irish National education system which sought to teach a mostly nondenominational curriculum.

Part of the Government's motivation was to establish schools in rural areas where the churches had been slow to expand, especially during the severe depression of the early 1840s when the churches had difficulty maintaining their existing schools. The lack of rural schools was highlighted in a Government report in the 1840s²⁴.

The result was that, unlike the United Kingdom and the United States, the city and suburbs were not the basis of government-run schools, and for some decades the State set up new schools in rural areas, leaving the cities to the churches. Only from the early 1870s did government schools (by then called public schools following the *Public Schools Act of 1866*) begin to prevail in Sydney. By January 1848, there were two administrative boards, a Board of National Education to oversee the Government schools and a Denominational Schools Board to run the church-based schools, which continued to receive State aid²⁵.

Cleveland Paddock School

The expansion of Sydney into Surry Hills and then into Redfern and Chippendale began in the 1840s and continued through the 1850s. In September 1850, surveyor Edward Burrowes measured out a rectangular area of 2 roods 5 perches on the north-west corner of present-day Chalmers Street and Cleveland Street, to be set aside for a National School²⁶. This was a further subdivision of the original grant for Cleveland Paddock.

The first National School to open in Sydney was the Cleveland Paddock School in May 1856. The school started in a corrugated iron building imported from Liverpool in England due to the high cost of colonial labour at the time. The school opened with 54 pupils²⁷, expanding to about 270 by the end of the year²⁸. During this time, it became one of four "model schools", including Fort Street, William Street (now closed) and Paddington. In 1866, the New South Wales government passed the *Public Schools Act 1866*, which combined the government and denominational boards of education into a single Council of Education. All national schools were named public schools when the Act came into effect in January 1867²⁹.

Cleveland Street Public School

The prefabricated iron buildings were replaced in 1867-68 with more substantial sandstone and brick Gothic Revival buildings. The new school opened in September 1868 with an enrolment of 1,100 pupils. As numbers increased, additions were made, such as a new Girls' School in 1891 and a new Infants' School in 1909. The site became an intermediate high school for boys and girls in 1912, whilst retaining a primary school department³⁰.



Figure 6 Cleveland Street Public School

An intermediate high school was a school containing both primary and secondary departments. The system emerged in 1912 to cater for children who qualified for high school but were unable to enrol in the small number of high schools at the time. The schools offered basic instruction to Intermediate Certificate standard. The number of intermediate high schools declined rapidly after 1950 when high schools were established in large numbers, and the system was abolished in 1977³¹.

Additions continued to be made, including a three-storey brick building in 1924-5. The primary school closed in 1966 and the site became a boys' high school³². In 1980, the high school moved to new grounds and buildings in Alexandria. The Cleveland Street site became an annex to the new high school, but with the separate function of providing intensive English language tuition to newly-arrived migrants.

In 2001, the site became a high school dedicated to intensive English language (ESL) tuition, called Cleveland Street Intensive English High School. In 2018, the ESL school vacated the historic Cleveland Street buildings for a new 14-storey building on the same site, constructed for a new inner city high school, and then moved to its permanent site in Mitchell Street in 2019. The Inner City High School opened in January 2020 in the new building³³.

Prince Alfred Park

The paddock becomes a park

Halting the carve-up of Cleveland Paddock

After parts of the Government Paddock were excised for the railway station and the school, the Sydney City Council decided to recommend to the Government that the remaining undeveloped land be granted to the Corporation as a place of public recreation for the people. A committee was formed to prepare a memorial to the Governor asking for these steps to be taken³⁴. Nothing was done for some time, so in June 1852 the newspaper *Empire* wrote that Cleveland Paddock “an oasis in the surrounding desert of crowded streets and fetid alleys, and for nature’s sake the grounds should remain unimpaired”³⁵.

In September 1855, following the death of Daniel Cooper in 1853, a parcel of fourteen acres of Cleveland Paddock was subdivided into building lots and put up for sale. The subdivided area seemed to be only Cleveland House and its surrounds (between Chalmers and Elizabeth Streets)³⁶. The remaining undeveloped land in Cleveland Paddock was acquired by the Government and was finally gazetted as a public reserve in December 1865³⁷.

In July 1867, the Minister for Lands informed the Sydney Lord Mayor that the Cleveland Paddock and adjacent Police Barracks would be handed over to the Sydney City Council for recreation by enclosing it with a dwarf wall and iron palisading³⁸. From the end of that year, the City Council was receiving tenders from people wanting to use the now-enclosed paddock for grazing purposes during the following year³⁹.

The first Royal visitor gets a mixed reception

In October 1867, Prince Alfred the Duke of Edinburgh, second son of Queen Victoria, commenced the first Royal tour of the Australian colonies when he landed in Adelaide. Huge crowds gave him an enthusiastic welcome everywhere he went, but the Prince was to find that this was as good as it got. He arrived in Melbourne in November, also to huge crowds, but religious tensions began to mar his stay when the community hall he was attending was provocatively decorated with an image showing the Protestant William of Orange defeating Catholic armies in Ireland.

A rowdy crowd of Irish Catholic protesters outside the hall was fired upon, and another riot ensued when a free public banquet attracted 40,000 Melbournians (out of a population of 200,000) and the Prince cancelled his appearance out of fear for his safety. Other problems dogged the visit in regional Victoria, and the Prince decamped to Tasmania before travelling to Sydney in January 1868. He spent a month in New South Wales then travelled to Queensland⁴⁰.

In February, while the Prince was still in Sydney, newspapers reported that the City Council decided to rename the Cleveland Paddock to Prince Alfred Park in honour of the visit⁴¹. Later that month, it was reported that the Prince was invited to plant the first tree in the newly-designated park⁴². He left for Brisbane in late February before returning to Sydney in March.

On his return, disaster struck when the Prince attended a Sailors’ Home Picnic in the park at Clontarf. The day was declared a public holiday and several steamers left Circular Quay for the park, where all

the sports of England were organised: cricket, football, croquet and Aunt Sally, among others. The Prince arrived by steamer at 2pm, took lunch, and when he was leaving the lunch tent an Irish Catholic named Henry O'Farrell came up behind him and shot him in the back at close range with a revolver. Panic and pandemonium ensued, the would-be assassin was immediately seized by the crowd, and the police had difficulty preventing the mob from lynching him on the spot⁴³.



Figure 7 Shooting of Prince Alfred, 1868 (National Library of Australia)

Over the next few months, the Prince made a full recovery while meetings expressing “indignation at the recent outrage” were held around the country. Newspapers attacked the Irish in a show of rabid sectarianism that had suddenly changed from a kind of underground sentiment to a very public animosity. O'Farrell was convicted of attempted murder despite signs of mental instability. The Prince's request for clemency was ignored and O'Farrell was hanged in Darlinghurst Gaol in April 1868.

The legacy of the Prince's visit was that the great relief at the news of his recovery prompted large sums of money being contributed by the public to hospitals built in his name: the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne (opened 1871) and the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney (opened 1882). Schools, streets and parks were also named after the Prince by the highly embarrassed officials⁴⁴.

Note that the newspaper record makes it clear that Prince Alfred Park in Surry Hills was named in the month before the shooting, not as a result of it (as is invariably repeated in histories of the park). However, it was not reported if the Prince called for the royal shovel to accept the tree-planting invitation.

Redesigned as Exhibition Gardens

Despite Cleveland Paddock being gazetted as a public reserve in 1865, the area suffered from neglect by the City Council. Its condition was described in 1869 by Jules Joubert, French-born secretary of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales, as a “quagmire with a filthy drain running

across it – a plague spot”⁴⁵. After the Society moved the annual Easter Show from Parramatta to Prince Alfred Park in 1869, the New South Wales Government decided to hold the Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition in 1870 to mark the centenary of Captain James Cook’s visit.

Part of this large project was to lay out the park in the European Exhibition Gardens style, including the planting of over 1,000 trees. The innovative architect Benjamin Backhouse (1829-1904) was engaged to redesign the park. Backhouse’s 1870 plan featured serpentine paths, popular in public park design in nineteenth century England. He also designed lawns, terraces and shrubbery. Significant filling and levelling was carried out and roads, plantations and paths were made. A raised avenue was built from the Cleveland Street entrance and included a viaduct over the creek, which was partially filled and converted into ornamental ponds. Raised terraces were built around the Exhibition Building and a carriageway constructed for access from Chalmers Street. About eighty small timber and iron pavilions were erected in the park at one time, all to Backhouse’s designs. He also designed the refreshment stands and a bandstand to the south of the Exhibition Building.



Figure 8 Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition, 1870 (State Library of NSW)

Pedestrian access to the park (which by then was surrounded by an iron railing fence) was via three unusual gates which were self-closing and recorded the number of times they were opened, thus counting the number of patrons entering the park each day - early versions of the turnstile gates still used today. All work in the park was completed in quick time just before the Exhibition’s opening on 30 August 1870⁴⁶.

Benjamin Backhouse served as an Alderman in the Brisbane City Council before moving to Sydney in 1868, and then as a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council until his death in 1904. He was also an earnest social reformer who campaigned tirelessly to improve Sydney’s sewerage system from the 1880s⁴⁷.

After the show moved on

The Agricultural Society held twelve annual Easter shows in Prince Alfred Park from 1870 to 1881 before moving to Moore Park. The show reverted to a primarily agricultural one after the industrial flavour of the 1870 exhibition. Once Prince Alfred Park was no longer used as a showground, its importance declined and it was largely neglected by the public despite the booming enthusiasm for public parks in the 1880s. Despite the lack of public patronage, numerous gas lamps were installed in the park during the 1880s, and the whole site was evidently returfed and the first of many pathway realignments was undertaken.

By the late 1890s, the park had become derelict and had been damaged by landfill dumped for the construction of the Central Railway Station, a massive project that began in June 1901 to demolish the Sydney Terminal on the western side of Prince Alfred Park and construct a new and much larger terminal to the north of the park (on top of the old Devonshire Street Cemetery), finally opening in 1906. Despite these disruptions, the park continued as a favoured place for circuses and large public gatherings until the late 1950s.

In 1904, the Council erected a new timber and brick bandstand, and between 1910 and 1925, avenues of shade trees were planted along the main access ways, as part of the Sydney City Council's City Beautifying Scheme⁴⁸.

The circus comes to the park

Circus history

A circus is a company of people who put on diverse entertainment shows. They may include clowns, acrobats, trained animals, trapeze artists, musicians, dancers, tightrope walkers, jugglers, magicians, and many other acts. The term circus also describes the performance that has followed various formats throughout its 250-year modern history.



Figure 9 Astley's Amphitheatre, c1808 (Harvard University)

The modern circus began to crystallise in London in the 1760s, when riders used to give open-air displays of trick horsemanship at Lambeth, south of the Thames. In time, some of these displays began to resemble the form we associate with the modern circus. The man credited as the father of

the modern circus is Sergeant-Major Philip Astley (1742-1814), an English cavalry veteran of the Seven Years War between England and France (1756-1763). He performed in a circle, not in a straight line like his rivals, as he found it was easier to stay on the horse with a circular track.

After experimenting with different-sized rings, he found that 42 feet was the optimum diameter that produced the right amount of centrifugal force to allow the rider to balance on the back of a galloping horse. This became the standard diameter for circus rings ever since. To fill in the gaps between stunt riding demonstrations, Astley gradually introduced acts by clowns, ropewalkers, tumblers and gymnasts, thus developing the format that became universal in the modern circus⁴⁹. By 1779, he had enclosed these displays in a permanent venue that he called Astley's Amphitheatre.

American circuses were not much interested in travelling to Australia, but American innovations such as the Big Top and multiple rings were adopted into the style of Australian circuses.

The contemporary circus

Until the middle of the twentieth century, travelling circuses were a major form of spectator entertainment and attracted huge attention wherever they arrived in a town or city. But their popularity declined after World War II when television and other forms of entertainment arrived and the public's tastes became more sophisticated. Then from the 1960s onwards, circuses attracted criticism from animal rights activists. Many circus troupes went out of business or were forced to merge with others. Despite this, a number of travelling circuses are still active around the world, ranging from small family enterprises to giant three-ringed extravaganzas.

From the 1970s, some fundamental changes appeared in the circus landscape. While remaining a highly popular form of entertainment, the newer contemporary circus movement exhibits a more theatrical flavour and avoids the use of performing animals. Australia's most famous contemporary circus is undoubtedly Circus Oz, and the country's premier youth and community circus is the Flying Fruit Fly Circus. These and overseas circuses such as Cirque du Soleil from Canada have reignited the Sydney public's appreciation for and fascination with human acrobatic feats, without the need for the animal acts that typified earlier circuses⁵⁰.

Circus in Australia

Circus took a long time to become established in Sydney. It was not until 1850 that the Royal Australian Equestrian Circus was established in York Street. Then with the 1850s gold rush providing an expanding audience for performances, Sydney's enthusiasm for circus continued until the present day. Despite wars, depressions and many alternative forms of entertainment, the record shows that Sydneysiders enjoy a good circus. Sydney's first comprehensive circus performance was by the Italian Luigi Dalle Case and his little troupe that arrived in early 1842 and opened a short-lived circus-style pavilion in Hunter Street named the Australian Olympic Theatre. The performance included equestrians, ropewalkers, gymnasts, acrobats and clowns⁵¹.

Interstate entrepreneurs soon leapt into action: in Launceston a publican and professional equestrian named Robert Avis Radford (1814-1865) opened Radford's Royal Circus in December 1847 behind his Horse and Jockey Inn⁵². Radford became bankrupt after only two years, but two of his equestrians, Golding Ashton (1820-89) and John Jones (c1826-1903) eventually established long-running colonial circus dynasties, under the professional names of James Henry Ashton and

Matthew St Leon respectively. As a result of their efforts, the history of almost every notable Australian circus can be traced back to Radford's pioneering circus enterprise.

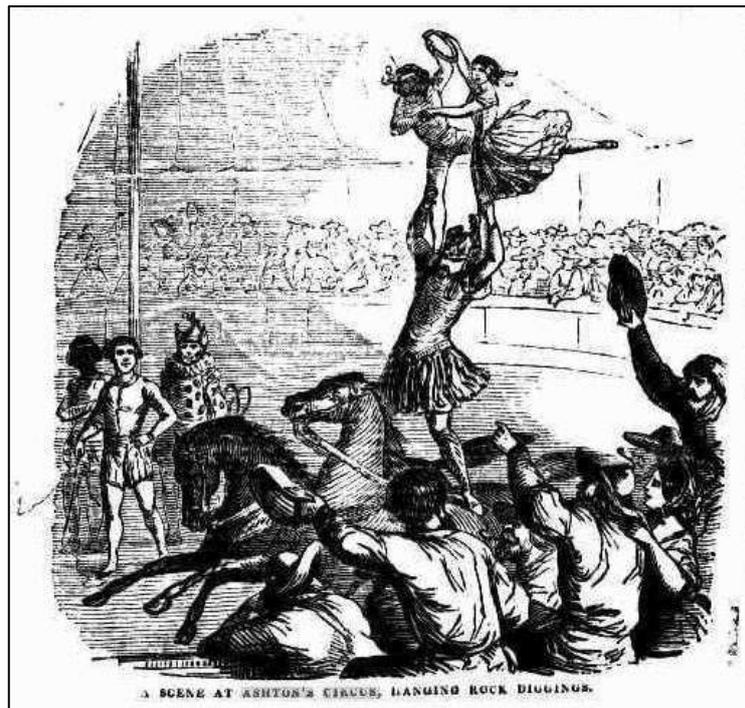


Figure 10 Ashton's Circus in NSW, 1854 (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 6 May 1854)

Circus performances of this early era differed greatly from the wide-ranging presentations offered to audiences today. Colonial circus productions featured only men, women and horses, with no wild animals. Ashton developed his troupe in the early 1850s, and was enthusiastically patronised by the Sydney public. Later in the nineteenth century, itinerant Australian circus proprietors borrowed the American idea of attaching menageries of wild animals to their travelling companies. From these sideshows, some animals such as lions, tigers and elephants were eventually integrated into the circus performances.

Most of the early Australian circuses were built around the owning family, with skills and experience being accumulated and transferred to each new generation. The family-based circuses preferred the freedom and informality of the bush rather than the noise and bustle of the cities. The more capable circus families, such as the Ashtons, Perrys and St Leons, survived the economic tides to build dynasties and reputations that lasted a century or more. Today, after some 160 years of activity, Ashton's Circus is conducted by the seventh generation of the family, and is the oldest circus travelling Australia, if not the world⁵³.

Prince Alfred Park welcomes the Big Top

From 1887, traditional circuses performed in Prince Alfred Park almost every year until the 1950s. Then from the 1970s until the present, contemporary circuses performed there as part of large events like the Sydney Festival. The many circuses will be described in the order in which they first performed in the park. Note that despite its longevity, Ashton Circus did not perform in the park until 1882. This was because the company concentrated on regional tours to small towns, and when in Sydney must have utilised the other popular circus venues, such as Belmore Park. The very large

but short-lived, Fitzgerald Brothers' Circus did not perform at Prince Alfred Park, but as they once performed in the adjacent Benevolent Asylum grounds, they have been included.

Fryer's Circus and Equine Paradox

Years active: 1885 to 1888.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 1887.

Robert W. Fryer was an equestrian director in America in the early 1870s. His Circus and Equine Paradox was formed in 1885 and successfully toured Australia in 1886. Dan Fitzgerald worked in the circus in 1885 and introduced new features. In 1887, the novelty of a Japanese Village with Japanese performers was added to the show⁵⁴.

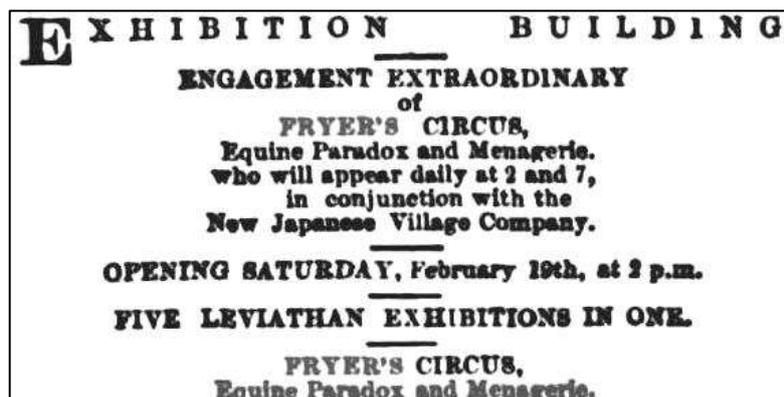


Figure 11 Fryer's Circus, 1887 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 Feb 1887)

When Fryer's Circus visited Sydney in February 1887, performances were given in the Exhibition Building, featuring trained horses, dogs and goats (the latter two being trained to ride on the backs of the former one)⁵⁵. The Japanese Village was constructed in a different part of the building⁵⁶.

