

## History of Bellerive Oval

The lands along the Derwent's Eastern Shore were the domain of the Moomairementer people for hundreds of years before the first European settlers arrived at Risdon Cove in 1803. Risdon Cove was soon abandoned in favour of Sullivans Cove across the Derwent and only a few hardy individuals settled the Eastern Shore over the next few years.

They planted crops at Kangaroo Point, later called Bellerive (meaning 'beautiful riverbank'). In early times the favoured venue for community sport was a large field on the shores of Kangaroo Bay, to the north of today's Bellerive Oval.

The land on which Bellerive Oval was to be developed was part of an original land-grant to James McCormack, who established an orchard there in the mid-1850s. Beachside Estate, as it became known, was bought in 1913 by the Clarence Council, which set aside 8.5 of the 14 hectares for recreational purposes.

The oval was nothing special. Grass was sparse in summer as Bellerive didn't have a town water supply. The rough and stony surface was partially levelled and top-dressed in the late 1930s. As well as having a north-south slope, the oval sloped down from the middle – one could only see the upper torso of a player on the opposite side of the oval. A tin shed served as a change-room, but there were no spectator facilities.

A photograph from the 1920s shows two paths crossing the ground. It was said the Catholics used one to get to Corpus Christi convent school while the Protestants used the other to walk to Bellerive Primary School.

Other improvements in the 1930s included a cinder track for cycling and trotting. A Bellerive football captain was killed while training a horse there. The former Rose Bay ferry-jetty pavilion was relocated to the ground to serve as a shelter and change shed. Situated just off Derwent Street near the present "Field of Fame", the landmark weatherboard pavilion was used by both footballers and cricketers for many years.

Until 1943, when the Derwent River was finally bridged, Eastern Shore sport was very localised. The Bellerive Recreational Ground, featuring an east-to-west concrete wicket, was used mainly for community ball sports and athletics. It was the home of the local cricket and football teams playing against clubs from South Arm to Geilston Bay.

The new floating bridge saw a push in the 1940s to involve the Eastern Shore in Hobart-wide competitions. Senior football came to Bellerive Oval in 1947 with the formation of the Clarence District Football Club. The oval got an improved playing surface and some basic facilities, as well as a perimeter fence.

There was a problem: the football authorities (TFL) would not allow the football club to overlay the concrete cricket pitch with sand and loam, which meant club footballers had to remove the concrete before their season started and replace it for the new cricket season. Needless to say the strength of the cement deteriorated as the years progressed. The cricketers took a little longer than the footballers to enter senior club competition; in 1956 the Clarence District Cricket Club was admitted to the TCA. Turf wickets were officially opened by the Warden of Clarence on 19 January 1957.

In the same year the new Clarence football captain-coach, Stuart Spencer, started a push for better facilities which culminated in new brick clubrooms by 1962. In 1965 the oval got a new surface, floodlights on four 22m towers, a stand for 500 people on the western side, and parking for cars along the eastern flank in the area known today as The Hill. When the cricket club embarked on an ambitious clubroom development in the early 1980s, and additional stands added, the oval started to shape up as a reasonable suburban sporting facility.

In the mid-1980s the Tasmanian Cricket Association unsuccessfully sought support to upgrade facilities at its century old ground on the Queen's Domain. More promising was the idea of making a new headquarters at Bellerive Oval.

With assistance from the Tasmanian Government and the Clarence Council, in 1986 the TCA made a historic move to Hobart's Eastern Shore at a cost of some \$7m.

In 1987 Bellerive Oval was resurfaced and levelled with the removal of the prominent camber. A ten-strip centre wicket area consists of couch grass, which has been successfully propagated in the colder southern climate, and English rye in the perimeter pitches. The dimensions of the playing surface are 175m x 135m – slightly longer but somewhat narrower than the MCG. The Hill replaced the original gravel car park and 'drag strip' on the eastern side of the ground and additional stands were erected at each end of the Oval. A new building, the AGC Pavilion, was completed in December 1987 to accommodate members and officials. Now called the Players Pavilion, the AGC Pavilion also provided the Oval's first corporate entertainment venue, seating 120 diners in comfort.

All this was completed in time for the first international fixture to be played at Bellerive Oval – a one-day International between New Zealand and Sri Lanka on 12 January 1988. The success of this match and perseverance by the TCA encouraged the Australian Cricket Board to allocate a Test match to Bellerive. From 16 to 20 December 1989, Australia played Sri Lanka in Tasmania's first Test match, won by Australia by 173 runs.

There have since been many improvements to the ground, both temporary and permanent. One early 'improvement', now just a memory, was the most televised toilet block in the cricket world; a sandy-coloured brick building always in the action because of its strategic location at the southern end of the ground.

The biggest changes were the result of a 10-year plan from the early 1990s. They included major new training facilities – one of Australia’s best-equipped indoor practice centres, together with new practice wickets for home and visiting teams. Electronic aids included a traditional-styled scoreboard and later a full-sized video replay screen, both operated by match officials in the scorers’ room opposite. The video screen was relocated from Sydney, where it had been used for the Olympic Games.

The TCA overcame some complex legal and financial hurdles before it finally signed the contract in May 2001 to begin work on the most significant developments in the Oval’s history, costing in total over \$18 million.

The new Southern Stand seats 5,800 people in comfort, with full under-cover refreshment facilities. It also houses a world-class television broadcasting capability including three studios and accommodation for outside broadcast vehicles. Beneath the spectator seats are fully-appointed change-rooms meeting top national standards for sports other than cricket. They were first used for Australian football (VFL competition) in July 2003. At the northern end of the ground is the Members Pavilion, opened late in 2002, which provides members and guests with Tasmania’s best sporting-ground facilities for dining and entertainment. The Members’ accommodates 600, while in the Century Room 300 guests can enjoy top-level dining with a magnificent view over the Oval and Derwent River.

The highlight of Bellerive Oval’s short history as an international cricket venue came on 11 January 2003. A total of 16,719 people packed in to see the opening of the new facilities before watching the Oval’s first Australia-England encounter – a one-day international game. A close match was won by the Australians, fittingly led by Tasmania’s Ricky Ponting and including the Tasmanian all-rounder Shane Watson, who bowled the day’s final over to ensure victory. The festive day included a cavalcade of ‘greats’ of Tasmanian cricket, led by Jack Simmons, captain of the Tasmanian team which won the Gillette Cup in 1979, and David Boon.

In 2009 a set of four light towers was constructed at a cost of \$4.5m – the official “turning on the lights” co-incided with the first T20 International played at Bellerive on 21 February between Australia and West Indies. This match with Ricky Ponting as the Australian captain saw the host team successful by 38 runs.

*Extracted from “The Government Paddocks to Bellerive” by Michael Gandy. This booklet is available for purchase from the Cricket Museum at Bellerive Oval.*