

Steyne Park, Double Bay



Steyne Park, Double Bay, c1960.

Land on the waterfront at Double Bay was reserved for a park as early as 1834 when the plan for a village at Double Bay was proposed by the Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell. An area bound by New South Head Road, Ocean Avenue, Bay Street and the harbour was then surveyed by Surveyor Larmer. 31 lots were created which were offered for sale by auction in 1835. The reserved land by the harbour was named *The Steyne*.

In these early years Double Bay was a centre for market gardeners, fishermen, dairymen, boat owners and small traders. Michael Guilfoyle ran a successful nursery on land which ran from South Avenue to the Steyne reserve. Market gardens flourished in the low lying, swampy ground. Fishermen Peter and Samuel Richardson, occupied two timber cottages within the reserve close to the harbour's edge. The cottages stood there for many years until they were resumed by the government in 1892 and demolished some years later.

The Steyne was officially dedicated for public recreation on 6th December 1867. In 1861 Woollahra Council had created a committee to oversee the management of the park. A statement of account for work carried out by Woollahra Council at Steyne Park from 1889-90 indicates that the park had seating, turnstiles, drinking fountains and fences. Trees were planted and asphaltting carried out. In 1904 it was gazetted that the Council were the appointed 'Trustees of Steyne Park'. By-laws for the management of the park were published the same year.

From soon after the time of its inception in 1860, Woollahra Council had encouraged cricket to be played on the reserve and approved the playing of football there in 1885. Local cricket and football clubs used the reserve for matches after application to council, the newly formed Double Bay Football Club being one of the first to use the reserve to play football. Council made a concrete wicket available in 1884. A letter to Council from the Double Bay Cricket Club in September 1906 complimented Council on having provided 'a first class concrete wicket ... on Double Bay Reserve'. Athletics meetings were also held at Double Bay Park – in 1919 the local Returned Soldier's Athletic Sports Meeting was held on the 1st and 2nd Saturdays in May.

A proposal to build public baths near the Double Bay wharf was made by Frederick Cavill to Woollahra Council in 1885. The baths did not eventuate, being built at Rushcutters Bay instead.

Tenders were sought from Woollahra Council for the erection of a pavilion on the Double Bay Reserve in June 1892. Newspaper advertisements placed in 1945 indicate that band performances from the pavilion were held in the park on Sunday afternoons.

The War Memorial, in the south east corner of the park, was opened on 2nd August 1919 by Sir Walter Davidson, the then governor of NSW. The original bronze statue (since recast) of a soldier of the AIF was designed and modelled by the sculptor, William Macintosh, and the pedestal designed by Oscar Backhouse, in 1919.

The 1930s saw some significant developments in and around the park. Dressing sheds and conveniences were built in 1930. The stone sea wall at the foreshore of Double Bay Park, first proposed in 1936, was completed in 1939.

Significant changes to the park were proposed and adopted by Council in 1937. It was decided to make the park into a 'beauty spot for passive recreation', no longer offering it for seasonal hire as a sporting venue. A scheme for improvements, drawn up by Council's Engineer, attempted to 'hold a balance between ornamentation and recreation and a resting place'. The scheme eventually included the removal of the stone plinth and fence, the levelling of the park area adjacent to the plinth to make a smooth grade to the footpath level, the deletion of the circular concrete path and the moving of the playground to a more central position between the fig-trees with the provision of an additional slide.

It was noted by the Principal of the Double Bay Public School in 1937 that the school had been enjoying use of the park as its playing field for many years. The School continues to use the park as a playing area to this day.

The Council steamroller, which stood near the Double Bay Sailing Club for many years, was removed due to concerns over its safety for children, in 1988. Plans for a new children's playground began in 1989.

The park continues to 'hold its balance' between recreation and a resting place, being enjoyed by members of the community for contemplation, leisure and play.

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