Fitzgerald Brothers' Circus

Years active: 1888 to 1910.

Performed in the Benevolent Asylum grounds: 1897.

By the late 1890s, circus was a serious part of Australian entertainment, and the largest and most popular circus of the era was the Fitzgerald Brothers' Circus, which entertained audiences in a huge tent seating 6,000. From small beginnings, the brothers Tom and Dan became nationally famous during the early 1890s depression years following two highly successful seasons in Melbourne (1892) and Sydney (1893).

Part of their popularity was their patriotic appeal as an all-Australian show promoting Australian values such as pluck, camaraderie and enterprise. Their popularity helped cement these virtues in the emerging national identity. In later times, for example the Boer War of 1899-1902, their jingoistic acts advocated Australia's role as Britain's imperial partner in this area⁵⁷. The Fitzgerald brothers pioneered gestures of public goodwill, such as the distribution of hot cross buns and ginger beer to the local children each Easter. But after the death of both brothers in early 1906, Wirth's assumed the position of Australia's premier circus and carried on the tradition of goodwill gestures⁵⁸.

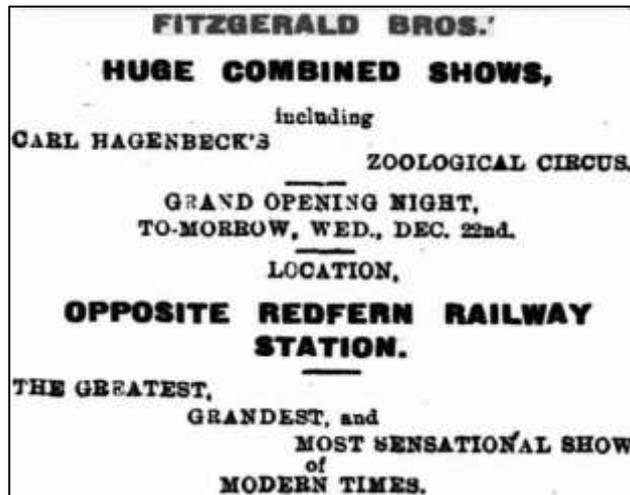


Figure 12 Fitzgerald Brothers' Circus, 1897 (*Evening News*, 21 Dec 1897)

In December 1897, the circus opened for a short season in the grounds of the Benevolent Asylum, across Devonshire Street from Prince Alfred Park⁵⁹.

Wirth Brothers' Circus

Years active: 1883 to 1963.

Performed at Prince Alfred Park: 1905 to the late 1950s.

The four Wirth brothers, John, Harry, Philip and George joined Ashton Circus as Wirth's Tourist Band in about 1881. They left in 1882 to set up their own troupe in Haymarket, initially with themselves as the only performers. From this time, Wirth Brothers' Circus grew so rapidly that by 1887 it was the largest in Australia⁶⁰. After touring the world in the late nineteenth century, from 1900 the circus confined its operations to Australia. Wirth's Hippodrome in Haymarket was built by the Sydney Municipal Council and leased to the circus, opening in April 1916. It was rebuilt in 1927 to become the Capitol Theatre⁶¹.

The rivalry between the two largest Australian circuses of the era was illustrated in February 1905 when Wirth Brothers and Fitzgerald Brothers both applied to the Sydney City Council to lease Prince Alfred Park for the forthcoming Easter season. After some consideration, the Council decided to lease Prince Alfred Park to Wirth Brothers for twenty pounds a week and Belmore Park to Fitzgerald Brothers for thirty pounds a week⁶².

In 1908 the *Australian Star* gave a detailed report of the circus's tradition of goodwill to the local poor children. On Good Friday, about 8,000 children were supplied with about two tons of hot cross buns and 380 gallons of ginger beer at the menagerie. Afterwards the children went into the main tent where a show was put on for them by a herd of six trained elephants performing tricks. On leaving, each child was given a tin pannikin of ginger beer⁶³.

Wirth's was one of the few circuses allowed to operate during World War II, although with a reduced itinerary. Travel between towns was restricted to road, and its daily progress severely restricted by petrol rationing. It was reported in July 1943 that the circus's seven elephants were actually walking the 600 miles from Melbourne to Sydney to perform at the opening night in Prince Alfred Park later

that month⁶⁴. With most of the men away on army service, the company was run by the five sisters, who not only managed the business side of the show but took part in the performances⁶⁵.



Figure 13 Wirth Brothers' Circus, 1943 (*The Sun*, 3 Sep 1943)

Over the years, a few circus elephants found themselves on the loose outside Prince Alfred Park. One night in September 1943, a runaway elephant scattered members of the nearby St Paul's Church choir as they were crossing the church grounds. When the elephant lumbered into the group, their screams were mixed with shouts from the keeper, who had tracked the errant wanderer down. The keeper soothed the perambulating pachyderm while it tucked into a smorgasbord of the church's flowers and shrubs before being led away. After the coast was clear, the choir members emerged from hiding and began their practice⁶⁶.

A few years later, it was reported that a twenty-ton elephant named Jip escaped from the circus after the grand parade and crossed Cleveland Street before leading her pursuers on an hour-long chase through Redfern before being captured. Several inebriated men staggering along Cleveland Street were so chastened on seeing an elephant coming their way they reportedly swore they were ready to "sign the temperance pledge"⁶⁷.

In 1945, Australian circuses could again operate unfettered by the petrol, lighting, manpower and transport restrictions of wartime, and new companies emerged to satisfy the public's hunger for entertainment after wartime privations. Wirth's Circus flourished after World War II until declining with the advent of television until finally disbanding in 1963⁶⁸.

Bostock and Wombwell's Novelty Circus and Complete Menagerie

Years active: 1889 to 1906.

Performed at Prince Alfred Park: 1906.

This long-standing English troupe can be traced back to 1805 when George Wombwell started a menagerie with the purchase of two large boa constrictors. He was very successful and soon established two more menageries. On his death, the menageries were carried on by surviving Wombwells and their relatives the Bostocks until being taken over by Edward Bostock in 1889.

By the time Bostock and Wombwell's Novelty Circus and Complete Menagerie came to Australia in 1906, the troupe had been on a world tour for over two years⁶⁹. The novel aspects of the circus were

that they performed on a stage instead of the traditional ring⁷⁰, and there were no horses, only human performers. The star turn in Sydney was the Lukishima Troupe of Plucky Japanese Acrobats and Balancers⁷¹.

PRINCE ALFRED PARK.
 (OLD EXHIBITION GROUNDS)
 FOR A SEASON OF THREE WEEKS,
 commencing
 SATURDAY NEXT, JULY 7,
BOSTOCK and WOMBWELL'S
NOVELTY CIRCUS AND COMPLETE
MENAGERIE,
 Established in England in 1866.
JUST THINK OF IT!
 OVER 100 YEARS OLD, 100
 and still
RIGHT UP TO DATE.
 The First of its Kind in Australia.
 PERFORMING LIONS TIGERS, etc.
 THE LUKISHIMA TROUPE OF
 PLUCKY JAPANESE.
 PLUCKY JAPANESE.
 AND THE COMPLETE
 ALL-STAR NOVEL CIRCUS CO.
 MATINEES Every WED. and SAT., at 3 p.m.
 PRICES: 3s, 2s, and 1s. Boxes to seat four, 30s.
 Boxes and 3s seats can be reserved at Elvy's.
 Sole Proprietor E. H. BOSTOCK
 Under direction of DOUGLAS BOSTOCK.
 ADVANCE AGENT ALEC. VERNE.

Figure 14 Bostock and Wombwell's Circus, 1906 (*Evening News*, 30 Jun 1906)

The circus was sold in Melbourne later the same year⁷², and in 1910 Wirth's amalgamated Fitzgerald's and Bostock and Wombwell's circuses into one company⁷³.



Figure 15 Lukishima Troupe (*New Zealand Mail*, 4 Apr 1906)

Stanton's Circus

Years active: 1920s.

Performed at Prince Alfred Park: 1925.

Charles Alfred Stanton, showman, was born in New South Wales. Little is known about him until he arrived in Perth in May 1925 to set up his Midway Shows for a number of weeks. A Midway Show refers to carnival sideshows that were placed between the entry gate and the area where the rides are located. Essentially they filled the gap between the entrance and the big attractions, and were designed to divert and entertain carnival patrons when they first arrived.

Stanton told the reporters in Perth that he had been touring overseas for some years and wanted to bring his troupe home. The show featured (simulated) aeroplanes, a Big Wheel, torpedo swings, Charlie Chaplin's Crazy Cottage, a Merry Go Round, illusions, sideshows and other novelties. Stanton had also been travelling with a circus and menagerie, but these were sent to the United States because of the heavy port fees in Fremantle⁷⁴.

In July that year, Stanton moved his show to Northam, about 100 kilometres east of Perth. It was reported that while there he was fined heavily (£20) for keeping a common gaming house. His Midway Show had recently been closed down in Perth when he was banned from conducting games of chance. After moving the show to Northam, he came to the attention of authorities there⁷⁵.

In December 1925, Stanton's Midway show performed at Prince Alfred Park, billing itself as the "Wembley Amusement Park brought to Australia". The company featured Midway Shows, a Mammoth World's Fair and a circus⁷⁶. The World's Fair opened first, featuring a machine that gave patrons the thrill of aeroplane flight. Added to the show since Perth were performing fleas, diving submarines and an act called Bunty Pulls the Strings (a 1921 silent comedy film)⁷⁷.



Figure 16 Stanton's Circus, 1925 (*Evening News*, 19 Dec 1925)

The circus opened the following week, featuring the Mirano Brothers (contortionists), the Homaz Duo (aerial dental act), Ted Trevor and his dog ("with a human brain"), Lopez and Lopez (Continental clowns), and Prince the clown pony⁷⁸. Stanton said that he always assisted a local charity wherever he went, and the present season would aid the Sydney Homeopathic Hospital⁷⁹.

In January 1927, Stanton advertised his Midway Show for sale, when his registered office was in Newcastle⁸⁰. But he apparently kept the show, because in October that year he arrived in

Wollongong for a season, and invited representatives of local charities to get in touch with him⁸¹. A couple of months earlier, he was fined £3 for conducting an illegal lottery at his White City premises at Petrie Bight on the Brisbane River⁸².

Stanton must have been an incorrigible gambler, because in January 1928 he was sentenced to twenty-one days in prison for having run a game of chance called Copper, Silver and Gold at the White City in Brisbane⁸³. Neither he nor his Midway Show and circus were ever mentioned in the press again.

Bullen Brothers' Circus

Years active: 1922 to 1969.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 1949 to the 1960s.

Alfred Percival (Perce) Bullen (1896-1974) and Lilian Ethel Bullen (1894-1965), were husband and wife circus proprietors. Perce was born in Kiama and from a young age had two ambitions: to drive a Rolls Royce and own a first-class circus. He married vaudeville dancer Lilian in 1917, and they gradually built up a small travelling circus-carnival. They bought an elephant, added a shooting gallery, then performing horses, monkeys and dogs. In a small sideshow Perce, billing himself as Captain Alfredo, introduced his performing lion.

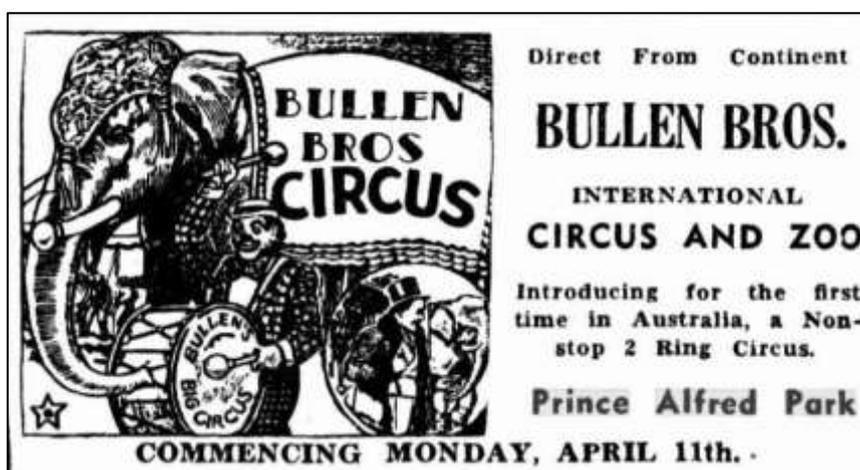


Figure 17 Bullen Brothers' Circus, 1940 (*The Sun*, 29 Mar 1940)

By 1922, the Bullens had made enough money to organise their own circus. They travelled around country towns over dirt roads in horse-drawn wagons. By the era after World War II, the family had built one of the most exciting circuses of that time. Its extensive menagerie included thirteen elephants. In the late 1940s, Perce worked four lions, two tigers, two leopards and two Himalayan bears. He treated the animals well and was never attacked by any of them. Perce's white Rolls Royce led the procession of long, brightly-decorated caravans from town to town. But he overdid the bling when he turned up in a Bentley that had been used by Queen Elizabeth during the 1954 royal visit, and this publicity stunt caused a public outcry.

By 1955, his two-ringed circus had twenty-six acts of international class, its own lighting plants and power supply, a schoolteacher, 56 vehicles and caravans, and 80 permanent staff. The circus was a family affair: the sons and their wives took leading parts and conducted their animal and trapeze acts with enthusiasm and polish. But faced with the increasing popularity of television, Bullens gave

its final performance in May 1969 at Parramatta. His sons established lion safari parks and Perce retired to the family estate at Wallacia⁸⁴.

Bullen Brothers' Circus first performed in Prince Alfred Park in April 1949 for an Easter season. Then in December 1953 the circus arrived in the park for a Christmas season. Yet another runaway elephant made the news during this season when the one-ton Topsy was frightened by a dog after the grand parade and lumbered off towards St Paul's Church. Topsy crashed through the front door of the church hall where members of the Sydney Thistle Band were practising. The startled bagpipers and drummers ran from the building and alerted the rector.



Figure 18 Greg Bullen and Topsy, 1943 (*The Daily Telegraph*, 26 Jan 1943)

The elephant's trainer Greg Bullen arrived before the (no doubt reluctant) police and led Topsy back to the circus. When asked why he thought she broke up the band practice, he just suggested "she probably doesn't like bagpipes". The rector said they have had possums and stray dogs in the church before but never an elephant, although he approved the animal's good sense in wishing to attend church occasionally⁸⁵.

In April 1954, recent disclosures of the conditions in which the Bullens Circus animals were held led to an investigation into cruelty to circus animals, led by representatives of the police, Taronga Park Zoo and the RSPCA⁸⁶. This may have been the beginning of the end for the use of animals in circuses, which was accelerated by the animal rights movement in the 1960s.

Ashton's Circus

Years active: 1854 to the present.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 1882 onwards.

James Henry Ashton (1819-1889) was reputedly a clog dancer and circus performer from Colchester, Essex, who arrived in Australia in the 1840s. By 1854 he had formed Ashton's Royal Olympic Circus and for the next 35 years he toured Australia with his variously grandly titled circus. He acquired a reputation for developing local talent, and members of the Wirth family joined his troupe for a time.

James junior (1861-1918) and Frederick (1866-1941) along with their siblings were soon being featured as clowns, riders, musicians, tumblers and high-wire performers, with a splendid brass band and a tent capable of seating 800 people. The Ashtons mainly toured country towns in New South Wales and Queensland. James junior drowned in the Macquarie River at Dubbo in 1918. Frederick carried on the circus, and died in Randwick in 1941.

Ashton's is the oldest-surviving circus in Australia, and predates most circuses in the English-speaking world. His descendants still carry on the family company, which is currently known as Circus Joseph Ashton, named after the sixth generation of the family⁸⁷.

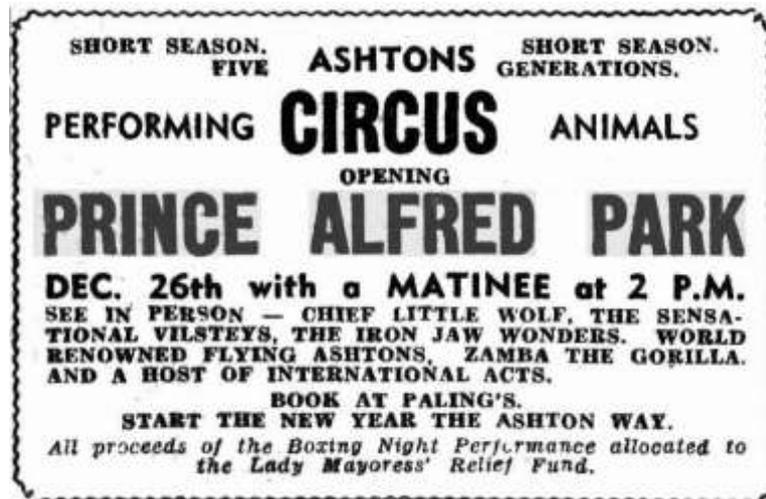


Figure 19 Ashton's Circus, 1952 (*The Daily Telegraph*, 23 Dec 1952)

Their first recorded performance in Prince Alfred Park was in May 1882, when Ashton's Circus Troupe took part in the Bartlemy Fair celebrating Queen Victoria's birthday (which was on 24 May), held in the Exhibition Building. They rarely came to Sydney, as they concentrated on small regional towns, but made a city appearance in Prince Alfred Park at Christmas 1952⁸⁸. In 1957, when the other large companies such as Wirth Brothers' Circus were in decline, Ashton's Super Circus was advertising itself as Australia's largest circus and zoo⁸⁹.

Sole Brothers' Circus

Years active: 1917 to 1993.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 1977, 1978.

William Alfred Sole was born in 1869 in Braidwood, NSW. He joined a circus family when he married Eliza Jane Perry in 1891 in Thargomindah, western Queensland. Her father was William Perry who according to legend had swapped his pub for a circus in the 1870s, which he operated as Perry Brothers' Circus. In 1892, the four Sole brothers (James, Edward, William and Walter) joined the Perry circus from Eidsvold in Queensland. The following year, the Sole branch of the Perry family renamed their troupe Eroni Brothers' Circus (after William's mother's maiden name), to avoid confusion with Perry's Jubilee Circus, run by Charles Sole. In 1914, the Sole family went to work for the St Leon Circus, but left the following year to start an exhibition of animals on the show circuit.

In 1917, William and Eliza Sole left the main family circus to operate as the Sole Brothers' Circus. In 1923, tragedy struck when both William Sole and Charles Perry died in an explosion of the petrol-

operated lighting plant they were checking. The circus carried on operating into the modern era, mostly touring throughout Australia, New Zealand and South Africa⁹⁰. The Sole Brothers' Circus performed at least twice in Prince Alfred Park: during the inaugural Festival of Sydney in January 1977⁹¹, and again in January 1978⁹².

