

Manly Oval and Grandstand



MAN04249 Two sorts of fencing. Dated at 1887. Oddfellows Hall (built 1878) on right.

The *Australian Town and Country Journal* reported: "A public meeting was held at Manly Beach on Wednesday evening [8 November 1871], J B Smithers in the chair, for the formation of a cricket club. Thirty-one members were enrolled, and the officers of the Manly Cricket Club appointed. Ivanhoe Park, by the kindness of Thomas Heselton Esq, has been secured for the practice ground."¹

The earliest reference found in Trove to 'Manly Oval' was SMH 13 April 1888, p9, with a match report on the NSW v Victoria Telegraphic Departments cricket match. The match was played on matting.

Annual bicycle races took place at the Oval from 1887. The second annual race was on 4 August 1888, and the third on 3 August 1889.²

A demonstration lacrosse match was played at the Manly Cricket ground in May 1888.³

In October 1888 the position of caretaker for Manly Oval was advertised.⁴ The opening match of the cricket season took place between the Benedicts (married men) and Bachelors of the Manly Club.⁵

A two-rail fence around the cricket ground was constructed in late 1891.⁶

Tennis matches were played under the auspices of the NSW Lawn Tennis Association in July 1893. Manly no 1 team played Manly no 2. Players included F Ridge, S Ridge, Messrs Dowling, Rawson and Wyld.⁷

¹ *Australian Town and Country Journal* 11 November 1871, p26.

² *Evening News* 6 August 1888, p8; 5 August 1889, p6.

³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 May 1888, p15.

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 October 1888, p18.

⁵ *Evening News* 9 October 1888, p6.

⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 July 1891, p13.

⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 July 1893, p3.

In 1894 a good turf wicket was to be formed under the supervision of Mr Gregory.⁸

A pavilion was erected for the tennis club in 1894, on the east side of the reserve adjacent to the tennis courts.

Sydney Morning Herald 10 November 1894 reported the opening by the Mayoress of Manly of a handsome little pavilion which had just been completed for the use of the members of the cricket club.

Manly Federals played rugby fixtures at the ground. In June 1895 they played Hawkesbury Agricultural College; in July 1896 they defeated Shamrock 23-3.⁹



Park in 1897

In August 1897, Alderman Fletcher moved that an asphalt path be laid from near the lamp in the centre of the park westerly to the stone-steps leading to Raglan Street.¹⁰

Celebrations to mark the Record Reign of Queen Victoria were held at the ground in July 1897. Commemorative tree plantings took place on the site of the old Ivanhoe Park Pavilion.¹¹

In August 1898, the Oval was the venue for exercises of the Manly University School Cadets Corp, who fired blank cartridges.¹²

In 1899 it was proposed that the cricket and tennis clubs should pay for the caretaker of the Oval. In return, Council would reduce their annual rent from £25 per annum to a nominal sum.¹³

Manly Bowling Club's new green and pavilion were opened in November 1899. There was an unofficial opening on 9 November, and the official opening was on 19 February 1900, by Mayor Fletcher.¹⁴ The new green was in use for a match against Glebe on 11 December 1899.

The Relief of Mafeking was celebrated at the Oval on 30 May 1900 with a procession headed by Manly Fire Brigade.¹⁵

⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 August 1894, p40.

⁹ *Australian Town and Country Journal* 3 June 1895, p6; 18 July 1896, p40.

¹⁰ *Evening News* 14 August 1897, p7.

¹¹ *Evening News* 29 June 1897, p6.

¹² *Sydney Morning Herald* 26 August 1898, p7.

¹³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 4 May 1899, p7.

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 November 1899, p7; 19 February 1900, p5.

¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 May 1900, p7.

On 14 July 1900 a baseball match was played between Manly and Waverley.¹⁶ Were there regular fixtures?

Commonwealth celebrations took place on 16 January 1901 to mark Federation. 1200 schoolchildren were treated to a commemorative medal and a bag of cakes. The Oval was decorated with flags, Venetian masks and decoration.¹⁷

In January 1901 a cricket match was played between Victorians and Manly.¹⁸

In April 1901, a match between Manly and the bowlers of New Zealand resulted in a win to the New Zealand team, 60-36.¹⁹

On 17 October 1901 the NSW Public School Cadet Corps held a combined parade at Manly Oval.²⁰ They were told that the Empire could depend on them.

