

## *History of Chiswick Gardens, Ocean Street Woollahra*

---

### ***The Public Gardens***

Chiswick Gardens, at the corner of Ocean and Wellington Street Woollahra, is one of a number of small parks and rest areas added to the more closely settled suburbs of the Municipality during the 1930s and 1940s. Once the garden of *Chiswick*, a mid-nineteenth century private house, the land became a public recreation area following Council's acquisition of the site in 1938.

Moves to acquire the property began in late 1937, with Alderman J D Gaden's proposal that *negotiations be at once opened for the acquisition of land at the corner of Ocean Street and Wellington Street*. The site was at that time owned by Mrs Lilian Florence Holme, who was willing to sell the land for use as a park or for other public purpose. The house *Chiswick* had been demolished soon after Mrs Holme's acquisition of the property, and the former stables occupied by the First Edgecliff Troop of Boy Scouts and Cubs as a Scout Hall.

It was decided that the stables would, in the new scheme, be retained and transformed into a kiosk and caretaker's quarters. This kiosk was the modest precursor to a later incarnation of the building as *Pruniers*, one of Woollahra's better-known restaurants. Originally a Double Bay establishment, *Pruniers* has operated since 1971 from the former stables of *Chiswick* - several times renovated since 1938.



Pruniers, 1978

The purchase of the *Chiswick* property by Council was completed in late June 1938, and the work of improvements quickly put in hand to obtain the full benefit of the spring growth. Walls were reconstructed, garden benches purchased, and arrangements made regarding the remodeling of the stables building. A playground was installed, equipped with a log swing and a merry-go-round.

The official opening took place a year later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1939. In front of the Mayor, Alderman George Grimley, and a gathering of other Woollahra aldermen and local dignitaries, the new park was formally declared open by Mr E S Spooner, Member for Ryde and a former state Minister for Works and Local Government. In introducing Mr Spooner, Alderman Hugh Latimer paid tribute to the so-called *Spooner Scheme*, through which many of these public works carried out by Woollahra had been made possible.

The completed park won accolades from the Parks and Playgrounds Movement of NSW which conveyed to Council its appreciation for *the splendid work done in establishing this and other small parks throughout the Municipality.*

Chiswick Gardens has continued to serve the community well. The importance of such a facility is underlined by its location in one of the more densely populated sections of the municipality. Writing at the time of Woollahra Council's Centenary in 1960, official Council historian James Jervis described the park as:

*a cheerful little spot, and its well-kept lawns, bright flowers and shrubs ...  
make it a pleasant little oasis in the bricks and mortar of upper Woollahra.  
(History of Woollahra p. 171)*

### ***Previous History of the Chiswick Gardens Site***

As was the case with much of the land in the Municipality of Woollahra, the Chiswick Gardens site was once part of the 1,130 acre Cooper Estate. The story of its gradual detachment from the Cooper family holdings begins on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1857, with the Reverend Dr James Fullerton's lease of two parcels of land from the estate of Daniel Cooper, one of six acres, the other of six acres and 20 perches. The consolidated twelve-acre leasehold was bound by Ocean, Forth and Wellington Streets and Edgecliff Road.

Fullerton seems never to have occupied his Woollahra estate, but his twelve acres was rapidly carved up through a series of under-leases and re-assignments, and various houses were built on his holding. The earliest traced occupancy of the *Chiswick* site – an area of two roods, 34<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> perches within the Fullerton leasehold - is that of Benjamin Cocks, a boot and shoe importer with a business in George Street. Cocks was in residence by 1865, and remained at the property for some ten years. The 1871 Woollahra Council Assessment provides our earliest description of the *Chiswick* dwelling : a brick house consisting of ten rooms.

In 1875 the lease was assigned to businessman and company director Alfred Stanger-Leathes of *Tara* in nearby Ocean Street, who let the property firstly to Randolph Charles Want and subsequently to George Hedgeland, before relinquishing the leasehold to Dr Arthur Oakes in 1880. The house-name *Chiswick* first appears in Council and other records in 1877, during the term of Stanger-Leathes' leasehold and Want's period of residency. The reason for the choice of name is not clear, particularly as the setting would seem to bear little resemblance to its Thames-side English counterpart.

Of Stanger-Leathes' two tenants, George Hedgeland was a surveyor with a business in Point Piper Road (now known as Jersey Road) and Randolph Charles Want, whose father had built up one of Sydney's leading law firms during the 1840s, himself pursued a legal career.

Following the transfer of the *Chiswick* lease from Alfred Stanger-Leathes in 1880, the house began an association with two medical gentlemen: Arthur Oakes and his tenant, Thomas Nott. Both had completed their studies in Scotland. Dr Oakes at first occupied *Chiswick*, but by 1882 Dr Nott was his tenant, an arrangement which appears to have continued until 1886 when the lease of the property was transferred to businessman Frederick William Stoddart, who was to remain there for the ensuing forty-eight years.

Born and educated in Melbourne, Stoddart moved to Sydney in 1883. Four years later he acquired the lease of *Chiswick*, taking up residency of the property which would be his home for almost fifty years, and for which he secured the freehold c1909. In 1936, Mrs Lilian Holmes purchased *Chiswick* from the estate of Stoddart's late wife, Isobel.

Frederick Stoddart's great hobby was his garden, which included conservatories and many exotic species of plant. His obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* remarked that the horticultural displays in the spacious grounds of *Chiswick* had created widespread interest, and Council Minutes record Stoddart, in 1927, providing aldermen with a tour of his property and offering assistance with Council's gardening program.

A decade later, Stoddart's private garden became part of that program, with Council's acquisition of *Chiswick* ensuring the preservation of Stoddart's creation for the continuing enjoyment of the wider community.

**Prepared by Woollahra Local History Centre  
September 2005**