By the 1990s, things were not going well for the circus. In March 1991 the New South Wales Environment Minister refused a request for a permit to import lions from Papua New Guinea, ruling that the circus failed to meet the standards required under the *Exhibited Animals Protection Act*. Then in August 1993, thirteen vehicle defect notices against the circus and an accident involving two of the vehicles prompted Queensland Transport Department officers to order the vehicles off the road⁹³. After operating for a century, the circus finally closed later that year.

Flying Fruit Fly Circus

Years active: 1979 to the present.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 2000.

This is Australia's national youth circus and the only full-time circus school for young people aged 8 to 19 in the country, located in Albury-Wodonga. It was a production of the Murray River Performing Group, set up originally by graduates of the Victorian College of the Arts Drama School. The group began full-time operations in 1979, the International Year of the Child.



Figure 20 Flying Fruit Fly Circus, 2020 (Seymour Centre website)

The group regularly performs at festivals both at home and overseas, and like other contemporary Australian circuses it has been inspired by the founding principles that guided the development of Circus Oz. The "Fruit Flies" revived some traditional circus skills such as acrobatics, clowning, trapeze and wire walking, which were at risk of being lost to posterity⁹⁴.

The circus was a feature of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival when they teamed up with the Shanghai Acrobatic School of China, to perform a work called "Fusion" in Prince Alfred Park⁹⁵.

Circus Monoxide

Years active: 1994 to the present.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 2007.

Circus Monoxide was originally formed under the banner of Precarious by a group of theatre media students at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst in 1994. The company gained fame at “Mountain Madness”, a cabaret staged to counter the impact on the climate of the Bathurst 1000 motor races⁹⁶. In 1996 the group called itself Circus Monoxide in a defiant gesture against the pollution emitted by the racing cars at its birthplace in Bathurst⁹⁷.



Figure 21 Circus Monoxide (Circus Monoxide website)

It is primarily a regional touring company that takes its off-beat brand of circus away from the beaten track to small-town Australia. The group is most heavily influenced by Circus Oz, and shares many of that company’s founding principles⁹⁸. In October 2007, Circus Monoxide performed “Crash ‘n’ Burn” in the Big Top at Prince Alfred Park⁹⁹.

Circus Oz

Years active: 1978 to the present.

Performed in Prince Alfred Park: 2018.

Circus Oz, the most famous of Australia’s contemporary circus groups, gave its first performance in Melbourne in March 1978. It was the amalgamation of two existing groups: Soapbox Circus, a roadshow set up by the Australian Performing Group in 1976, and the New Ensemble Circus, a continuation of New Circus, established in Adelaide in 1973.

While still using traditional elements such as rings, tents and clowns, and rejecting others such as animals, Circus Oz injected new elements of popular music, mainstream theatre and satire to produce a performance more attuned to the expectations of a contemporary audience¹⁰⁰.

The group emerged from the politically-driven political arts movement of the late 1970s, with a left-wing political agenda. It is now much loved and enthusiastically funded, and while the political

agenda has been considerably toned down from its earlier days, politics and social concerns continue to be a part of their high energy comic family-friendly productions¹⁰¹. Circus Oz performed in the Big Top at Prince Alfred Park during the Sydney Festival in 2018¹⁰².



Figure 22 Circus Oz (Photos, dailytelegraph.com.au)

In December 2021 Circus Oz was in danger of closing, as its 1,000 members had voted to reject reforms proposed by its funding partners and the board decided to wind up the company¹⁰³. But then in February 2022, the company announced it was moving forward with a new board¹⁰⁴.

Playing and exercising in the park

Playgrounds

When the Cleveland Street Public School opened in 1868, there was only a small playground allocated to the site. By 1872 the growing number of pupils prompted the Secretary of the Council of Education to request the Sydney Municipal Council for the use of Prince Alfred Park, which was freely granted¹⁰⁵. The request was repeated in October 1891, when the Department of Public Instruction also installed a gate in the school fence to give direct access to the park¹⁰⁶.

Council records show that from 1908 a portion of the park was being leased to the Department of Public Instruction as a playground for the school¹⁰⁷. The lease was renewed every couple of years until at least 1964, when the Council considered a request to dedicate the playground area to the school permanently¹⁰⁸. This did not happen, as the City Surveyor's Sheets during the period 1949-1972 do not show a playground other than the public Coronation Playground¹⁰⁹.

In August 1923, the New South Wales Government passed the *Sydney Corporation Amendment Act*, which gave the City Council the power to establish playgrounds. The Council planned to construct a number of playgrounds and tennis courts in the parks under their management. Alderman Marks announced that the first playground would be in Prince Alfred Park, and would be for girls¹¹⁰. The girls' playground was commenced that month, adjoining the boys' playground¹¹¹.



Figure 23 Playground gymnasium, 1909 (*The Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1909)

Alderman Ernest Samuel Marks (1871-1947) was a very successful athlete in the 1880s, winning many trophies. He was a founder of the New South Wales Amateur Athletic Association and the Australian Olympic Federation. He also founded sporting clubs and institutions, such as the Darlinghurst Harriers. From 1920 to 1927 he served on the Sydney Municipal Council, where he actively campaigned for more children's playgrounds and the preservation of parks¹¹².



Figure 24 Coronation Playground, 1954 (City of Sydney Archives)

In March 1937, the City Council voted to rebuild the playground and name it the Coronation Playground, in honour of the coronation of King George VI, which was in May 1937¹¹³. Construction was delayed by a large cost blowout from the original estimate of £1,500 pre-coronation to £4,000 post-coronation¹¹⁴. The playground and Field House were finally opened in February 1940, after it had slipped back from being the first planned to open in the Municipality to being the fifth to actually open (with one to go). Alderman Marks said that there had been glowing reports from all quarters of the effect of the playgrounds on child behaviour. Juvenile delinquency in the neighbourhood of play areas had practically ceased, and Camperdown School reported that truancy

had stopped since their playground was opened. Children had to be registered to use the Council playgrounds, and 1,000 had already registered at the newly opened Coronation Playground¹¹⁵.

A major refurbishment of Prince Alfred Park in 2013 resulted in two playgrounds. One was an open play space next to the basketball courts, and the other was an enclosed toddlers' playground near the pool entrance¹¹⁶. The latter celebrates many of the historical events of the park: a yellow metal climbing structure in the shape of a hot-air balloon represents the various ballooning feats of the late nineteenth century, a small dinghy marked "*Galatea*", represents the ship of that name commandeered by Prince Alfred the Duke of Edinburgh during his visit to the Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition in 1870. Finally, an elephant celebrates Jung the seafaring elephant from the same ship that entertained visitors in the park during the Exhibition¹¹⁷. The circular shape of the playground may also represent the many circus rings that have been laid out in the park for more than a century.

Cricket

The English sport of cricket was carried around the globe by the expansion of the British Empire from the early seventeenth century. From early beginnings in the 1500s in Surrey, England, it is now played professionally in former imperial countries in Africa, the Asian Subcontinent, the West Indies and the Antipodes. In the colony of New South Wales, cricket was first reportedly played in Hyde Park in December 1803¹¹⁸, where it had to compete with horse racing, army exercises and various other recreational pursuits that must have turned the pitch into a batsman's nightmare¹¹⁹.

In August 1826, a group of Sydney cricketers formed the first club and named it the Australian Cricket Club¹²⁰. But it was a very loose arrangement at first, prompting *The Monitor* to claim a few months later that the club did not really exist, writing that "a few Sydney mechanics got together on New Year's Day to play a game, but it was most unskilful"¹²¹. However, cricket steadily expanded through the 1830s, and more and more clubs were reported in the press: the Civilians' Club¹²², the Penrith Cricket Club¹²³, the Macquarie and Exclusives Clubs¹²⁴, and the Albert Cricket Club¹²⁵. Cricket continued being played in Hyde Park until at least the 1840s¹²⁶.

The first record of cricket being played in Prince Alfred Park was in October 1829 when Lieutenant Thomas de la Condamine, press secretary to Governor Sir Ralph Darling, wrote to the fledgling Australian Cricket Club informing them they could no longer play cricket on the Government Paddock on Parramatta Road¹²⁷. Despite this inauspicious start, cricket was being played regularly there from October 1850, after the formation of the Royal Victoria Club¹²⁸. Vice Regal patronage was bestowed by the attendance of Governor Sir Charles Fitzroy at a game between teams of officers from the Army and Navy at the ground in December that year¹²⁹. By the end of the summer the Royal Victoria Club was holding monthly matches amongst its members, with a match against the military planned in the near future¹³⁰.

In 1854, a single-wicket cricket match (with three batsmen per side) was played by members of the Royal Victoria Club at the Cleveland Paddock¹³¹, and in 1857 another single wicket match was played at the ground between the Royal Surrey Club and Emu Club¹³². Participation in cricket expanded to include teams from industry groups, and in April 1859 a match was played at the Cleveland Paddock between the Retail Drapers and the Wholesale Drapers¹³³. A visit to New South Wales by the All-England cricket eleven in 1862 resulted in an increasing interest in the sport¹³⁴.

Despite its regular use as a cricket ground for almost fifteen years, the Cleveland Paddock was not popular with players because of its unevenness, and in October 1864 the Albert Cricket Ground was opened in Redfern by the Governor Sir John Young¹³⁵. The new ground featured good facilities for both spectators and players, with a grandstand on the north-west corner and a pavilion running around three sides of the ground.



Figure 25 Fred Spofforth (Wisden website)

The pitch was of matted couch grass, and was very soft and spongy, making it a slow pitch that favoured the bowlers. The ground was home to the Albert Club, which could boast three teams of eleven players, including the greatest bowler of the day, Fred “The Demon” Spofforth. The Albert Ground was established as a money-making business, and fees were charged to anyone who wanted to use it, including the New South Wales Cricket Association. But the cost of staging cricket matches there was so high that until the early 1870s the Association preferred to use the Domain whenever possible. The Albert Ground closed in the late 1870s when the Garrison Ground at Moore Park came into use (the Garrison Ground was later renamed the Association Ground, and is now the Sydney Cricket Ground).

The last recorded cricket match at the Cleveland Paddock was in December 1868, between the Young Albert and the Union Cricket Clubs¹³⁶. After this time, much of the park would have been taken up by the Agricultural Society for the annual Easter shows from 1869 to 1881, leaving insufficient room for a cricket ground.

Skating

Roller skating

Roller skating was a popular pastime in Sydney from the late nineteenth century, with two roller skating rinks operating near Prince Alfred Park: The Elite Skating Rink in Elizabeth Street (last reported in 1890) and the Redfern Palace Skating Rink on the corner of Cleveland Street and Walker Street (last reported on 1895)¹³⁷. Roller skating in Prince Alfred Park was mostly conducted inside the Exhibition Building, and was first reported when the Columbia Elite Roller Skating Rink began a winter season in May 1887¹³⁸. The roller skating history of the park will be described in more detail in the section on the Exhibition Building.

In 1896 a short film of a roller skater in Prince Alfred Park was made by the early French cinematographer Marius Sestier, who was working for the Lumiere Brothers. The film was called *Patineur Grottesque*, and was the work of a French film crew who visited Melbourne and Sydney that year, principally to make a film of the Melbourne Cup and to publicise the new cinematography. It had long been assumed that the film of the skater was also made in Melbourne, but a recently-discovered Christmas/New Year postcard of Prince Alfred Park at around the same time shows the same Cleveland Street backdrop as the film¹³⁹.



Figure 26 Skating film in Prince Alfred Park, 1896 (National Film & Sound Archive)

Ice skating

Ice skating commenced in Sydney with the opening of the Glaciarium at Railway Square in July 1907, which operated until 1955, reportedly leaving Sydney without an ice rink¹⁴⁰. Plans were drawn up for a new swimming pool complex on the site of the demolished Exhibition Building in 1954. The initial plan was to use the pool for swimming in summer and then ice it over for winter skating¹⁴¹, and there was no separate ice rink in the first plan in 1954. But this must have been too expensive, as a separate ice rink appeared in later plans for the project. An open-sided roof with a windbreak of moveable fibreglass panels was also planned for the skating rink, but this was not built at the time¹⁴².

The two pools (main and wading) were built at the same time as the skating rink, and both were officially opened in December 1958 by the Lord Mayor Alderman Henry Jensen¹⁴³. The skating rink was open for public use at the start of the next winter in June 1959¹⁴⁴. But the uncovered rink was always at the mercy of strong winter winds and rain, making it almost impossible to maintain a good skating surface. The City Council was unwilling to spend the estimated £50,000 on a cover (with a windbreak) as originally planned, after already spending £74,000 to construct the rink¹⁴⁵. The skating rink was closed for a few days soon after it opened due to bad weather¹⁴⁶.



Figure 27 Ice skating in Prince Alfred Park, 1961 (City of Sydney Archives)

The great Australian figure skater Pat Gregory (1928-2019) was photographed skating at the rink in 1969¹⁴⁷. She had a long career starring in ice shows in Britain and America before retiring in 1980 to become a competition judge and skating coach¹⁴⁸. In 1975, the Sydney City Council selected Noel (Pat) Burley, founder of Burley's Ice Rinks, to cover the rink with a roof, making it possible to open all year. The newly-covered rink reopened in October 1976. The ice in the rink was kept at a significantly lower temperature than most outdoor rinks, allowing a much harder and faster skating surface. The new roof enabled much more reliable programming of ice hockey games, training and recreational skating, as bad weather or hot days no longer led to rescheduling of activities¹⁴⁹. The rink was advertised as Pat Burley's Iceland, completely weatherproof and open all year¹⁵⁰.

Born in 1928, Pat Burley grew up in Melbourne, and he and his wife Nancy became Australia's first Olympic figure skaters at the 1952 Oslo Winter Olympics. He founded Burley's Ice Rinks in 1964, creating ice floors for the American Ice Capades, which toured Australia in the 1960s. He was the architect of ice hockey in Australia during the late 1970s, and the Sydney All Stars ice hockey team played at the Prince Alfred Park rink¹⁵¹. The skating rink closed in 1985, became derelict and was demolished in about 1993¹⁵². The site was then grassed over to become a part of the swimming pool surroundings.



Figure 28 Pool and covered skating rink, 1980 (City of Sydney Archives)

Swimming

After the War Memorial Museum closed in February 1935 before moving to Canberra, it was suggested that the Exhibition Building could be used as an indoor swimming pool¹⁵³. But when that proved too difficult¹⁵⁴, the old building was demolished in 1954 when Olympic fever gripped the nation, to make way for a swimming and ice skating complex on the same site¹⁵⁵.

In October 1954 the construction industry's newspaper gave notice that the City Council had approved plans for three swimming pools. The whole site would be remodelled, including the park area, dressing rooms, refreshment rooms and a gymnasium¹⁵⁶. The newspaper added a week later that the pools would be enclosed in a large building with a sliding roof. The main pool was intended to be iced over for winter skating and a grandstand would run the entire length of the three pools¹⁵⁷.



Figure 29 Pool and uncovered ice skating rink, 1959 (City of Sydney Archives)

The proposed pools were an Olympic pool, a diving pool and a wading pool. The earliest diagram of the site showed that the pools would be built in a line perpendicular to Chalmers Street with an

entrance near the Railway Institute building. A later plan showed a smaller grandstand running alongside the western boundary of the park with an entrance foyer in the centre. A separate skating rink was located in front of the grandstand with the main swimming pool behind it. The wading pool had become smaller and circular and the third pool was then called the “future diving pool” (in dotted lines). Squash and handball courts were in a separate building on the southern side. The next plan called the grandstand the “pool building”, there was no diving pool or squash or handball courts¹⁵⁸.

It seems from these changing plans that cost considerations resulted in a scaled-back design, going from a covered complex with a dual purpose main pool/skating rink, diving and wading pools, squash courts and a grandstand, to eventually become two uncovered pools and separate skating rink with a smaller amenities building. The two pools and skating rink were eventually declared open in December 1958 by the Lord Mayor Alderman Henry Jensen, although the skating rink was not used by the public until the next winter season in June 1959¹⁵⁹.

Sometime after this, the buildings were redesigned: the main building and entrance on the western side were demolished and replaced with changing rooms and an entrance on Chalmers Street. The author remembers that it wasn't exactly the height of luxury: in the 1990s you would pay the attendant at the entry booth a dollar or so for a hot shower, then hurry back to the outside showers where one of them would be warm-to-hot for five minutes or so.



Figure 30 Heated swimming pool (Prince Alfred Park Pool website)

In 2010-2013 a \$9 million redevelopment was undertaken, including an uncovered 50-metre heated swimming pool, and featured a native grass and palm tree roof over the amenities building¹⁶⁰.

Tennis

The first tennis courts in Prince Alfred Park were a set of four hardcourts on the western side, constructed in 1923¹⁶¹. In 2013, they were replaced by five blue Plexicushion tennis courts (the same surface used in Melbourne for the Australian Open) during the park renovation. The courts are the home of the UTS Tennis Club, managed by the University of Technology Sydney¹⁶².



Figure 31 Tennis courts, 1930s (City of Sydney Archives)



Figure 32 Plexicushion tennis courts, 2013 (City Community Tennis website)

Basketball

The City Surveyor's Sheets during the period 1949-1972 do not show basketball courts in the park during this period¹⁶³, but two basketball courts were constructed next to the tennis courts during the 2013 park renovation¹⁶⁴. The former watercourse that ran through the centre of the park now runs underground between the tennis courts and the basketball courts at a low point in the park¹⁶⁵.



Figure 33 Park basketball courts (Courts of the World website)

Other park activities

Ballooning

A balloon, which normally moves freely with the wind, is different from an airship, which is a powered vessel that can propel itself through the air in a controlled manner. Many balloons have a basket or gondola suspended beneath the main envelope for carrying people or equipment. The balloon is a fabric envelope filled with a gas that is lighter than the surrounding atmosphere, and a degree of directional control is possible by making the balloon rise or sink in altitude to find favourable wind directions.

The first balloon to carry passengers used hot air to obtain buoyancy and was built in France in September 1783. The first passenger flight carried a sheep, a duck and a rooster. The Montgolfier brothers launched the first balloon to carry humans in November 1783. When air is heated it expands, so a given volume contains less air and is lighter than air at room temperature. A hot air balloon can only stay up while it has fuel for its burner to keep the air hot enough.

A human-carrying balloon using hydrogen for buoyancy was first made a few weeks after the Montgolfier brothers' flight. Gas balloons have a greater lift for a given volume, so they do not need to be so large, and they can stay up much longer than hot air. So gas balloons dominated ballooning for the next two hundred years. It was common to use town gas to fill balloons, which was not as light as hydrogen gas, having about half the lifting power, but was much cheaper and readily available. Modern balloons use portable heating devices to maintain buoyancy, allowing hot air ballooning to make a comeback.