In 1902, Manly played the NSW Parliament. Parliament made 255 runs, Manly 57. E W Quirk, former Mayor of Manly, now MLA, was in the Parliament team.²¹

Latrine accommodation was added to Manly Oval in 1902, designed by F Trenchard Smith.²² In 1902 a 'neat picket fence enclosed the playing area, the tennis courts were separated from the oval, and the pavilion on the hill was fenced in'.²³

Bicycle handicap races were held on 8 June 1903 over one mile and half-mile distance.²⁴

A new bandstand in Ivanhoe Park was opened in February 1903. It was beautifully situated.²⁵

The *Referee* reported in May 1903 that the AFL had secured four dates on Manly Oval to play exhibition matches.²⁶ East Sydney played Alexandria at Manly on 18 July 1903.

Croquet was played at the park. The Manly Croquet Club held its annual championships in January 1904.²⁷

New by-laws for the Oval were issued by the Lands Department in September 1904. Council could now charge admission to the ground on 18 days of the year.²⁸

The major portion of the old Council Chambers had been taken down by August 1905, allowing an expansion of the cricket pitch.²⁹ Alterations to the ground were noted in September 1905. The front fence was to be brought down to the stone wall, and at the rear to Sydney Road. A high paling fence was to be erected for privacy.³⁰ However it is not clear that a fence was ever put up. In June 1908, reference was made to 'Scotchman's Hill', in Raglan Street, where spectators had a view of first-grade matches without paying, and it was regretted that the 6'6" fence proposed had not been permitted.³¹

In a match on 20 January 1906 between Paddington and Middle Harbour, Trumper and Noble batted for Paddington. Trumper scored 120, Noble scored 2.

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 14 July 1900, p14.

¹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 January 1901, p9.

¹⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 January 1901, p4.

¹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 April 1901, p5.

²⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 October 1901, p7.

²¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 December 1902, p13.

²² *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 January 1902.

²³ Mayoral Annual Report for 1902.

²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 June 1903, p6.

²⁵ *Evening News* 18 February 1903, p5.

²⁶ *Referee* 20 May 1903, p8.

²⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 January 1904, p2.

²⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 September 1904.

²⁹ *Evening News* 14 August 1905, p2.

³⁰ *Evening News* 14 September 1905, p2.

³¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 June 1908, p8.

On 22 August 1908 a party of men and officers from the American Fleet (the Great White Fleet) was entertained, and a sports meeting held at Manly Oval. The sports were spoiled somewhat by the rain.

In 1909 there was a match between the Manly Waratahs and the All Blacks.³²

Captain Penfold, the balloonist, made ascents from Manly Oval on 4 and 18 September 1909.³³ Admission fees went towards defraying the cost of the new cricket pavilion.

Mayor Bonner opened the new pavilion on 9 April 1910. It had cost £780, and there was seating for 500; a superior view could be obtained from the top of the structure by about 20 spectators.³⁴ The architects were Hassall and Stockham.³⁵

The Band Association of NSW held its annual championships at Manly Oval in 1910 on 22nd 24-26th January.³⁶ Brisbane Concert Band took the overall title. The Oval was also the venue for Highland Pipe Band contests, such as the one on 7th April 1910.³⁷

Possibly the world's greatest brass band, the Royal Besses o' th' Barn Band visited Manly Oval on 6 October 1910 as part of their world tour. In their repertoire was a selection from Tannhauser, and the 'Memories of Britain' suite.³⁸ They also performed at the Sydney Cricket Ground in the same week.

The Oval was the venue for the Coronation of the 'Queen of Manly', on 4 December 1915. This was a war-time fundraising activity in which several local women were nominated and the winner was the one who raised the most money for the cause. Several Aldermen dressed up in regal costume.³⁹



MAN04804. St Andrew's Manse and Church Hall in background. Frank Bell image so pre1922

³² *Sydney Morning Herald* 29 May 1909.

³³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 September 1909.

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 April 1910, p2.

³⁵ *Manly Daily* 22 October 1909, invitation to tender.

³⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 October 1910, p2.

³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 April 1910, p16.

³⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 October 1910.

³⁹ See photo MAN05625.

After a rugby match played between a Manly team and a side from Mosman, the Mosman team was attacked by Manly supporters. One player was knocked unconscious and had to be carried to safety. Mosman and North Sydney teams demanded police protection for future fixtures at Manly.⁴⁰

Manly Council advertised for a groundsman for Manly Oval in November 1920 to be paid a salary of £4/15/- per week; preference would be given to a returned soldier.

Robert Shute was injured in a heavy collision in a match played at Manly Oval in June 1922. He died in hospital on 6 June 1922. He gave his name to the perpetual trophy, the Shute Shield, contested by Sydney's first-grade sides.

