

Lough Playing Fields Manning Road, Double Bay



The old amenities block, Lough Playing Fields, 1970s.

The land on which the Lough Playing Fields now stands was once part of the Cooper family's Point Piper Estate. In the 19th and early 20th centuries this area of land around Manning Road was known as Edgecliff Gully. From about the mid 1880s it was leased primarily as market gardens to mostly Chinese lessees. The 1907-08 Woollahra Council Assessment books record 9 leases of land in Edgecliff Gully as market gardens.

The site of the playing fields was acquired by Woollahra Council over a number of years beginning in 1927 with the purchase of 2 roods 2¼ perches of land referred to as 'Lot 9', on Manning Road. The reason for this initial purchase was reported in the Council minutes as 'enabling access to Cooper Park'.

Adjacent to the 'lot 9' parcel of land was a market garden and later dairy operated by the Shelton family. They began leasing the land from the Cooper Estate in 1904. Hannah and James Shelton then purchased the freehold to the land in 1907, eventually transferring it to Samuel and Emma Shelton in 1921. The house they built there was known as *Belgravia*.

The Council Minutes of 14th June 1926 refer to a report from a meeting of the Town Planning Association of NSW, which indicated that there was general concern over the lack of park space in a number of Municipalities – 'the lack of park and recreation areas in Municipalities was again stressed with particular emphasis as it affects areas for the healthy recreation of women – pointing out that there is at present only one hockey ground available at Moore Park for twenty four clubs...'. This desire to increase available open space no doubt influenced Council's continuing acquisition of surrounding land in Manning Road.

Woollahra Council began gradually resuming the land owned by the Samuel and Emma Shelton as 'open space' from 1927. In September 1927, it was recommended that a resumption of the Shelton's land, in total one rood, 25¾ perches, be undertaken as part of 'the improvement of the access to Cooper Park from Manning Road'. In December 1927 this resumption was gazetted.

In 1937 Council again recommended acquiring more of the Shelton property. A further 2 roods 24 perches adjacent to Manning Road and adjoining the Cooper Park Lands, described as 'an interior block surrounded on two sides by land owned by the Council and on the other side by the reserve vested in the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board' was duly acquired.

In 1935 Woollahra Council had begun discussions with the Water Board on possible acquisition of water board owned land on Manning Road. It was not until May 1938 that the board approved the sale of the land, which was then transferred in September 1940. It was agreed that the board should deposit 7,000 cubic yards of filling and that Council would level and grade it.

Woollahra Council purchased the remainder of the Shelton property for £1,384.17.3 in 1944, thus completing the acquisition of the playing fields site. The house *Belgravia* was demolished by Council under the Public Health Act in January 1958.

The area of land acquired by Council was originally referred to as the 'Manning Road Reserve'. It was renamed the Lough Playing Fields in 1955 in honour of John C. Lough, long serving Town Clerk of Woollahra Council from 1920 to 1954.

In 1951 plans for the playing fields included 'provision for two hockey fields' and a possible 'bowling green for the use of women'. However reservations over this proposal were reported in the Minutes of 8th October 1951. The report stated that the 'only land available for a bowling green is that shown on the accompanying plan at the rear of the Council's cottage known as "Belgravia". This land was considered unsuitable as it was 'water-logged and very unstable' and the depth of filling not deemed appropriate.

In the 1958 valuation lists of the NSW Department of the Valuer General the site is described as holding 'filling, fencing and dressing shed'. In 1960 Jervis in his *History of Woollahra* wrote that the playing fields were used by 'local schools for recreation' and as a 'centre for women's hockey and basketball'. An archery club also held regular competitions there.

In 1989 Woollahra Council received a grant of \$44,000 from the NSW State Government to build a new amenities block (and demolishing the earlier block) at Lough Playing Fields. Today the park is used for netball, cricket and softball, as well as other leisure activities such as walking and jogging.

**Prepared by Woollahra Local History Centre
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