The first attempt at a balloon flight in Prince Alfred Park was by Thomas Gale, a man bedeviled by difficulties getting airborne in Sydney during 1870 and 1871. After finally ascending from Victoria

Park Camperdown early in January 1871¹⁶⁶, the re-energised Mr. Gale advertised another ascent from Prince Alfred Park during celebrations for the colonial anniversary on 26 January. On the appointed day the balloon was slowly filled with town gas, the car was attached, but when Gale tried to take off in high wind the balloon crashed against the gable of the Exhibition Building, tearing the fabric. The fast-leaking balloon simply drifted a short distance before collapsing back to the park¹⁶⁷.

In November 1884, Harry Henden, an aeronaut from London, arrived in Sydney on the *Lusitania* with his gas balloon named the *Gem*¹⁶⁸, and made his first ascent from Prince Alfred Park the following month¹⁶⁹. Henden was previously a jeweller in Dorking, and the balloon was thought to be named in honour of his previous profession. It was made especially for the colony's hot climate, constructed entirely of silk with a wicker car capable of holding two people.



Figure 34 Harry Henden's ascent, 1884 (*Evening News*, 5 Dec 1884)

A gas main was laid in the park, and from it the balloon was filled¹⁷⁰. Henden took seven bags of ballast on his ascent, each of ten pounds, and disposed of three of them during the trip. At a height of about 6,000 feet, he noticed that he was being blown out to sea, but saw that about 1,500 feet higher up the clouds were being blown landwards, so he let out some ballast to drift higher up to the onshore winds. On approaching Rookwood cemetery, he dropped some pieces of paper to check the wind direction, and after noticing landward winds way below, he opened the valves to descend. When he was floating just above the trees near Enfield, he threw out the anchor in an open area and landed. He rolled up the balloon and fitted it into the wicker car, which was driven back to the town in a cart¹⁷¹. This was to be one of the few incident-free balloon trips from Prince Alfred Park.

The Building Australia Exhibition in Prince Alfred Park in October 1909 featured a number of balloon ascents by Captain Penfold. The first one didn't go well, as the balloon caught fire when being inflated with hot air and the burning material was carried over Redfern before coming down behind some shops, just ahead of the pursuing fire brigade¹⁷². His second attempt was more successful, but he had to cut himself loose at 700 feet and descend by parachute, which was then burned when contacting power lines near the park¹⁷³. Another ascent a month later saw the undaunted Captain Penfold land by parachute in Blackfriars School, to the great delight of the excited students¹⁷⁴.

The incurable thrill-seeker's last ascent from Prince Alfred Park was a balloon race with Captain Holloway. The latter's 80 foot balloon got away first, rising quickly to some 4,000 feet before Penfold

got off the ground. His balloon shot upwards, but at 120 feet it suddenly swerved, pitching him out of his trapeze. The crowd expected him to fall, but the indomitable Captain managed to struggle back into position. He eventually cut himself loose and parachuted back to Surry Hills, as did Captain Holloway. Back on solid ground, Penfold reported that on ascending, the trapeze bumped live power lines, which snapped the wires and burned him badly, throwing him out of the trapeze¹⁷⁵.

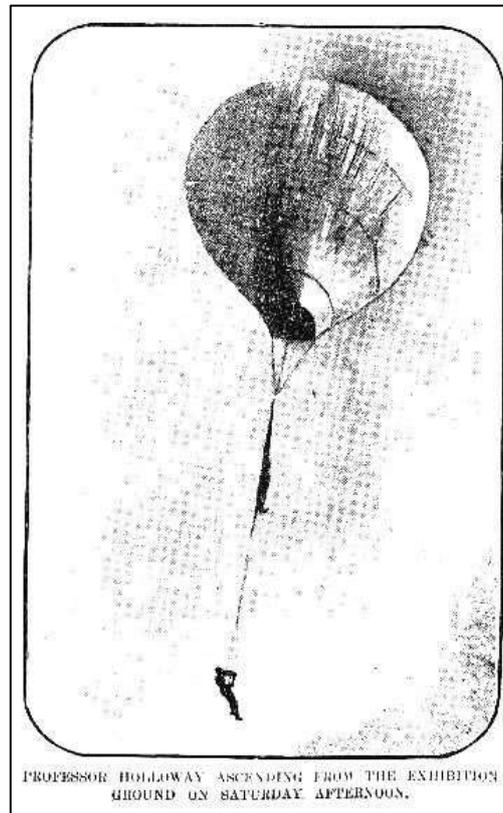


Figure 35 Prof. Holloway above the park, 1909 (*The Daily Telegraph*, 8 Nov 1909)

Over the next few days, the daredevil duo continued their fierce rivalry to ascend higher and higher, with Holloway reaching a height of 10,000 feet, according to the aneroid barometer on board, while Penfold managed 7,000 feet¹⁷⁶. Unfortunately for the local infrastructure, all this barely controlled ascending and descending was wreaking havoc with power lines, which the balloon undercarriages were ripping out on the way up or down¹⁷⁷.

Meanwhile, the Town Clerk Mr Nesbitt was taking a very dim view of the ballooning vandalism (no pun intended) on his patch, and promptly banned any more aeronautical activities during the Exhibition, notifying the Inspector-General of Police for good measure¹⁷⁸. The spectacle of two balloonists causing damage to the local environment (power lines and trees), their balloons (catching fire during inflation or being destroyed on landing) and themselves (hospital visits to patch up burns, cuts and bruises), moved the *Catholic Press* to observe that “all the experiments in aerial navigation so far have convinced the public that it is still a good thing to have plenty of solid ground close under the feet”¹⁷⁹. No more ballooning was reported in Prince Alfred Park after this.

Band music

Rotundas, bandstands and kiosks were types of garden pavilions that were popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The form of these structures is generally based on oriental traditions – the

word kiosk is Turkish, and the characteristic hexagonal roof derives from the pagoda, a type of temple that spread with Buddhism through India, China and Japan. Increased leisure during Victorian times prompted a greater use of public parks for recreation, and the popularity of brass band music led to the advent of bandstands as the entertainment centre of many parks.

Several bandstands were constructed in central Sydney in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The City of Sydney Archives records those in the city area:

- Hyde Park (erected c1884, replaced in 1912 and moved to Camperdown Park)
- Wynyard Park (erected 1888)
- Prince Alfred Park (erected 1904)
- Argyle Park (proposed 1908)
- Moore Park (erected 1909)
- Belmore Park (erected 1910)
- Dawes Point Reserve (erected 1910)
- Observatory Hill (erected 1912)
- Green Park, Darlinghurst (erected 1925)¹⁸⁰

A bandstand in Prince Alfred Park was designed by Benjamin Backhouse as part of the 1870 Intercolonial Exhibition. In 1904 it was replaced by a timber and brick rotunda and relocated¹⁸¹. By the following year, bands were playing in the park on Sunday afternoons, including the impressively-named Railway Military Champion Band¹⁸². Sunday entertainment of any kind was controversial in Australia at this time, and the published programs were fairly sober classically-oriented affairs, possibly to avoid the wrath of the churches by prompting unholy singing and dancing on the Sabbath.



Figure 36 Prince Alfred Park bandstand, 1906 (City of Sydney Archives)

In 1960, the Sydney City Council began to consider whether to renovate or demolish the old bandstand. The Town Clerk's correspondence file on the matter concluded in December 1963, so the building must have been demolished soon after that¹⁸³. There is no bandstand in the park today, but music is played on temporary stages during festivals.

Military activity

Volunteer Rifle Corps

The New South Wales Volunteer Rifles, also known as the Sydney Battalion Volunteer Rifle Corps, was formed in 1854 then revived in 1860, and was the forerunner of today's Army Reserve. The Corps was originally created in response to the Russian scare of the 1850s, in particular the Crimean War (October 1853 to February 1856), which Russia fought and lost to an alliance of France, the United Kingdom, the Ottoman Empire and Sardinia¹⁸⁴.

In August 1860, a public meeting was called to announce the desirability of forming a company of rifles in the southern part of the city, to be called the South Sydney Volunteer Rifles. Another meeting was then called to invite people to join¹⁸⁵. Drill sessions were advertised for the volunteers from the next month at Carters' Barracks in Pitt Street¹⁸⁶. By November the fledgling South Sydney Company was exercising in Cleveland Paddock¹⁸⁷. In December, a large assembly of all the metropolitan and suburban volunteer companies witnessed the presentation of a set of camp colours to the South Sydney Company on their home turf after marching from Hyde Park.

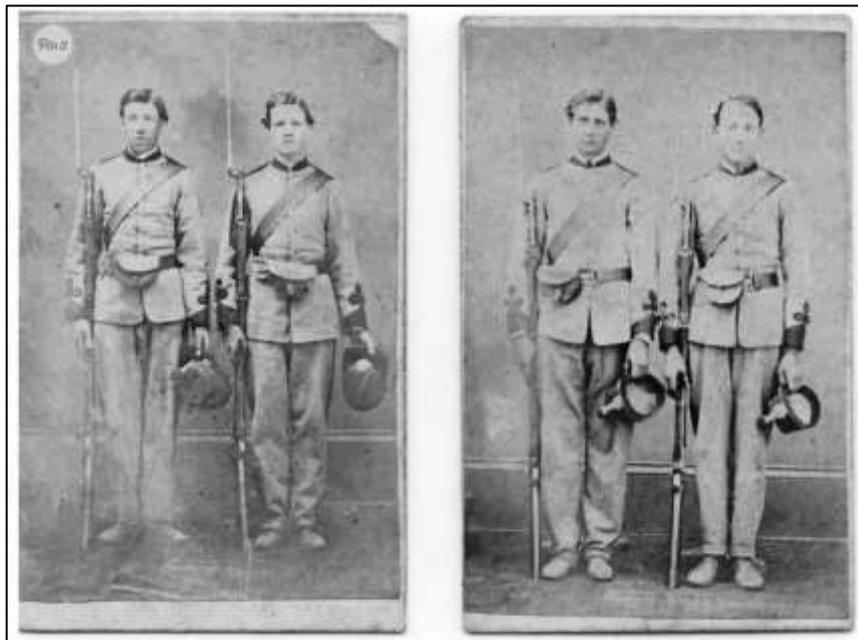


Figure 37 1st NSW Rifle Volunteers, 1860s (Remembering the Past website)

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the company's recent activities in the Cleveland Paddock had caused a revival in the volunteer movement¹⁸⁸. In November 1861, the South Sydney volunteers were fundraising to form a band¹⁸⁹. They would have used the Paddington Rifle Range for rifle practice while in Sydney, but to keep it interesting the company periodically challenged other rifle companies to shooting matches, such as the Singleton Company in March 1872¹⁹⁰.

In 1900, a very large assembly of most of the ten colony-wide companies of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the New South Wales Volunteers took place in Prince Alfred Park before taking the train to Loftus Station to commence their annual week-long training in the Royal National Park¹⁹¹.

World War 1 recruiting

On the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, the Australian Government declared its support of the British involvement in the war. Recruiting offices were set up in army barracks around the country only six days after the war began. Thousands of men enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in first few months to support the British Empire. In the early days of the war, only the biggest and fittest volunteers were accepted, and almost one third were rejected. But as the war progressed, the AIF needed more men to replace casualties and to expand its army, so the physical requirements for enlistment were dramatically relaxed: in August 1914 the minimum height was 5' 6" (168cm), in June 1915 it was 5' 2" (157cm) and by April 1917 it was down to 5" (152cm).

Early enlistments were frequently driven by a desire for adventure. But after huge losses at Gallipoli in 1915 and in devastating battles on the Western Front, long lists of casualties were published in Australian newspapers. In the face of this discouraging news, enlistment slowed down and was driven more by a sense of duty than adventure. In the end, more than 330,000 Australian men and women served overseas in the AIF during the war, out of a total population of about 5 million. By the end of the war in November 1918, some 60,284 died and many more returned injured, ill or traumatised¹⁹².



Figure 38 World War I recruiting poster (fineartamerica.com)

Army recruiting was conducted in Prince Alfred Park from 1915, sometimes inside the Exhibition Building¹⁹³ and other times from tents erected in the park. Senior community figures often spoke at the meetings¹⁹⁴. By November 1915 (near the end of the Gallipoli campaign) the newspapers were reporting that recruiting for the Army was disappointing, with the numbers well short of the 9,600 men a month required for reinforcements. The recruiting rallies were essential because attempts to introduce conscription (via referendums in October 1916 and December 1917) failed to gain a national majority¹⁹⁵.

In May 1917, a large recruiting tent was again erected in Prince Alfred Park, where returned ANZACs were invited to speak at the rallies. On one occasion, a Redfern man named Sydney Williams wanted to enlist to take the place of a workmate who had been killed at the Western Front. When his mate was about to leave on active service, Williams offered to take his place if he was "knocked out". When he learned of his mate's fate, Williams turned up at the Prince Alfred Park recruiting tent to enlist¹⁹⁶.

WWII marches

Australia's involvement in World War II began right at the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939. The Army was first engaged in combat in 1940 when the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions joined Allied operations in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Following early successes against the Italians, Australians suffered in the Allied defeats by the Germans in Greece, Crete and North Africa. In June and July 1941, Australians participated in the successful Allied invasion of Syria, a French mandate. Up to 14,000 Australians held out against German attacks on the port of Tobruk, where they were besieged from April 1941 for seven months.

After being relieved at Tobruk, the 6th and 7th Divisions departed for the war against Japan. The 9th Division remained to play an important role in the Allied victory at El Alamein in October 1942 before it also left for the Pacific. Japan entered the war in December 1941 and swiftly achieved a series of victories, occupying most of South East Asia and large areas of the Pacific by the end of March 1942. After the bombing of Darwin which began in February 1942, the 6th and 7th Divisions returned to defend Australia. The threat of invasion receded when the Allies won a series of decisive battles in the Pacific, on the Kokoda Trail and at Milne Bay.

Further Allied victories against the Japanese followed in 1943, including land battles in New Guinea, although the large and complex offensive was not completed until April 1944. The final series of campaigns were fought in Borneo in 1945, right up to the end of the war in August 1945. Australian troops suffered 39,000 casualties in the war, and 30,000 were taken prisoner, two-thirds of these by the Japanese in the first weeks of 1942. Most German prisoners of war returned home, but 36% of Japanese prisoners died in captivity¹⁹⁷.

Prince Alfred Park's large size and location on the city's fringe made it a popular place for the start or finish of military marches during the war. As early as December 1940, tens of thousands of people watched the march of 2,500 members of the AIF and the Royal Australian Air Force through the city streets, starting at Prince Alfred Park, proceeding into the city past the saluting base at the Town Hall then out to the AIF camp at the Moore Park Show Ground¹⁹⁸.

In late November 1941, 1,200 men of the newly-formed 1st Armoured Division paraded through Sydney's streets, starting in Prince Alfred Park, marching to Martin Place then returning to the park, accompanied by four brass bands¹⁹⁹. This unit was caught up in the changing fortunes of the war, as it was originally intended to be deployed in North Africa, but after the outbreak of the Pacific War in early December the division was kept in Australia to defend the nation against the feared Japanese landings.

By early 1942, the threat of attacks on Australia prompted authorities to dig slit trenches as air-raid shelters in locations that might be targeted. One possible target in Sydney was Central Station, and in January the *Daily Telegraph* urged the creation of more air-raid trenches in parks near the station, such as Belmore Park and Prince Alfred Park²⁰⁰. An aerial photo in 1943 shows a series of zig-zag slit trenches in Prince Alfred Park next to the school grounds²⁰¹.

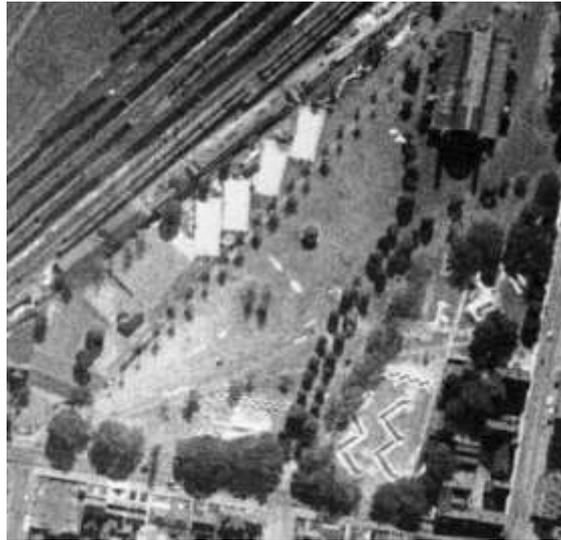


Figure 39 Slit trenches in the park, 1943 (maps.six.nsw.gov.au)

As World War II progressed, the Australian Army units eventually returned from overseas duty, sometimes to re-embark to a different theatre of war soon afterwards. On their return, they frequently marched through the streets of central Sydney to allow the population to show their appreciation for their efforts and sacrifices in the defence of the nation. Many of the marches commenced in Prince Alfred Park and proceeded along George Street to the Town Hall, where a senior Army officer such as Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey would take the salute as they marched past.

In September 1942, almost 3,500 veterans of the 16th Infantry Brigade marched from Prince Alfred Park. They were part of the 6th Division that fought in the first Libyan campaign, in Greece, in the invasion of Crete and the conquest of Syria. The brigade, which left home in early 1940, was famously associated with the storming of Tobruk in January 1941²⁰². In March 1943, the returning troops of the 9th Division repeated the same march. The division won fame for their seven-month defence of Tobruk from April to November 1941, and the rout of German forces at El Alamein in October 1942.

In December 1943, about 2,000 members of the 16th Infantry Brigade again marched from Prince Alfred Park to the Town Hall. Since their previous march the year before, the brigade had entered the New Guinea battlefront in October 1942 at a crucial phase of the campaign and turned the tide in favour of Australia in the battles of the Owen Stanley Range. Subsequently, they fought in the long struggle for possession of the northern New Guinea beaches, including Buna and Sanananda in January 1943. The salute was taken by the Governor-General Lord Gowrie, himself a former Brigadier General in the British Army²⁰³. Some 250,000 people cheered the soldiers as they marched, and it was noted that the brigade had originally marched through the city four years ago when they left for the Middle East, but that few of the original troops remained by 1943²⁰⁴.

Near the end of the war in February 1945, the British Centre erected six marquees in Prince Alfred Park as emergency accommodation for Royal Navy sailors while on leave²⁰⁵. The British Centre was set up in September 1944 as a self-governing branch of the Australian Comforts Fund to cater for British naval servicemen who were part of the British Pacific Fleet based in Sydney²⁰⁶.

Korean War marches

The Korean peninsula had been occupied by Japan since 1910. In 1945 when the Japanese surrendered, the country was divided at the 38th parallel. The division created a northern zone backed by the Soviet Union and a southern zone backed by the United States. With no agreement on how to unify, the zones became separate countries in 1948: the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north.