A Maori side played NSW in July 1922, admission 1/-, grandstand 6d extra.

New Zealand Maoris played Metropolitan at the Oval in June 1923.⁴¹

Prior to the match between Manly and University in August 1923, there was a demonstration of aerial stunting by Lt Holden in his plane.⁴²

On 6 October 1923, cricketer Jack Gregory made a century for Manly against Balmain and took 6 wickets for 4 runs.⁴³

The Manly Sporting Union was formed circa 1924.⁴⁴ It was proposed the Oval area should be enlarged by removing the trees inside the fence near the tennis courts, and by reconfiguring the tennis courts.

Architects Hassall and Stockham invited tenders to supply additional seating accommodation at the oval in June 1924.⁴⁵

In 1924 the old Court House building was removed, presenting an opportunity to enlarge the available area of the Oval. The Oval caretaker in 1924 was Mr C Bashford.

A soccer match between Canada and a Metropolitan side in June 1924 saw a 6-2 win for Metropolitan.⁴⁶

There was a fatality at Manly Oval in March 1926, when a timekeeper at a cycling championship, Mr D H MacKenzie, was accidentally hit by three cyclists. He was taken to Manly Cottage Hospital, but died of his injuries.⁴⁷

On 24 August 1927, Metropolitan defeated a team from Japanese Universities 33-23.

Plans for a caretaker's residence at Manly Oval were drawn up in February 1928 by architect Harold Mead, to cost £690.⁴⁸ This is possibly the building shown in photo MML03291. A tennis pavilion was also drawn up by H Underwood.⁴⁹ Additions to the croquet club rooms were drawn up by Mrs Coombe of Bower Street.⁵⁰

In 1930, the pageant *The Triumph of Australia* was performed at Manly Oval on 8 and 15 November. The pageant featured 1000 performers. Proceeds were to go to Manly District Hospital, but according to the Council's Engineer, the pageant was "woefully mismanaged", and takings from the second performance had to go towards paying the performers of the first.⁵¹

Manly Ladies' Hockey Club applied in May 1932 to use the small room under the Pavilion at Manly Oval as a Committee Room, and asked that it be connected to the electric light supply⁵².

⁴⁰ *Singleton Argus* 6 June 1918, p4.

⁴¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 June 1923, p13.

⁴² *Sydney Morning Herald* 29 August 1923, p16.

⁴³ *Sunday Times* 7 October 1923, p11.

⁴⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 7 April 1924, p13.

⁴⁵ *Construction and Local Government Journal* 11 June 1924, p1.

⁴⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 June 1924, p4.

⁴⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 March 1926.

⁴⁸ *Construction and Local Government Journal* 22 February 1928, p2.

⁴⁹ *Construction and Local Government Journal* 8 February 1928, p2.

⁵⁰ *Construction and Local Government Journal* 12 December 1928, p5.

⁵¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 November 1930, 26 November 1930.

⁵² Health and Building Committee minutes 27 May 1932.

In July 1932, the first rugby league match to be held on the Oval was played before 1500 spectators. Two Manly District Rugby League Association matches were played. In one, Narrabeen drew with Brookvale, 2-2.⁵³ The other match was between Manly and North Curl Curl. Match proceeds were donated to Manly District Hospital.

Turnstiles were installed on the eastern side of the ticket box at the Merrett Gates in 1932; five turnstiles were purchased from Sydney Ferries Ltd.⁵⁴

A crowd of over 3000 saw Don Bradman bat for St George against Manly on 5 March 1933. Bradman was missed twice by the wicket-keeper, and went on to make 112. St George finished on 293 all out.⁵⁵

A rugby match between Victoria and NSW was won by Victoria 14-8, its first victory over NSW in NSW. The attendance was a record for Manly Oval, estimated at over 10,000.⁵⁶

During 1935 the Tennis Club committee considered the advisability of making application to the local council for financial assistance to erect a new clubhouse. Plans and specifications were kindly submitted by one of the members, Mr R A Stewart, who was also deserving of great credit for his effort of forwarding to Manly Council the application for a loan of approximately £1,400 for a building to be of brick and two storeys. [Architects Kaberry and Chard let a contract to J A Carter of Manly for the erection of the new tennis club pavilion for Manly Council in September 1936⁵⁷.]