The relationship between the two Koreas was never stable, and in June 1950 the North Korean People's Army crossed the 38th parallel to invade the Republic of Korea. Twenty-two countries joined the United Nations multinational force to defend South Korea. Australia was one of the first countries involved, and in September the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR) arrived and joined the British Commonwealth Brigade.

The Korean War came to a halt in July 1953 when an armistice (but not a peace deal) was signed on the 38th parallel close to where it had begun. Thus the war ended in a stalemate which exists today, after causing the deaths of four million people. Over 17,000 Australians of the three services served in Korea - 340 of them died and 30 became prisoners of war²⁰⁷. Many troops remained in Korea until November 1954 to establish the Demilitarised Zone at the border and to exchange prisoners and war dead.

Australian troops continued the tradition of earlier wars by marching to or from Prince Alfred Park. In March 1952 the 1st Battalion (1RAR) marched from the park to Circular Quay to travel to Japan for training prior going on to Korea²⁰⁸. A year later, 600 troops from the same battalion returned from Korea and marched through the city, finishing at Prince Alfred Park²⁰⁹. After the protracted armistice was finalised in November 1954, 3RAR, which had served for the entire war, marched through the city's streets from the dock at Circular Quay to Prince Alfred Park²¹⁰.

Religious meetings

Many and varied organisations wanted to use Prince Alfred Park, but the City Council was not always willing to grant permission. News reports showed that political meetings were sometimes barred²¹¹. Even circuses and buckjumping shows, though wildly popular with the public, were banned by the Council in 1909²¹². The Health and Bylaws Committee declared that "the day had passed when the area could be devoted to such purposes as a circus, and the park should be kept beautiful and dignified". Wirth Brothers had held a circus there every year since 1905²¹³. But despite the Municipal refusal, all was forgiven the following Easter when they returned to erect the Big Top and resume their annual "sawdust and spangles" shows²¹⁴.

On the other hand, in an era when the churches had much more influence and patronage than today, religious rallies were normally permitted. The first such organisation recorded in the press was the Chippendale branch of the Sydney City Mission, which began monthly temperance meetings in Prince Alfred Park from July 1890, in conjunction with the Independent Order of the Good Templars²¹⁵. The Mission held large open-air meetings in the park until 1898, attracting several thousand people²¹⁶.

The Sydney City Mission was established in 1862 by the Englishman Benjamin Short, modelled on the London City Mission, to address the spiritual and physical needs of the city's poorest inhabitants. It was non-denominational with the motto "Need, not Creed", and had the backing of clergyman of

almost every denomination. The Mission's original policy was to not own any buildings, which probably explained the use of the park, but in 1904 the leaders decided to purchase Nithsdale, a large property in Liverpool Street with a spacious ballroom suitable for large meetings²¹⁷.

A small group called the Bible Teachers' Association was first reported in 1908, meeting each week in the Newtown Town Hall²¹⁸. In 1910, it was announced that the group's religious meetings in Prince Alfred Park would be held "immediately opposite a private hospital at the request of the patients, who derive much comfort from them even though they cannot take an active part in them"²¹⁹.



Figure 40 Salvation Army rally in Prince Alfred Park, 1941 (Sam Hood, SLNSW)

But the main religious group that made use of Prince Alfred Park was the Salvation Army, which in 1906 began a long tradition of Easter weekend meetings in a large tent²²⁰. These soul-saving campaigns continued almost uninterrupted until after World War II. In 1916, Commissioner James Hay addressed the tent meeting on the evils of drink, saying he hoped the upcoming referendum on reducing hotel opening hours would approve six o'clock closing (it did)²²¹. The only interruption to the Salvos was in 1942, when war restrictions prevented their tent meetings for a few years, and the group moved to the Congress Hall in Elizabeth Street²²². The Prince Alfred Park rallies resumed in 1946²²³.

The Salvation Army is an international Christian religious and charitable movement organised on a military pattern, founded by William Booth (1829-1912), a Methodist minister who began an evangelical ministry in 1865 in the East End of London. Their services are characterised by joyous singing, instrumental music, hand-clapping, personal testimony and an open invitation to repentance²²⁴. The Salvos began operation in Australia in 1880 and gradually established Corps in each State, pioneering a model of welfare services that were operated by them but subsidised by Government²²⁵.

The Exhibition Building

Intercolonial Exhibitions

Agricultural Society shows

The Agricultural Society was formed in 1822 in an effort to improve the quality of primary production by means of displays and competitions. A key activity of the new society was to organise the Annual Show of Livestock, a competitive display of animals and produce that provided agricultural education for the public and enabled its members to meet and conduct business. The Society's first Show was held in 1823 at Parramatta, the agricultural hub of the colony, which at the time was struggling to provide for its population of 30,000, half of them convicts²²⁶. The Show included prizes for high-performing servants as well as the best rams, cheeses and beer²²⁷.

The Society lasted until 1836 when it was disbanded due to declining membership, drought and an economic downturn. It was resurrected in 1857 as the Cumberland Agricultural Society, but soon expanded its scope to represent the farming interests of the whole colony, becoming the Agricultural Society of New South Wales in 1859 to reflect this change²²⁸. Annual shows resumed, but in January 1868 a meeting of the Agricultural Society discussed the invigoration of the event, as the farming people of the local Cumberland area had not supported it as much as expected. It was also noted that the Cleveland Paddock near the city had recently been granted to the Sydney City Council, who intended to fence the area, and this was as good a location as any for future shows²²⁹.

AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES.
Alteration of date.
METROPOLITAN INTERCOLONIAL EXHIBITION,
to be held in the
PRINCE ALFRED PARK, SYDNEY,
On **TUESDAY, 4th, WEDNESDAY, 5th, and THURSDAY, the 6th of MAY, 1869.**

SCHEDULE OF PRIZES :
For

- I. Horses**
- II. Cattle**
- III. Sheep**
- IV. Pigs**
- V. Poultry**
- VI. Dogs**
- VII. Wool**
- VIII. Wine**
- IX. Sugar**
- X. Farm Produce**
- XI. Vegetables, Fruit, and Flowers**
- XII. Manures**
- XIII. Agricultural Implements**
- XIV. Manufactured Articles**
- XV. Works of Art**
- XVI. Field Trials (Ploughing, Reaping, &c. ; and**

Forms of Certificates may be obtained on application to the Secretary, at the office of the Society, No. 227, George-street, Sydney. All certificates for the entry of live-stock must be returned, filled up, to the Secretary, on or before the 1st April, 1869.

Figure 41 1869 Exhibition prize schedule (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 Feb 1869)

In June 1868, the Lord Mayor of the Sydney City Council granted the use of (the newly renamed) Prince Alfred Park for the Agricultural Society's shows from the following year²³⁰, when an expanded show would be called the Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition²³¹. The new venue had the advantages of greater space for the increased membership of the Society, easy access from the country via Redfern Station and a large audience in the city and surrounds. The exhibition, held in early May, attracted more than 37,000 people and was a great success. The extensive displays included machinery, fine arts, manufactured goods and items from the other Australian colonies and overseas. They aimed to demonstrate the colonial triumph of "civilisation" over the natural world²³².

A large number of temporary sheds and pavilions were erected in Prince Alfred Park to accommodate the many exhibits²³³. But those that were more suited to indoor display were housed in the Cleveland Street Public School in the south-east corner of the park. The boys' playground was used for carriages, buggies and other vehicles and the girls' playground was converted into a flower garden. The school rooms displayed magnificent artworks, sculptures, medallions, and art of all kind. The first floor was devoted to drawings, architectural plans and manufactured items that required secure housing²³⁴.

Construction of the Exhibition Building

A report after the 1869 show pointed out that a great number of industries were brought to the public's attention for the first time because of the expanded exhibition. Encouraged by this, the Agricultural Society urged the City Council to erect a large building in the park which could be rented out for one or two months a year for future Metropolitan Exhibitions²³⁵. In July 1869, a deputation from the Agricultural Society and the City Council met the Minister of Lands, Mr Forster, to ask permission to erect a large building in Prince Alfred Park for the annual exhibition. The Minister saw no obstacle to this, as the park was held by the Council in trust²³⁶.

In September, the Agricultural Society complained that the City Council drove a hard bargain when the two groups discussed leasing arrangements for the proposed building for two months each year, and the Society considered going elsewhere. The 1870 exhibition would already be very expensive to organise, as the Society thought that the centenary of European settlement should be commemorated with an expanded exhibition involving all the Australasian colonies²³⁷. A major part of the plan for the 1870 exhibition was an extensive redesign of Prince Alfred Park, which is described in detail in the earlier section on the park.

By November, the Society had agreed to lease the new building. Plans and specifications had been finalised²³⁸ and the City Council called for tenders²³⁹. The building, designed in the ornate Victorian Baroque style, would cover one acre of land and cost £18,000 to erect. The Society would lease the building for £1,000 per year for ten years²⁴⁰.

The engineer John Young won the tender to construct the Exhibition Building and the surrounding pavilions. He had previously rebuilt part of St Mary's Cathedral and erected the new Post Office²⁴¹. The foundation stone was laid by the Lord Mayor, Walter Renny, in March 1870²⁴² and by the next month construction was making good progress²⁴³. The building was completed in August, in time for the opening at the end of the month²⁴⁴.

The exhibition ran for a month, and after it closed the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported enthusiastically on the event. It was pronounced a great success, with a total attendance of

185,000²⁴⁵, including an estimated 30,000 visitors filling the grounds at one point. There were 130 exhibits of horses and 186 exhibits of cattle, mainly Durhams, Herefords and Devons. Inside the vast building were displays of horticultural specimens, including ferns, orchids, palms, cycads and other choice plants contributed by various amateur and professional gardeners and nurserymen. All the expanding produce of the colony was on display, both commercial and artistic.



Figure 42 Main exhibition hall, 1870 (City of Sydney Archives)

A popular feature of the exhibition was Prince Alfred's pet elephant, named Jung or Tom, who was travelling around the world on the Prince's ship *Galatea*, and which the Prince offered to loan to the exhibition for a couple of weeks to entertain visitors in the park while he toured the colony. The *Australian Town and Country Journal* remarked that Jung was perfectly docile, and walked around the park with a care that might well be adopted by the biped visitors²⁴⁶. After his days as an honorary seaman were over, Jung was presented to the Dublin Zoological Society²⁴⁷.



Figure 43 Jung at the Exhibition, 1870 (Royal Agricultural Society of NSW)

The Exhibition showed the impressive progress made in the previous 82 years of colonisation, and was expected to give great impetus to the breeding of first class horses and cattle and to the use of modern machinery in the agriculture and mining industries²⁴⁸.

Further Intercolonial Exhibitions were held in 1873 and 1875, and in other years Agricultural Society shows were held. The great exhibitions moved to the Garden Palace in the Domain with the Sydney

International Exhibition in 1879. Agricultural Shows continued at Prince Alfred Park until 1881 when continuing high rents forced the Society to move to Moore Park, where a Showground was built to house the Agricultural Show until 1998, after which it moved to its present site at Homebush²⁴⁹.

Concerts

The Exhibition Building was Sydney's first concert hall, and remained the only large one until the construction of the Garden Palace in the Domain for the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition. This grand building was a reworking of London's Crystal Palace, and was utilised by the State Government after the closure of the exhibition in the winter of 1879. It was also the venue for choral and orchestral concerts until it was completely destroyed by fire in September 1882. After this the Exhibition Building continued to be the only large concert hall until the opening of the Sydney Town Hall in 1889.

Inspiration for a national anthem

One evening in 1878, the composer and choir master Peter Dodds McCormick (c1834-1916) attended a concert of national anthems sung by a large choir in the Exhibition Building. While the music was very stirring, he felt aggravated that there was not one note from Australia. Sitting in the bus on the way home, he wrote the first verse of an Australian national anthem. When he got home he composed the melody, then the next morning, feeling that he had written an inspired piece of music he quickly composed the remaining verses of *Advance Australia Fair*²⁵⁰.

McCormick was born in Glasgow and migrated to Sydney in 1855, where he began working as a joiner and participated in local musical societies. He became a school teacher in Sydney in 1863 and taught at inner city schools until 1885. Both ultra-Scottish and ultra-patriotic, his greatest interest was music. He organised and conducted many church choirs, including very large 10,000- and 15,000-voice children's choirs for special occasions.

ST. ANDREW'S DAY—SATURDAY, November 30, 1878.

HIGHLAND ANNUAL SCOTTISH CONCERT,
Protestant Hall, Castlereagh-street.

The following Artists will take part on this occasion :—

Mrs. and Miss Caldwell, Miss Horniman, Miss Isaacs, Miss Wright, Miss Foxall.
Mr. A. Fairfax, Mr. Foxall, Mr. James Godfrey, Mr. Henry Godfrey, Mr. Bowen, Mr. Grosset, Mr. Allen,
and a number of talented Amateurs.

PROGRAMME.

PART I.—Miscellaneous.

Duet, Piano-forte—Selection of Scottish airs

Song—"The Star of Love"	Mrs. and Miss Caldwell
Song—"Auld Robin Gray"	Mr. Henry Godfrey
Song—"Poor Jack Brown"	Miss Isaacs
Duet—"I knew a bank"	Mr. Bowen
Patriotic Song (first time)—"Advance, Australia fair"	Miss Horniman and Lady Amateur
Song—"Bennie Tweeddale"	Mr. Andrew Fairfax
Song—"The shake of the hand"	Miss Wright
Song—"Out on the rocks"	Mr. James Godfrey
Recitation—from Popular Readings	Miss E. A. Foxall
Song—"Dear England"	Mr. W. Allen
Old English Glee—"The Red Cross Knight"	Mr. Grosset
Highland Reel, by four Youths (in full costume)	Company
	Messrs. Campbell and M'Rae.

Figure 44 Debut of *Advance Australia Fair* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 Nov 1878)

He published thirty patriotic and Scottish songs. *Advance Australia Fair* was first sung by Andrew Fairfax at the St Andrew's Day concert in November 1878. Under the pseudonym Amicus, McCormick later published the music and the original four verses. It was sung by a choir of 10,000 voices at the Commonwealth inauguration in January 1901. After his death, sporadic attempts were made to have *Advance Australia Fair* proclaimed Australia's national anthem²⁵¹.

Following a nationwide opinion poll in 1974, *God Save the Queen* was replaced by *Advance Australia Fair* by the Labor government, who wished to symbolically move away from the colonial ties to Britain. But *God Save the Queen* was reinstated by the conservative Liberal government in 1976. A plebiscite to choose the national song in 1977 favoured *Advance Australia Fair*, which was eventually restored in 1984. The 1984 version has modified lyrics from McCormick's original version and his four verses are reduced to two: the first is essentially the original but the second is completely rewritten from the original version.

Before its official adoption as the national anthem, the song was widely used elsewhere, For example, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) used it to announce news bulletins until 1952²⁵². In recent years, the song has been criticised for failing to acknowledge the indigenous history of Australia, and in January 2021, a one-word change was made to the line "for we are young and free" to become "for we are one and free" as a gesture of inclusion.

Dame Nellie Melba

The *Daily Telegraph* reported that Mrs Armstrong (better known later in her career by her adopted name Nellie Melba) was one of the soloists in the Christmas Day performance of Handel's *Messiah* at the Exhibition Building in 1885²⁵³. Dame Nellie Melba (1861-1931) was born Helen Porter Mitchell in Melbourne. Her parents were proficient in a number of musical instruments and her mother was her first music teacher. She was not an infant prodigy, but pursued her interest in singing and the piano at the new Presbyterian Ladies' College, where she also acquired social graces.

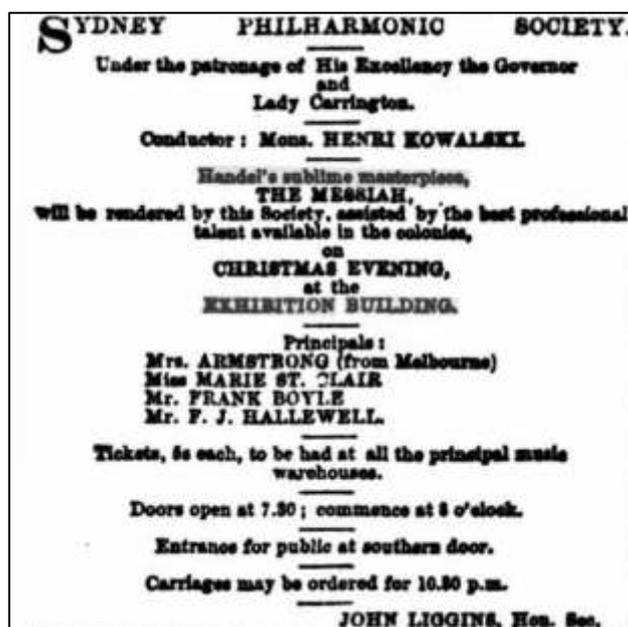


Figure 45 Melba's Sydney debut, 1885 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Dec 1885)

In early 1884, after a failed marriage and with a child, she applied herself totally to becoming a professional singer, and in May she made her debut at a Liedertafel (choral society) concert at the Melbourne Town Hall. Acknowledging her talent, the *Australasian's* critic declared that “she sings like one out of ten thousand”. Accompanying her father to London for an exhibition in 1886, she sang in various salons, gaining social and singing experience before her operatic debut in October 1887. She performed for many years in opera houses throughout Europe and North America, and her career coincided with the golden era of Covent Garden in London where she returned many times, maintaining a permanent dressing room.



Figure 46 Dame Nellie Melba, 1890s (National Library of Australia)

She moved freely in high society and was the prima donna of her day, on first name terms with tsars, kings and emperors. She was mobbed when she appeared in distant places, much like pop stars today. She eventually returned to Australia in 1902 for a concert tour of all States, setting a new world record with the takings from one Sydney concert. In her home country Dame Nellie Melba represented glamour, success and international acceptance.

In 1924, she began a series of farewell concert tours that lasted until the final performance in September 1928, leading to the famous expression “more farewells than Nellie Melba”. After her death in 1931, obituaries read like the passing of a monarch. A splendid constitution and tenacity of purpose allied with great powers of concentration enabled Melba to remain for so long at the top of the musical world²⁵⁴.

Other music

A brass band competition involving twenty three bands was reportedly held in the Exhibition Building in September 1880²⁵⁵. Leading up the centenary of European settlement in January 1888, the building was used for a banquet dinner after the dedication of Centennial Park in the morning²⁵⁶ and a specially composed Centennial Cantata was performed during the celebrations²⁵⁷. The following January, the Centennial Exhibition Orchestra performed a season of ten concerts in the Exhibition Building²⁵⁸. This is just a sample of the many musical events held in the Exhibition Building.

Sunday concerts

Organised entertainment of any kind was forbidden on Sundays in the colony, but in 1907 there were moves to challenge this. The objections to Sunday entertainment were almost always from the Protestant churches, the most rabid being the Nonconformist denominations (those other than the Church of England). The Roman Catholic Church was not opposed to Sunday concerts (nor, on a slightly different topic, to the showing of motion pictures on Sundays in the 1950s when that issue arose²⁵⁹). This in itself became an issue of sectarian paranoia, with *The Methodist* claiming that “Roman Catholicism seeks to overthrow Protestantism”²⁶⁰.

In October 1907, the Sydney City Council discussed whether to allow Sunday concerts in the Exhibition Building. One opposing Alderman approved of “the peace and devotion of an Irish Sunday, as opposed to America with its Coney Island and the Continent, examples they should not strive to imitate”. The Council voted by a narrow majority to allow the concerts²⁶¹. This provoked *The Methodist* to note disapprovingly that Sydney’s “railway, tramway and harbour excursions on Sundays were being patronised by an increasing number every week, and now concerts at night”.

The Wesleyan masthead then mentioned that a deputation from the Evangelical Council had protested unsuccessfully to the City Council about Sunday afternoon band concerts. Working up a good head of steam, the editor then thundered about the evils of anything but devotion to the Almighty on the Sabbath, quoting from the “French infidel” Voltaire, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, and even the editor of *Punch* (who had politely asked the British Museum to open on Sundays)²⁶². It was an impressively wide reading list, if nothing else.

Responding to this evangelical earbashing, the Lord Mayor referred to a recent letter from the Inspector-General of Police following the Evangelical Council deputation, in which Inspector Roche reported that the Sunday concerts were in fact well conducted, and did not require police to preserve order either inside or outside the building²⁶³. Sergeant James Rowland added that early in 1907 the State Military Band played classical music in Sunday evening concerts that included (silent) cinematograph screenings in the first part, and the band did not fire up the drums and brassware until the nearby Chalmers Street Church service was finished²⁶⁴.

One thing of note in this controversy is that silent movies began to appear in musical (and vaudeville) performances around this time. Initially just a short ten-minute reel with piano accompaniment, increasing steadily until movies became longer and more popular and eventually pushed live performers off the vaudeville stages forever.

Roller skating

A primitive form of roller skating was first recorded in Europe in the eighteenth century. Improvements were made throughout the nineteenth century, and from the 1880s ball bearings were being used to give faster and smoother movement. Skates were being mass-produced in America by this time, heralding the first of several boom periods.

Responding to the popularity of the sport, the Columbia Elite Roller Skating Rink opened in the Exhibition Building in May 1887 for a winter season²⁶⁵. The following year, the skating rink operated during the Centenary Universal Exhibition in the building²⁶⁶. Due to the great enthusiasm for skating, the same company opened a second rink nearby in Elizabeth and Bedford Streets, called the Sydney Elite Skating Rink²⁶⁷.

On the closing day of the Centenary Exhibition, the first of many fancy dress skating carnivals was held in the rink²⁶⁸. Nine skating rinks were listed in the Amusements section of *The Daily Telegraph* that year - the other rink operating in the neighbourhood was the Palace Skating Rink, on the corner of Cleveland and Walker Streets, Redfern²⁶⁹.

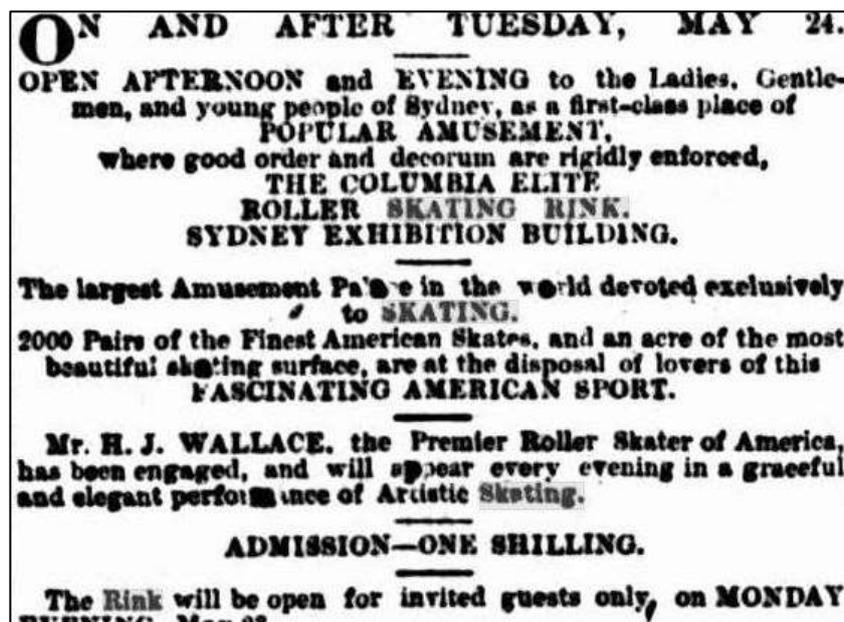


Figure 47 Launch of roller skating, 1887 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 1887)

There was then a hiatus in skating (and other recreational) activity for several years due to the severe economic depression that lasted from 1890 to 1893. Wool exports had boomed in the decades following the 1850s gold rush, but by the end of the 1880s a stagnating global economy had prompted international financiers to withdraw funds from Australian investments. This created a run on financial institutions and the closure of a dozen banks, ruining thousands of large and small investors. The crisis led to the maritime strike of 1890, the shearers' strike of 1891, and the subsequent formation of the Australian Labor Party to give the workers a voice in government. The economy began to recover in 1894, but was not back to normal until about 1900²⁷⁰.

In the winter of 1904, the revival of roller skating saw the building become the Columbia Elite Roller Skating Rink once again, managed by Mr J. Kealman. The large hall was festooned with bunting, and in every corner ferns and shrubs helped to brighten up what was otherwise a gloomy interior²⁷¹. But this company did not stay long in the venue, and in February 1906 the City Council awarded the tender to Messrs. A. and H. Ellis, who in April opened the Sydney Skating Rink²⁷².

Fancy dress or novelty skating evenings were popular events, and in September 1906 the Sydney Skating Rink held a "maggie" carnival with a black and white theme. The floor was crowded with skaters while hundreds watched. The two simple colours lent themselves to a variety of costumes. One man dressed up as a parson representing the Anti-Gambling League, while several well-known brands of whisky were represented, and one girl was dressed in a New Guinea costume. Another man came as a telegraph pole, while others came dressed as draught boards, the ten of clubs, and several others difficult to put a name to²⁷³.

In March 1908, the manager of the skating rink (Larry Foley) hoped to hold a boxing contest in the building, including a bout for the championship of Australia, and he advertised for entries. But this was not mentioned again, so the City Council must have disapproved of it (as they did for other attempts to hold boxing matches there in later years)²⁷⁴. But sporting variety was achieved by a football match on skates in April 1908 between the Prince Alfred Club and the Sydney Club²⁷⁵. Scrimmages on roller skates must have been tricky to master.

For the 1910 season, the champion American skaters James Bendrodt and George Irving came to Australia and gave an exhibition of trick skating at the Sydney Skating Rink²⁷⁶. The lease on the Exhibition Building was expiring in October 1911, and Wirth Brothers' Circus offered to lease it from the City Council for a number of years. But the building was deemed unsuitable for a circus as it would have required a new exit from the gallery to accommodate a very large audience in the upper areas of the hall, so the skating continued²⁷⁷.



Figure 48 Skaters Bendrodt and Irving, c1910 (buckleyfilms.com.au)

Larry Foley was still keen on getting athletic events off the ground in the Exhibition Building during the summer off-season for the skaters. But his proposal in December 1913 to hold athletic competitions in summer was objected to by local citizens and the police, so it went the way of his earlier boxing proposal in 1908 and did not get past the starter's gun²⁷⁸.

By the winter season of 1923, the roller skating boom must have been fading, as the *Referee* newspaper reported that there were only two rinks still operating in Sydney: the Exhibition Skating Rink at Prince Alfred Park and the Centennial Rink at Bondi Junction²⁷⁹. The Exhibition Building held its last roller skating season for several years in 1924²⁸⁰. The following year, the building was converted into the Australian War Memorial Museum, which remained there until moving to Canberra in 1935.

Roller skating finally returned to the Exhibition Building in March 1938, which was then called the Exhibition Skating Rink²⁸¹. Unfortunately for the skaters and the management of the rink, World War II broke out the following year, and the City Council handed the building over to the Women's Australian National Services (WANS) as a women's physical training centre²⁸². But the skating rink kept operating each winter until the 1942 season²⁸³, after which the Army occupied the building from 1943²⁸⁴. The Army remained in the building until Jun 1948²⁸⁵.



Figure 49 Exhibition Skating Rink, 1930s (National library of Australia)

Skating had finally ended its long occupation of the Exhibition Building that commenced in 1887, survived a severe depression, then had to make way for a war museum. But by the time the Army vacated the building in 1948, it was in dire need of very expensive renovation, and this must have been beyond the resources of the skating company, who were listed for bankruptcy in the Supreme Court in August 1944²⁸⁶. Roller skating enjoyed subsequent boom periods, one being after the invention of the sport of roller derby in Chicago in the 1930s, then with the development of roller blading in the 1970s. Roller skate wheels are now usually seen propelling skateboards, which became mainstream in 2000 with skateboarding-based video games, commercialisation and recently as an Olympic sport.

Australian War Memorial Museum

Charles Bean, Australia's official World War I correspondent, first conceived the idea of a memorial museum to Australian soldiers while observing the battles in France in 1916. Bean had been impressed with the work of the Canadians in establishing a Canadian War Records Office in London, and he set up an Australian War Records Section there in 1917 to ensure their preservation. The Canadian and Australian governments were aware that the British government was forming a war museum in Britain, and they were determined not to allow the British to secure the best of their own "trophies" and records for its own museum. Bean felt strongly that these relics that told of Australian achievement and sacrifice should become the possession of the Australian people.

Over the next two years, more than 25,000 objects, paper records, photographs, film and works of art were acquired. Included were large objects such as vehicles, heavy weapons, a tank and several aeroplanes. Smaller pieces included hand weapons and equipment, tools and trench signs such as the famous “Roo de Kanga” from Peronne. All were brought back to Australia in 1919 and formed the basis of the collection that would eventually become the Australian War Memorial. Many of the records were distributed to the States and others went to Canberra²⁸⁷.

The war relics that went to Melbourne were put on public display in its own Exhibition Building as the Australian War Museum, opening on Anzac Day 1922. The collection was enthusiastically received by the public and attracted large crowds. By the time the exhibition closed on 26 January 1925, 780,000 people had visited the displays. The Australian War Memorial continued to use the Melbourne Exhibition Building as its main store until the 1940s and as its main office in the 1930s²⁸⁸.

After the Melbourne exhibition opened, the Returned Sailors and Soldiers’ Imperial League thought that the people of Sydney should have the opportunity to view them as well. Officials of the League approached the State Government to ask for the collection to be transferred to Sydney for a period of time. But the Government was not enthusiastic and told the officials they would have to find a suitable building themselves. After looking at many sites in central Sydney, they decided the old Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park was the only venue large enough to house the collection.



Figure 50 War Memorial Museum, c1925 (Australian War Memorial website)

The building already had a tenant with a long lease (the Sydney Skating Rink Ltd), but the Sydney Lord Mayor Alderman David Gilpin was a supporter of the League’s plan, and he negotiated with the skating company to secure an agreement for the lease to be transferred to the Federal Government. The original arrangement was to house the war relics in Sydney for two years before moving to a permanent home in Canberra²⁸⁹. The Melbourne exhibition closed after Australia Day 1925 and the exhibits were packed up and transferred to Sydney to be ready for a public opening in April²⁹⁰.

In August 1925, the Federal Government announced that a competition would be held for the design of an Australian War Memorial in Canberra. An imposing site had already been selected in front of

Mount Ainslie, facing Parliament House across the lake²⁹¹. But by 1927 a winning entry had still not been announced, and two of the architects were encouraged to come up with a joint design. This was accepted, but construction was hindered by a limited budget, Depression conditions and another World War, and it took fourteen more years before it was completed and opened.



Figure 51 War Memorial Museum, Sydney (History Review website)

In May 1934 it was announced that in a few months' time the War Museum in Sydney would close its doors and reopen in Canberra. The building being constructed would have about three and a half times the space of the Exhibition Building, allowing hundreds more exhibits to be displayed²⁹². The museum closed at the end of January 1935 so that the exhibits could be dismantled and packed for transport to Canberra. Since moving to Sydney, some 2,500,000 visitors had viewed the collection²⁹³. In May 1936, the Sydney City Council leased the Exhibition building to the Metropolitan Egg Board, to be used as a metropolitan depot for three months²⁹⁴.

Meanwhile, in Canberra the construction of the new War Memorial building was proceeding, and by February 1938 work had commenced on the last stage of the building. Staff kept busy by arranging the thousands of exhibits of the nation's participation in the Great War. By this time the museum was expected to open towards the end of 1939²⁹⁵.

However in September 1939, Australia found itself participating in another World War, and the Board of Management discussed methods of collecting records and relics of the new conflict and displaying them in the building. The plan agreed on was to divide the memorial into two sections, one for each World War²⁹⁶. Some expansion of the building was also necessary to accommodate the expected influx of new relics, and the building was eventually opened on Armistice Day in November 1941 by the Governor-General Lord Gowrie²⁹⁷.

Wartime military use

The Sudan Campaign

In 1883, the British-backed government of Egypt sent an army south to crush an indigenous rebellion led by Muhammed Ahmed, also known as the Mahdi. However, the Egyptian army was soundly defeated, leading the British to call on General Charles Gordon to evacuate the Egyptian troops. But Gordon was himself besieged in Khartoum, and was killed in January 1885. He was a heroic figure in the British Empire, and the news of his death was greeted in Canada with an offer to send troops to the Sudan. The New South Wales government made the same offer, and would cover the contingent's expenses. Other colonies made the same offer, but only New South Wales's offer was accepted by the British Government²⁹⁸.

A large and enthusiastic meeting was held in the Exhibition Building at Prince Alfred Park in February 1885 to express sympathy with the Government's offer of troops and to initiate a Patriotic Fund to provide funds to assist the families of those who went²⁹⁹. It was one of the largest meetings ever held in the colony, and an estimated 12,000 people attended. The convener of the meeting, the Sydney Lord Mayor Alderman Thomas Playfair, pointed out that it was the first time Australian troops had been sent to fight in another country for the Empire³⁰⁰. The offer was of a contingent of some 700 troops, including infantry and artillery, fully equipped with horses, guns and means of subsistence. There was no trouble finding volunteers to join the contingent³⁰¹.



Figure 52 NSW Sudan Contingent, 1885 (AWM website)

The contingent left Sydney in March 1885 amid much public fanfare on a day declared a public holiday to farewell the troops. But not everyone was as enthusiastic, and the nationalistic *Bulletin* ridiculed the contingent both before its departure and after its return. After involvement in a minor skirmish while supporting British troops, most of the contingent worked on the railway line being laid across the desert. This was not the exciting time they had imagined, and the Australians suffered from the enforced idleness of guard duty. After two months, and not having taken part in any battles, the few Australian deaths were from disease.

By May 1885, the British Government decided to abandon the campaign and the Australian contingent sailed home, arriving in Sydney in June 1885. It was generally agreed that no matter how

small the military significance of the colonial contribution, it marked an important stage in the development of a self-confident colony and reiterated the enduring link with Britain³⁰².

The campaign was over so quickly that there had not been time to distribute the Patriotic Fund before the troops returned³⁰³. Presumably the sudden arrival of the contingent in June focused the minds of the Fund's trustees towards this end. The members of the Sudan Contingent were entertained at a large banquet in the Exhibition Building, which was for the entire contingent and not just for the officers as originally planned. The returning troops were the popular heroes of the day, and the men from country towns were feasted on their arrival home³⁰⁴.

World War I

Army recruiting in Prince Alfred Park during World War I was conducted both in tents erected in the park and inside the Exhibition Building. An outline of Australia's involvement in the war and the tent meetings are described in the section on the park.

The Exhibition Building was nominated as the main centre for recruiting meetings in Sydney. Senior community figures were often invited to deliver motivational speeches, and the big guns were brought out at one such meeting in July 1915 when the Premier, the Chief Justice, the Lord Mayor, and the Archbishop of Sydney all made motivational speeches³⁰⁵.

After the war ended, the Government began to address the mammoth task of settling a quarter of a million ANZACs back into a life free of gunfire, artillery shells, bombs, mustard gas, trench foot and the traumatising effects of years of battle. In August 1919, the Exhibition Building was leased to the newly-created Repatriation Department as a training school for ex-servicemen³⁰⁶. Training was concentrated on those men who enlisted for active service while under age (and so had not completed a useful education) or were incapacitated (and had obvious special needs). Bricklaying, tile laying, building construction, basket making, tailoring and other trades were taught. The aim was to reach 40% efficiency, at which point they could be sent out to civil employment as industrial trainees. By May 1920, 180 men were attending classes³⁰⁷.



Figure 53 Building Trades School (*The Sun*, 27 Jul 1921)

World War II

By the second year of World War II, several voluntary women's groups had spontaneously sprung up for a variety of specialist defence purposes, augmenting the existing Red Cross, Comforts Fund and Canteens. To train and co-ordinate these voluntary groups of women war workers in a more effective way, the Women's Australian National Services (WANS) was formed in June 1940. At the inaugural meeting at the Sydney Town Hall, Lady Wakehurst (wife of the New South Wales Governor) outlined the aims of the WANS: to be a training scheme and not an employment bureau, to better organise the existing groups, and to form a Land Army. Membership would be voluntary and a uniform was considered essential³⁰⁸.



Figure 54 WANS in Wagga Wagga, 1943 (State Records NSW)

In July 1940, it was announced that the WANS would use the Exhibition Building as a physical training centre, even though it was currently being leased as a skating rink³⁰⁹. Some City Council Aldermen objected to this because the skating rink company had recently invested thousands in a new floor and repairs to the building, and they thought the WANS should instead use schools for their training. But a compromise was reached in which the WANS shared the large space with the skating activities³¹⁰. The WANS soon commenced training in first aid, home nursing, ARP (Air Raid Precautions) and physical fitness³¹¹.

In November 1940, a successful function was held at the Exhibition Building to mark the official opening of the Centre by Lady Wakehurst. A parade of 2,500 WANS marched past, mostly in uniform, no doubt helping prepare the public mind for the part women were destined to play in the Armed Services. 1,000 WANS in gym costumes gave a series of physical training exercises, only four months after they had commenced training. The WANS attaining rank were appointed to various Metropolitan and Suburban Centres where they assisted in the Area Training programme³¹².

In April 1942, the WANS moved its training centre from the Exhibition Building to Army House in Mary Street, Surry Hills³¹³. The military authorities occupied the building in 1943³¹⁴. For the rest of the war, the building was used as a store for war equipment and as accommodation for American troops³¹⁵.