As part of Australia's 150th anniversary celebrations in 1938, an exhibition tennis match was played at Ivanhoe Park between members of Australia's Davis Cup team.⁵⁸

In July 1940 the Returned Soldiers Volunteer Defence Corps paraded on Manly Oval.⁵⁹

At the Marist Brothers school sports on 11 September 1940, a 9-year old boy was shot and badly injured by the starter's pistol. He was rushed to Manly Hospital, where the wad from the pistol was removed from his chest.⁶⁰

On 11 January 1941, Manly Cricket Club were all out for only 29 runs versus St George. Ray Lindwall took 4 wickets for 2 runs, and Stapleton took 6 for 24. Manly's performance was described as a "debacle".⁶¹

Recruiting rallies were held at the ground in 1941, in particular on 18 May.⁶²

On 3 June 1944, Laurie O'Toole converted a try and watched the ball break the window of a passing bus.⁶³

In July 1945 Manly District Cricket Club urged the need for a new pavilion, as the old one was "a disgrace". It was noted that Manly Council had enlarged the water service to the ground.⁶⁴

Hockey enthusiasts could watch NZ Army playing Metropolis in April 1946.⁶⁵

The old bicycle track around the oval was to be removed, it was reported in July 1946.⁶⁶ The practice wickets would also be moved 30 feet towards the boundary fence. Manly Cricket Club would play its matches at Brookvale Oval until the ground alterations were finished.

⁵³ *Sun* 2 July 1932.

⁵⁴ Manly Council Minutes Staff Committee 4 April 1932.

⁵⁵ *Daily Telegraph* 6 March 1933.

⁵⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 June 1933.

⁵⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 September 1936, p5. Health and Building Committee minutes 27 August 1936.

⁵⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 February 1938, p15.

⁵⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 July 1940, p10.

⁶⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 September 1940, p5.

⁶¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 January 1941, p11.

⁶² *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 May 1941, p10.

⁶³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 3 June 1944, p12.

⁶⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 July 1945, p6.

⁶⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 April 1946, p9.

In April 1946, it was stated that there was no chance of rugby league being allowed to use the Oval, since there were currently 30 teams in training with the Manly Rugby Union side across all the grades.⁶⁷ There was still no league being played on the Oval in 1949, which drew criticism from the league authorities.⁶⁸

In July 1946 Jimmy Randell retired from the employ of Manly Council. He had been curator of Manly Oval, and was latterly in charge of Council's depot.⁶⁹ In his youth he had been a notable rugby player, representing NSW.

There were seven-a-side rugby matches played at night under floodlights on the Oval between Manly and Drummoyne in 1947.⁷⁰

On a track that was heavy after recent rain, John Treloar equalled the Australian record for the 100 yards, in 9.6 seconds, on 19 March 1947. He repeated the feat the following year, on 29 January 1948.⁷¹

Two young men were arrested by armed police in the act of robbing the Bowling Club of gin and other liquor in August 1947.⁷²

Herb McKenley of Jamaica set an Australian All-comers record of 31.5 seconds for the 300 yards on 29 January 1948, beating the previous mark of 31.8.⁷³

A record attendance was predicted for the rugby fixture between Manly and Randwick on 29 May 1948.⁷⁴

On 12 January 1949, Lloyd La Beach, a black sprinter from Panama, ran the 100 yards in 9.8 seconds, easing up.⁷⁵

In February 1949, openers for Manly in their cricket fixture versus Petersham were Keith Miller and Jim Burke, who both played for Australia.⁷⁶

A crowd of 10,000 watched Manly defeat Randwick 5-0 in their match on 21 May 1949.⁷⁷

The England women's XI was to play a two-day cricket match with the Australian women at Manly Oval in February 1949.⁷⁸ The match was drawn.

⁶⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 3 July 1946, p11.

⁶⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 3 April 1946, p8.

⁶⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 February 1949, p8.

⁶⁹ *Manly Daily* 5 July 1946.

⁷⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald* 17 April 1947, p8.

⁷¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 20 March 1947; 30 January 1948.

⁷² *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 August 1947, p3.

⁷³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 30 January 1948, p5.

⁷⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 May 1948, p9.

⁷⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 January 1949.

⁷⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 February 1949, p9.

⁷⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 May 1949, p20.

⁷⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 February 1949, p8; 17 February 1949, p10.