Post-war and demolition

The Department of the Army handed the Exhibition Building back to the City Council in April 1946, and the Lord Mayor Alderman Reginald Bartley promptly announced that he would like to pull the old building down as part of the Council's plan to beautify the parks³¹⁶. However, the Council was surprised to receive competing requests from two different Commonwealth departments for the use of the building. One was from the Department of Supply and Shipping for the Commonwealth Disposals Commission to use it for auction sales of surplus war goods. The other was from the Department of the Interior, who wanted the building for classes under the Rehabilitation Training Scheme for ex-service personnel³¹⁷.

The Council decided to approve the Disposals Commission request and not the Rehabilitation Training request. This prompted the acting State president of the Returned Soldiers' League, Ken Bolton, a member of the Regional Subcommittee on Post-War Reconstruction, to criticise the decision, saying that a lack of accommodation was holding up the training scheme³¹⁸. Alderman Stanley Crick said it was wrong that the City Council should have been placed in the embarrassing position of having to choose between two Commonwealth departments. The Lord Mayor pointed out that the building was in "such a frightful condition it would be wicked to use it for housing ex-soldiers"³¹⁹. Despite the Mayor's keenness to bring in the wrecking ball, the Commonwealth Government was reluctant to approve the demolition of buildings in the immediate post-war years, due to the shortage of labour and building materials³²⁰.

The Commonwealth Disposals Commission was formally established in September 1944 for the liquidation of war surplus stocks, under the direction of the Department of Supply and Shipping. By 1945, thousands of motor vehicles were sold, including the famous "blitz buggies" used in the Battle of El Alamein. Also temporary buildings, aeroplanes, small ships, clothing and preserved food went out the door. The Commission decided that the speedy clearance of huge quantities of second-hand goods could best be achieved by an extensive series of public auctions, particularly to small purchasers³²¹.

The Disposals Commission auctions only ran for a couple of months, after which the Army announced that its War History Section had been installed in the Exhibition Building, and would be using it for at least two more years³²². The Army finally handed the building back to the City Council in June 1948³²³. A series of proposals was then put to the City Council for the future use of the building. One was to convert it into a modern entertainment hall to provide for dancing, banquets, charity balls and concerts³²⁴. But this proposal would need some £40,000 to convert the building, and the Ministry of Building Materials told the *Tribune* that building renovations would not be permitted until the supply of building materials improved³²⁵.

The other serious proposal was a request by the Minister for Education (Mr Heffron) for the City Council to turn the Exhibition Building into a National Fitness and Sports Centre³²⁶. Negotiations between the City Council and the National Fitness Council went on for more than a year, with the estimated conversion cost of £30,000 being a sticking point. Finally in May 1950 the City Council announced that the State Government had asked it to pay half the £30,000 renovation cost but offered a rent of only £500 a year, which the City Council thought was a losing proposition, so the proposal was rejected³²⁷.

Finally, after considering and rejecting many tenders for the lease of the old building³²⁸, the City Council finally voted to demolish it³²⁹. Alderman Ernest Pederson said that he believed valuable coins were buried under the foundation stone, but he did not want a treasure hunt to occur, and would be there when the building is demolished, even in the middle of the night, to deliver anything valuable to the custody of the Finance Committee³³⁰.



Figure 55 Building demolition, 1954 (City of Sydney Archives)

The City Council received several tenders charging around £11,000 to demolish the building, but decided to accept an unusual offer under which the City Council would actually be paid £687 to allow a contractor to do the job. He said he would make enough from the steel in the building to be worth his while³³¹. Workers began demolishing the roof of the building in October 1953³³² and pulled down the last tower the following March, thus ending the 84-year old life of the grand old building³³³.

Other events

Sporting events

The Exhibition Building was well suited to indoor sporting events with its large hall and spectator galleries above. After the great exhibition moved to the Domain in 1879 and the Agricultural Society moved the annual shows to Moore Park in 1881, the Sydney City Council was keen to accommodate any reasonable offer of leasing the building, which was in danger of bleaching and growing a trunk (that is, becoming a white elephant) until a long-term tenant could be found. One-off sporting events seemed like a good opportunity.

Pedestrianism, or competitive walking, became a fixture at fairs in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, developing from wagers on footraces and rambling. In particular, aristocrats used to pit their footmen (who were used to walking fairly long distances next to their masters' carriages) against each other. In the 1870s and 1880s, pedestrianism swept the USA and watching

people walking fast became America's favourite sport. Huge crowds packed indoor arenas to watch the best walkers in action, sometimes completing up to 600 miles in six days, generally by walking 21 hours a day. The competitors could only walk for six days because public amusements were banned on Sundays, so the competitors would set off just after midnight Sunday night and walked as far as they could until midnight Saturday night.

THE EXHIBITION BUILDING,
 PRINCE ALFRED PARK.
 The QUINTESSENCE of NOVELTY.
 FIRST TIME IN AUSTRALIA
 of the
 GREAT AUSTRALIAN LADIES' PEDESTRIAN
 TOURNAMENT, .
 Will take place on FRIDAY, 19th, and SATURDAY,
 20th DECEMBER, 1879.
 THE LADIES WILL START,
 and will appear in neat and elaborate costume.

First Prize	..	..	..	..	..	..	£25
Second ,,	..	..	..	..	..	..	£20
Third ,,	..	..	..	..	..	..	£15

In addition to the above prizes, there will be a SPECIAL PRIZE given to the one who remains longest on the track without rest—viz.: A LADY'S GOLD WATCH.

Messrs. Woodhouse, of Melbourne; Edwards, of Sydney; Williams, of Sydney, and McKay, of South Australia, will be present on the occasion.

A BAND of 16 Performers will be in attendance.

N.B.—Buses and Tramways will ply to and fro during the Tournament.

W. H. RICHARDSON, Manager.
 R. D. JEFFERSON, Agent.

Figure 56 Pedestrian tournament, 1879 (*The Daily Telegraph*, 6 Dec 1879)

There was a lot of razzmatazz accompanying the American races: brass bands played and vendors sold pickled eggs and roasted chestnuts. Gambling was a big part of the events, including bets on different parts of the race, leading to competitors being enticed by offers from gamblers to fix races. The origin of corporate sponsorship began with pedestrianism and the best walkers had lucrative sponsorship deals³³⁴. Pedestrianism evolved into the modern Olympic sport of race walking.

The first recorded pedestrian event in the Exhibition Building was a Ladies' Walking Tournament in December 1879, in which ten women competed over 24 hours for cash prizes as well as a gold watch for the walker who stayed on the track for the longest time uninterrupted. The winner was a French woman named Madame Azzella who walked 76 miles, with Miss Goodman second at 72 miles. However, several audience members expressed indignation at the spectacle of the women struggling on when completely exhausted, footsore and in considerable pain³³⁵. But the spectators underestimated the resilience of the competitors, because the *Evening News* reported that several of them were seen walking around the city only two days after the event, none the worse for their long journey³³⁶.

In June 1880, a 24-hour walking event was held in the Exhibition Building between J. W. Taylor and W. Baker, running from 10pm Friday to 10pm Saturday³³⁷. Taylor won with a distance of 102 miles, while Baker walked 99 miles in the allotted time³³⁸.

In March 1883, a classic six-day walking race was staged in the Exhibition Building between the American champion Dan O’Leary and the Australian champion William Edwards in front of several thousand people. Edwards won easily by over 23 miles, covering 373 miles. Many of Sydney’s Irish community came out to support O’Leary, as shown by a great display of green ribbons around the galleries. Despite three cheers being given for the Queen and the National Anthem played twice on the last evening, there was some relief that no sectarian disorder occurred³³⁹.

O’Leary, who would normally walk over 500 miles in six-day races, became ill during the race and later claimed that he was nobbled by his water being tampered with by “treacherous attendants”³⁴⁰. Pedestrianism was frequently criticised because of the extremely punishing effect of several days of almost non-stop effort. But it was usually pointed out that they were doing it voluntarily, and in any case there was a lot of prize money to be won by someone with perhaps no other useful life skills than a great deal of endurance and determination.



Figure 57 Race walkers, 1883 (*Aust. Town & Country Journal*, 24 Mar 1883)

In November 1884, the champion cyclist J. Rolfe attempted to beat the world record for the fastest time over 100 miles, on a special track laid in the Exhibition Building. He achieved the distance in 6 hours 9 minutes 3 seconds, the second fastest time ever accomplished. He rested for only nine minutes at the halfway mark, and raced against local riders for a period of ten miles each, beating most of them. His bicycle was a 57” Sanspareil (a penny farthing bike), weighing 23 pounds³⁴¹. As a comparison, the International Cycling Union specifies that track bicycles today must weigh at least 6.8 kg (about 15 pounds)³⁴², and the current world record for 100 miles without drafting is 3 hours 11 minutes³⁴³.

At about this time, penny farthing bicycles were overtaken by the new “safety bicycles” with both wheels the same size, just like modern bikes. They were so-named because they were much safer to get on, get off and to fall off. Penny farthing bikes were built with a very large front wheel because the pedals were connected to the front axle, and that was the wheel size required for both pedalling and travelling at a reasonable speed. Safety bikes followed the development of gear ratio systems so

that a small sprocket on the rear wheel could be connected by the chain to a much larger sprocket on the pedal crank, allowing smaller wheels to be used. Long distance bicycle racing took over from walking as America's favourite spectator sport³⁴⁴.

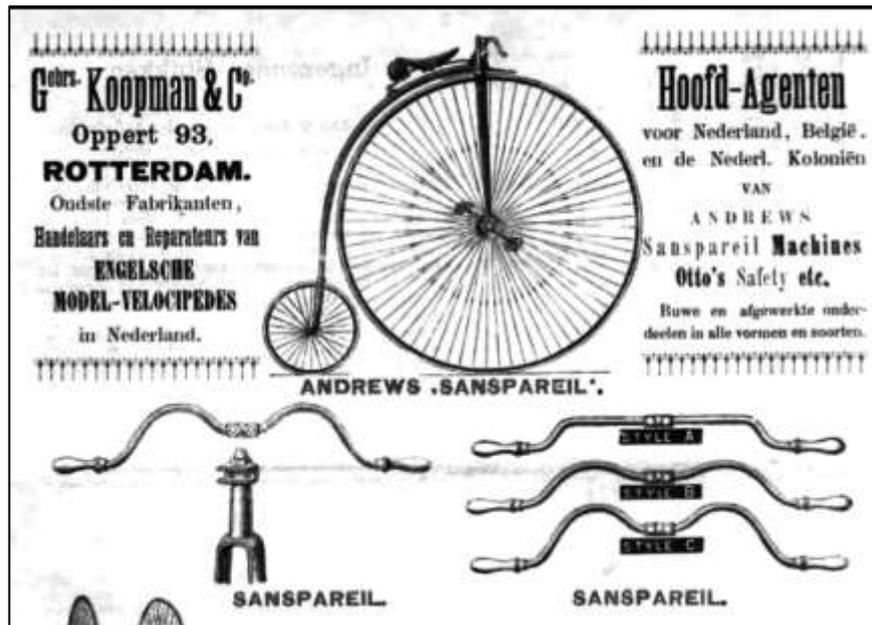


Figure 58 Sanspareil bicycle, c1893 (triumphbicycles.com)

But long-distance walking wasn't finished with the development of modern bicycles: a highly publicised walk in England, from the London Stock Exchange to Brighton on the south coast, set off a wave of similar contests around the British Empire, reaching Sydney in 1903. In July that year, a ten mile scratch walking match took place from Sans Souci to the Exhibition Building, between all amateur members of the railway and tramway services, organised by the Railway Institute (whose building was next door to Prince Alfred Park). Dress regulations were that an ordinary coat and trousers were mandatory, but sweaters and vests were optional. The event was won by S. W. York, the cross-country champion of New South Wales³⁴⁵. It was not clear if the fleet-footed Mr York drove or conducted a tram or a train.

In December 1906, the Sydney Skating Rink Company held a tug-of-war championship in the Exhibition Building during the skating off-season. Thirty teams competed for a total of £250 in prizes. The conditions were the best two of three pulls, six men to a team, each pull of fifteen minutes maximum. The Socialists beat Surry Hills, and in the football section North Sydney beat Newtown. A wrestling match was also thrown into the evening's entertainment, competing for £20 and the middleweight championship of Australia³⁴⁶.

Wool store

In January 1879, the wool broking firm Mort & Co of Circular Quay advertised to pastoralists in the country newspapers that they had "secured the capacious and admirably lighted" Exhibition Building as a wool store and display centre. Reference was made to extensions in the Southern and Northern Railways requiring them to lease extra storage space³⁴⁷.

Mort & Co was started by Thomas Sutcliffe Mort (1816-1878) who was working as a young clerk in Manchester when he was offered a position in Sydney which he saw as a way to restore his family's

declining fortunes. He arrived in Sydney in 1838, and in 1843 became an auctioneer, soon prospering in general and wool sales³⁴⁸. Mort & Co was formed in 1855 to operate wool sales to London. The business merged with R. Goldsbrough & Co Ltd in 1888 to form Goldsbrough Mort & Co Ltd. In 1963 a merger produced Elder Smith Goldsbrough Mort Ltd, eventually becoming Elders Limited.

Mort & Co may have leased the Exhibition Building for a few years only, as the Salvation Army leased the building in June 1884 for three months to hold services every Sunday night³⁴⁹. But Mort & Co were back in the building the same month as this, saying that the large wool clip required a short period of extra storage while additional warehouses were being built³⁵⁰.

In November 1902, the stock and station agent Pitt Son & Badgery rented the Exhibition Building as a wool store for three months. It was then used for various fundraising campaigns, including the New South Wales Drought Relief Fund before again being used by Pitt Son & Badgery as a wool store³⁵¹ until about 1904³⁵².

Plague inoculation centre

An outbreak of bubonic plague hit Sydney in January 1900 and spread from the waterfront, where rats from the ships carried infected fleas throughout the city. Quarantine areas were established in the inner city, including Millers Point, The Rocks, Chippendale, Darling Harbour, Glebe and lower parts of Surry Hills. Cleansing and disinfecting operations lasted from the March to July and included the demolition of “slum” buildings. Rat catchers were employed by the Government, killing over 44,000 rats which were burned in a special rat incinerator. Over 8 months, 303 bubonic plague cases were reported, and 103 people died³⁵³.

The causative bacterium of bubonic plague was discovered in 1894, and the transmission of the bacteria from rodents by flea bites discovered in 1898. Effective treatment with antiserum was initiated in 1896³⁵⁴. In March 1900, the State Government decided to conduct plague inoculations in the Exhibition Building, due to the large number of people to be inoculated from the infected Sussex Street area³⁵⁵. 1,200 people were inoculated in one day³⁵⁶, and the following day 1,000 men lined up for their jobs before going to work the day after that, cleaning out the quarantined area³⁵⁷.

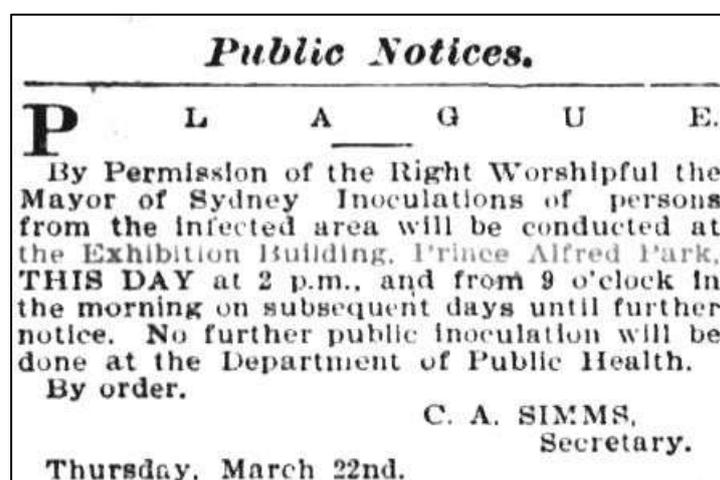


Figure 59 Plague inoculations, 1900 (*Australian Star*, 23 Mar 1900)

But the doses soon ran out, and the 10,000 extra doses ordered by cable from India wouldn't arrive for some weeks³⁵⁸. Note that the number of doses far outnumbered the actual number of cases,

which gives an idea of the panicked reaction by the Government when confronted by one of history's most feared diseases.

Anthony Hordern's temporary emporium

Anthony Hordern (1819-1876) arrived in Sydney as a free immigrant in 1823 with his parents Anthony (d1869) and Ann (d1871), and established a drapery shop. He was the founding member of the family retail empire. In 1856 a new three-storey Haymarket store opened and Anthony Junior (1842-1886) and the second son Samuel went into partnership as Anthony Hordern and Sons. On 10 July 1901 the building was destroyed by fire, but business resumed soon afterwards in the Exhibition Building, and later in a new building erected on the site of their original 1844 Brickfield Hill store in 1905.



Figure 60 Original Palace Emporium, 1888 (Sydney Living Museums)

The family claimed to sell everything “from a needle to an anchor” in their Palace Emporium. But the company began to accumulate losses in the 1960s and this building, and the rest of the block surrounding it, was controversially demolished in 1986 for the World Square development, which after many delays was finally completed in 2004³⁵⁹.

On the day after the 1901 fire in the Haymarket store, Anthony Hordern and Son announced in the press that they were resuming business that day in the Exhibition Building after transferring goods from their bulk stores. The company acknowledged that several workers lost their lives in the conflagration³⁶⁰. The Horderns were lucky the large building was available for lease, and was only empty because an offer by the City Council to the Labour Commission to use it as a night shelter for the unemployed for four months³⁶¹ had been turned down by the Government following objections to the idea³⁶².

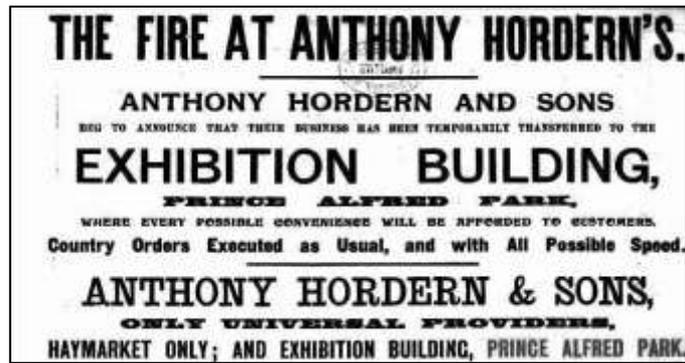


Figure 61 After the fire, 1901 (*Aust. Town & Country Journal*, 27 Jul 1901)

In November, the company announced that most of their departments would return to a new Haymarket store on the corner of George and Gipps (now Barlow) Street the following month. The Exhibition Building would retain large items such as furniture, bedding and carpets, and the annual Christmas toy show would also be held in the Exhibition Building³⁶³. In July 1902, the Sydney papers announced that all store departments had moved to the Haymarket store, and that this was the only store that would operate from that time³⁶⁴, but country newspapers continued to mention both the Haymarket and Exhibition Building stores until about the end of that year³⁶⁵.