Oval flooded 1949

In 1950 there was a dispute between Manly Council and the rugby union club over the lease of the Oval. The club was obliged to play ten first grade matches there in a season, and at present was only scheduled for eight.⁷⁹

Making his first team debut for Manly on 14 October 1950, 15-year old Peter Philpott took three wickets.⁸⁰

Spectators at the match on 24 June 1950 heard an appeal from the club captain of North Steyne Life Saving Club, appealing for volunteers to come to the beach to fill sandbags to try to save the clubhouse from being washed into the ocean. Concrete pillars on which the building rested had been exposed to a depth of 40 feet.⁸¹

On 24 February 1951, Peter Philpott was again among the wickets, taking 6 for 56 in 14 overs.⁸²

3000 spectators came to the Oval to watch the crowning of the Manly Queen of Mardi Gras in January 1952.⁸³

On 9 July 1952 the touring Fijian rugby team defeated a City side 28-19.⁸⁴ They paid a return visit in May 1954, defeating Metropolitan 11-8.

John Landy broke the NSW All-comers' record for the 1500 metres in the invitation scratch race held at the Oval on 5 March 1953. His time of 3min 57.6 smashed the previous mark of 4min 13. The second-placed man, John Plummer, also broke the old mark, with a time of 14min 0.2.⁸⁵ Landy said afterwards that he felt he could have gone faster; he set his best time for the distance in 1954, running a world record 3min 41.8.

⁷⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 April 1950, p16.

⁸⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 October 1950, p10S.

⁸¹ *Sunday Herald* 25 June 1950, p7.

⁸² *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 February 1951, pS9.

⁸³ *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 January 1952, p3.

⁸⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 July 1952, p10; 13 May 1954, p5.

⁸⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 March 1953, p3.

In July 1953, the pitch was described as a “mustard pot”, it was in such a churned-up condition.⁸⁶

In May 1954 Council’s architects, Trenchard Smith Maisey Morgan designed a new lavatory block for Manly Oval, to cost in the region of £4000.⁸⁷

Manly-Warringah Youth Association held its annual Youth Tattoo on the Oval in February 1943. It featured a parade of surf girls.⁸⁸

The Municipal Engineer reported in February 1963 on the ongoing reconstruction of Manly Oval grandstand, architects Alexander and Lloyd.⁸⁹ The *Pacific Times* 2 May 1963, had a photo of the grandstand under construction at Manly Oval, at a cost of £27,385, architects Alexander and Lloyd of Chatswood, to seat 1000-1500 fans, construction by A G McLean Pty Ltd. The new grandstand replaced a wooden building.

See Manly Council Contracts Register, contract 1962 no 7 for a detailed breakdown of the work done.

On 13 May 1972, NSW defeated Queensland at hockey 2-0 at Manly Oval.⁹⁰



Oval in 1980

In 1994, Manly Council handed over Manly Oval to the newly-formed Manly Oval Trust. The trust committee consisted of two members from Manly Rugby Club, two members from the Cricket Club, and two members from Manly Council.⁹¹

⁸⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 July 1953, p10.

⁸⁷ Manly Council Works Committee minutes 1 May 1954.

⁸⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 February 1954, p12.

⁸⁹ Engineer’s Report, 12 February 1963.

⁹⁰ *Canberra Times* 15 May 1972, p16.

⁹¹ *Manly Daily* 19 February 1994, p136.



Cricket pitch upgrade in 1996

The old grandstand was demolished in 1998 after being declared unsafe, at which point plans were made for an upgrade including a new grandstand, improved change rooms, first aid rooms, media facilities, a function room, kitchen and a kiosk. The process was delayed when it was found that the council could face legal action if provision was not made for a lift for disabled people.⁹²

Manly Council accepted a tender of \$1.47 million from Collaroy firm D G Sundin & Co on 9 July 2001 for erection of a new grandstand, with construction expected to be completed by May 2002.⁹³ The space-age roof was lifted into place on 14 December 2001. The new grandstand was opened by Manly Mayor Jean Hay on 11 May 2002.⁹⁴ It was named the Tony Miller grandstand, after Tony Miller MBE, who played more than 300 first grade matches for Manly and represented Australia. The design of the grandstand was by Group GSA architects, project architect Lindsay Henry, and the roof was assembled from Lysaght steel products.⁹⁵

On 6 December 2012 a crowd of 10,000 attended the Manly Council Christmas Choral Concert, mc'd by Andrew Hazzard.⁹⁶

In March 2017, the Save Manly Oval Alliance campaigned for the Oval to be given state heritage listing.⁹⁷ This followed the Manly2015 plan, which proposed having an underground car-park underneath the Oval.

⁹² *Manly Daily* 26 July 2001, p2.

⁹³ *Manly Daily* 13 July 2001, p2.

⁹⁴ *Manly Daily* 14 May 2002, p3.

⁹⁵ *Manly Daily* 16 May 2002, p17.

⁹⁶ *Manly Daily* 8 December 2012, p11.

⁹⁷ *Manly Daily* 25 March 2017, p11.