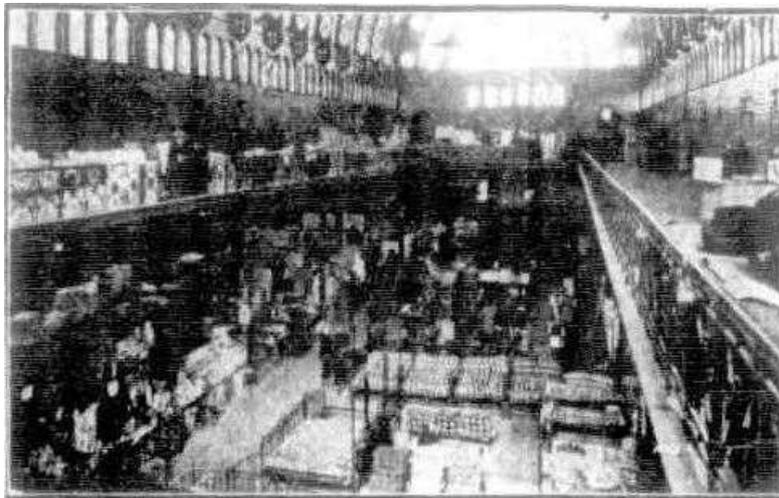


Figure 62 Exhibition Building temporary store, 1901 (*Empire*, 10 Jul 1923)

A few days after the last wardrobe, Persian rug and four-poster bed had been wheeled out of the Exhibition Building, the venerable New South Wales Poultry, Pigeon, Canary and Dog Society took over the building for their twenty-fifth annual show of feathers and fur, basking in the Vice-Regal patronage of New South Wales Governor Sir Harry Rawson C.M.G. at the opening³⁶⁶.

Part-time movie theatre

In September 1896, Marius Sestier opened the first small cinema to show projected films in New South Wales, located in Pitt Street towards Central Station. Early films were presented as novelty items in vaudeville or variety shows, but after an initial popularity, business slowed, and by 1899 all the early venues showing films had closed down. The renewal of interest came in 1905 when two new entrepreneurs, Charles Cozens Spencer and Thomas James West, arrived on the scene to mould

the fledgling industry. For the decade from 1907 to 1917, sixteen cinemas were built, nine of them surviving until the 1960s³⁶⁷.

By 1907, motion pictures had become so popular that the Glaciarium ice-skating rink in Railway Square was converted into a theatre for showing pictures, seating 3,000. In 1908, the Bulletin was complaining that the “flickergraph” had ousted the touring companies in the affections of country people³⁶⁸. Before World War I, moving pictures were generally shown in existing buildings: some 18 in the city and 96 in the suburbs. The first purpose-built picture theatre was the Bijou Picture Palace, opened in 1909 in George Street near Railway Square. It was a simple Edwardian design with three half-circle windows³⁶⁹.

EXHIBITION BUILDING,
PRINCE ALFRED PARK.

—
INSTANTANEOUS SUCCESS
—
FURORE OF ENTHUSIASM.

—
HUNDREDS unable to Gain Admission to this
“Ideal” Location for
MOVING PICTURES,
The Size of the Pictures the “Star” Films, the
DRAMATIC, PATHETIC, and Comic Subjects.
Universal Theme of Admiration.
Absolutely the Largest and Coolest Hall in
Sydney.
Promenade Spacious and Cool.

—
AN ENTIRELY NEW DEPARTURE.
—

Up-to-date Refreshment Rooms.	Bright Decorations.
Smoking Rooms.	Full Orchestra.
Exhibition	Conductor,
Exhibition	L.L. Howarde.
Exhibition	Specially Selected and Appropriate
Exhibition	Music, Hailed with Unanimous
Exhibition	Approval.
MOVING	Pictures Supplied
MOVING	by Mr. C. Spencer
PICTURES	(The Lyceum).

—

Thus Guaranteeing LEADING STAR Pictures, and
PERFECT Production. New Subjects Every Week
Best Music. Coolest Hall.
Finest Pictures. Greatest Floor Space.

ADMISSION : 1/6, 1/, and 6d.

Figure 63 Movie ad, 1908 (*Sunday Times*, 6 Dec 1908)

The Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park was one of the existing venues that showed movies as part of an evening’s entertainment for a few years. In January 1907, films called “cinematograph and picture songs” (obviously silent in the early days of movies), were played in the first part of a State Military Band concert on a Sunday evening, not far from the Chalmers Street Presbyterian Church. The idea was to present a selection of fairly quiet items while the church service was going, then in the second part the brass and drums could strike up after the service was over and avoid disturbing the worshippers^{370 371}.

In December 1908, the skating rink in the Exhibition Building was converted into a moving picture show during summer with a program that featured “many novel, dramatic, pathetic, sensational and travel films of merit”³⁷². The films were from Charles Spencer’s Theatrescope Company at the

Lyceum Hall. Available at the event were refreshments, smoking facilities and a cool promenade³⁷³. The cinemas advertised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that month were T. J. West's Glaciarium, Victoria Hall, Bijou Picture Palace and the Exhibition Building at Prince Alfred Park³⁷⁴.

The building reopened after the winter skating season in January 1909 with a movie of the great Johnson-Burns world championship boxing match and a program of all-new films³⁷⁵. The last mention in the press of film screenings at the Exhibition Building was in January 1911, when "a fine display of moving pictures of a diversified character" was shown. The newspaper noted that admission price was small, which was the great advantage movies had over vaudeville, where all the performers had to be paid, and so the admission price was much greater³⁷⁶.

Exhibitions

The Exhibition Building was constructed for large exhibitions, and after the Agricultural Society moved the annual Easter Show to Moore Park in 1881 and the Garden Palace burned down in 1882, the Prince Alfred Park building hosted most of the major exhibitions in Sydney for many years. This probably saved it from becoming the white elephant the City Council was concerned about after the great exhibitions of the 1870s were over³⁷⁷. The new exhibitions seemed to fall into two categories: showing off the latest breeds of birds and animals on the one hand and demonstrating the technological progress of the colony (and beyond) on the other hand.

Feathers and fur

The first recorded exhibition was the seventh annual show of the New South Wales Poultry, Pigeon and Canary Society in June 1884. This group had used the Temperance Hall in previous years, but the increased number of exhibits required a larger venue³⁷⁸. By July 1887, the Society had broadened its scope to become the New South Wales Poultry, Pigeon, Canary and Dog Society in its show for breeders³⁷⁹. Exhibitions continued in subsequent years³⁸⁰.

The Poultry Club of New South Wales opened a chooks-only show in June 1903³⁸¹. At the same time, the Sydney Fancy Pigeon Club displayed their feathered finery in the gallery of the building. It included "a fine display of carriers, dragoons, fantails, jacobins, show homers, flying homers, English and African owls, tumblers and magpies". Certainly a very impressive range of feathered friends, and fancy pigeon fanciers would have expected no less³⁸².

Man's best friend was not forgotten, and the City Council made the building available to the annual championship show of the Kennel Club of New South Wales in 1903³⁸³ and 1907³⁸⁴ for their annual show of pooches large and small. The Combined Terrier Club held their inaugural show in the building in September 1907³⁸⁵.

Industrial developments

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of tremendous technological development in the industrialised countries. Colonial Australians were very receptive to innovations from overseas, and large-scale exhibitions were a popular method of bringing them before business investors and the public. An early event in the Exhibition Building was the New South Wales Wealth and Industrial Exhibition, opening in December 1884. This exhibition was restricted to articles produced in the colony, but every branch of colonial productive and manufacturing industry was represented, including mining, metallurgy, agriculture, horticulture, arts and machinery. Gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded to the leading exhibitors³⁸⁶.

The centenary of European settlement (1888) was a year of celebrations in the colony, and two large exhibitions were staged in the Exhibition Building, beginning with the Centenary Universal Exhibition. This opened in March and displayed the products of some 650 British and foreign exhibitors, and about 350 colonial exhibitors. The exhibition was divided into 21 classes, including “fine arts, photography and engraving, education, musical and every kind of useful ornamental manufacture”³⁸⁷. The last day of the exhibition was the start of the winter roller skating season, and a grand fancy dress skating carnival and ball was held to mark the occasion³⁸⁸.

EXHIBITION OF WOMEN'S INDUSTRIES
and
CENTENARY FAIR.
President—The LADY CARRINGTON.

To be opened
TUESDAY, 2nd OCTOBER, 3 p.m.
DEPARTMENT I.—NEEDLEWORK and LACE.
DEPARTMENT II.—KNITTING, NETTING, &c.
DEPARTMENT III.—DOMESTIC INDUSTRIES.
DEPARTMENT IV.—MECHANICAL WORK.
DEPARTMENT V.—EDUCATIONAL WORK.

The EXHIBITS in the above Departments occupy the floor
of the building under the gallery.

THE FIRST FLORAL FETE
will be held in the
SPECIAL FLORAL ANNEXE.

THE FINE ART EXHIBITS
are placed in the GALLERY,
also
A VALUABLE LOAN COLLECTION
of Rare Works of Art.

THE CENTENARY FAIR
will be found to comprise a very large and varied collection
of
Needlework, Fancy Goods, and Useful and Ornamental
Articles.

In connection with
THE OPENING CEREMONY
A CONCERT WILL BE GIVEN
by
A CHORUS OF 100 VOICES
and
THE BAND OF THE PERMANENT ARTILLERY.

IN THE EVENING
there will be
A DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE.

THE BUILDING WILL BE ILLUMINATED
by the
ELECTRIC LIGHT.

Figure 64 Women's Industries, 1888 (*Evening News*, 2 Oct 1888)

An Exhibition of Women's Industries and Centenary Fair was the last of the great exhibitions in 1888, opening in October. The exhibits were divided into seven categories, and the competitive areas within the Exhibition were open to school pupils, girls and women of all backgrounds. The departments comprised needlework and lace, knitting, domestic industries (cooking and confectionary), mechanical work (typewriting, box and toy making), educational (especially sick nursing and ambulance work), horticulture and floriculture and fine arts (paintings, drawings, photography and pottery)³⁸⁹.

In June 1897, when the colony was recovering from the recent economic depression, an Engineering and Electrical Exhibition was opened by the Governor Lord Hampden. The exhibition was connected with the Engineering Association and the Electrical Association of New South Wales, and aimed for the advancement of engineering and electrical sciences, in which great strides had been made in the

past few years. Some exhibits included new railway signalling equipment to make travelling safer from the Railway Signalling Company of Liverpool England, and the Wunderlich Patent Ceiling and Roofing Company of Redfern, which constructed a miniature Roman temple to show off their manufactures of artistic metalwork and French tiles.

Also on display were new uses of electricity at the time, including a rotating pivot fan, a combined water motor and dynamo that would light a small country house, and a model electric bakery, electric frying pans and flat irons³⁹⁰. Obviously these are everyday items now, but it should be remembered that there was no public electricity network in Sydney until after 1900.

In the early twentieth century, the New South Wales Manufacturers' Exhibition opened in November 1908, and aimed to showcase the progress of manufacturing in the State by means of working exhibits. A series of competitions in vocal music, elocution, instrumental music, dancing, gymnastics and commercial subjects were also held³⁹¹. But the public electricity supply in Sydney was in its infancy at the time, and the street lights in Elizabeth Street failed at regular intervals, leaving parts of the streets in total darkness and interrupting the competitions and working exhibits at the Manufacturers' Exhibition³⁹².



Figure 65 Building Australia Exhibition, 1909 (*Sunday Sun*, 17 Oct 1909)

A spectacular and exciting exhibition the following year was the Building Australia Exhibition that opened in October 1909 in the Exhibition Building and throughout the park. Doubling as an Aviation Exhibition, the event was held only six years after the Wright Brothers' first powered flight in the United States, and a Wright Model A aeroplane was imported to Sydney later the same month³⁹³ in preparation for a successful powered flight in December at Victoria Park Racecourse, Zetland³⁹⁴. Aeroplanes being constructed in the colony were on display, although light engines made of aluminium rather than cast iron had yet to be developed locally³⁹⁵.

Despite the lack of powered flight during the exhibition, humans were not completely earthbound, as man-carrying kites were briefly flown in the park³⁹⁶, and hot-air balloons were taken aloft³⁹⁷. An article titled "Prickly Pears for Profit" described a huge balloon, 40 feet in diameter, inflated by "Australia's old enemy" the prickly pear. A Queensland company was granted 250,000 acres of prickly-pear infested land and was turning the pulped leaves into a highly volatile alcohol. The heat generated by burning this liquid was much greater than other combustible materials and was smoke-free, allowing a greater lifting capacity³⁹⁸.

The other significant invention on display at the exhibition was a wireless telegraph system. Morse code messages had been sent along wires (and later undersea cables) since the 1830s, but it took the ingenuity of Guglielmo Marconi to piece together all the inventions of earlier researchers and build the first operational wireless telegraphy transmitter and receiver in the 1890s. There was great scepticism of the untrained Marconi for several years, but the awarding of the Nobel Prize for physics in 1909 gave recognition to his achievement. At the time, the Australian Government jealously guarded the rights to wireless transmission³⁹⁹, and the equipment on display at the exhibition was the only installation permitted by the Government at the time⁴⁰⁰. An Institute of Radio Telegraphy was being established, as it was seen as “a ready means of bridging the vast silent spaces in Australia, and its value from a defence point of view is unquestionable”. Floods, fires or sabotage would not interrupt a radio signal, unlike the wire network of the day⁴⁰¹.

Sydneysiders in 1909 had no idea of the significance of what they witnessed in this exhibition, but the machines on display were the forerunners of modern transport and communications. The prototype air machines led to fast and affordable international travel, the wireless telegraph evolved into voice telephones, AM/FM/digital radio, television and microwave communications. Even the new and faltering public electricity system heralded an era of greater comfort in the home and increased productivity in the workplace.

Non-events

When the Agricultural Society was thinking about moving to Moore Park in 1880, the Lord Mayor Robert Fowler feared the building would become a white elephant⁴⁰², and invited to a wide range of requests to lease it. While many of these requests were successful, not all proposals were welcomed by nearby residents or other levels of Government.

The first doomed idea in March 1880 was to turn the building into a dead meat market, possibly combined with a metropolitan butter market⁴⁰³, the advantage being its large size and central location. Glebe Island was being used for this purpose at the time, but the Exhibition Building was more central, and was the only one available that was large enough to accommodate the markets⁴⁰⁴. But the idea (and with no refrigeration probably the contents of the market itself) was on the nose with Redfern residents, who wanted the park to retain its value as a place of recreation⁴⁰⁵. A public meeting was held in the Exhibition Building to protest the proposed market on health grounds⁴⁰⁶.

A number of proposals were floated to convert the building into public baths. In June 1881, a company run by Messrs. Johnson and Hunt applied to the City Council for a long lease of the Exhibition Building to construct salt water baths there⁴⁰⁷. Then in 1901, there was pressure by the New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association to turn the building into swimming baths for their use. The Association pointed out that funding had recently been approved by the Melbourne Municipal Council for public baths in Melbourne⁴⁰⁸. The final attempt to convert the old building into a swimming precinct was three years later in March 1904. At a swimmers’ banquet, Alderman Richard Meagher told the assembled swimmers that the building could easily be converted into baths for swimming races. He thought it was no use as it stood, and that the issue should be raised at the next Council elections⁴⁰⁹. Since this idea had come and gone for over twenty years without progressing, it can only be assumed that cost was the sticking point. In any case, roller skating was revived in 1904 and the skating company leased the building for many years after that, essentially alleviating the Council’s financial concerns.

During the outbreak of bubonic plague in Sydney, the Exhibition Building was used as an inoculation centre in March 1900. But the serum doses were in short supply, and new stocks had to be ordered from India. So in May the Government considered using the Exhibition Building to manufacture its own plague vaccination serum, due to its large size and relative isolation. But the President of the Board of Health objected, saying a more isolated place such as an island was needed for such an undertaking⁴¹⁰.

The Sydney City Council then offered the use of the Exhibition Building to the Government as a plague hospital, provided it was demolished (or “burned down” as *Truth* helpfully suggested⁴¹¹) and a reasonable compensation paid to the City Council⁴¹². But Redfern Council Aldermen objected to this because the building was close to Cleveland Street on their municipal boundary. The Cleveland Street Public School, where 1,000 children attended and played in Prince Alfred Park, was also very close by⁴¹³. The main infectious diseases hospital in Sydney at this time was the remote Coast Hospital at Little Bay, which had been in operation since a smallpox outbreak in 1881⁴¹⁴.

In April 1901, the State Government’s Labour Commission requested the use of the Exhibition Building as a shelter for the homeless and destitute unemployed during winter, who would otherwise sleep out in the cold⁴¹⁵. The City Council offered the use of the building to the Labour Commission for four months to fit it out as an accommodation centre⁴¹⁶. But in June it was reported that due to objections to the idea, it was abandoned by the State Government⁴¹⁷.

The former 1879 world middleweight boxing champion-turned-boxing-promoter Larry Foley tried in vain for a number of years to get City Council approval for boxing matches in the Exhibition Building during the summer skating off-season. Starting in December 1907, a syndicate of Sydney businessmen leased the Exhibition Building for boxing contests and athletic tournaments on a large scale⁴¹⁸. A few months later, the Sydney Skating Rink Company advertised that a heavyweight boxing tournament would commence in April 1909, inviting entries⁴¹⁹. But the tournament wasn’t mentioned again in the press. In December 1913, the ever-optimistic Larry Foley was again trying to get boxing matches off the ground (or the mat) in the Exhibition Building⁴²⁰. It was soon reported that he was again thwarted when objections by local citizens and the police resulted in the proposal being blocked⁴²¹.

Notes

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- ¹ Aboriginal people and place, Barani Sydney's Aboriginal History website.
 - ² Aboriginal Archaeological Assessment, Former Cleveland Street Public School.
 - ³ Aboriginal people and place, Barani Sydney's Aboriginal History website.
 - ⁴ *Inside Redfern - A Guided Walk*.
 - ⁵ Flynn, *The Second Fleet: Britain's Grim Convict Armada of 1790*.
 - ⁶ *Inside Redfern - A Guided Walk*.
 - ⁷ Lawrence, *Cleveland House*.
 - ⁸ Claim a Convict website, <http://www.hawkesbury.net.au/claimaconvict/>
 - ⁹ *Sydney Gazette*, 26 March 1814.
 - ¹⁰ Madden, Heritage Impact Statement, Cleveland House.
 - ¹¹ Sheilds, Map of the City of Sydney, 1845.
 - ¹² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 1848.
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