



**FROM FISHERMEN'S
CAMPSITE TO BIRD
SANCTUARY**



TAYLOR PARK



Torquay
MUSEUM
Without Walls

PUBLISHED IN DECEMBER 2016

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ORIGINALLY SET ASIDE FOR FISHERMEN'S CAMPING



Felix Rosser & his hut

In the centre of Torquay is a parcel of land known as Taylor Park, a legacy from Torquay's past, well before the first land sales of 1886. It is one of a few parcels of land in Torquay that has never been subdivided for public sale. It continues to be Crown Land, now managed by the Great Ocean Road Coastal Committee (GORCC).

One of the earliest inhabitants of the area was Felix Rosser who had been issued a licence for a fisherman's hut on Yellow Bluff as early as 1865 and over time he also erected a couple of fishing huts on the foreshore. As more fishermen came to fish at Zeally Bay the 'Reserve' now known as Taylor Park was the ideal location for their fishing huts or tents and for recreational camping. The reserve comprising five, approximately 5 acre allotments, had not yet been put up for sale. In 1877, Felix applied to purchase some of this land but Andrew White held the grazing licence at the time, so the request was refused. The inspector who came out to review the land holding

reported back to the Lands Department that the land should be put up for sale. The recommendation was not acted upon. Then in 1881 there was a flurry of requests to purchase some of the land. James Follett first asked if any land was available and, despite a negative response, he applied for land anyway. Charles White objected to Follett's application, at the same time putting in his own submission! Over the coming months further applications encouraging a sale arrived at the Lands Department. Follett's application was refused even though he had 49 signatures from fishermen stating they would never use the land. James Follett already owned the adjoining 90 acres (between Darian-Beach Roads, Torquay Rd - The Esplanade) which he used as a 'fishing homestead' it was reported. In one of the objections there was a petition with 13 signatures of fishermen and Geelong residents wanting to use the reserve for camping. In support of not selling the land, South Barwon Shire, as did the Geelong City Town Clerk, wrote to the Lands Department recommending the land be reserved for fishing and camping purposes. In their

wisdom, the Lands Department decided to withhold the land from 'sale, leasing and licensing, except with a fisherman's licence', preventing a monopoly of land ownership and allowing adjoining landholders to access their land.

In 1882, four years before the Puebla (Torquay) township land sales, the 27 acres of the Reserve were gazetted to be withheld from sale. Three years later in 1885, frustrated by the cattle and sheep eating the grass, Felix Rosser, with the support of other fishermen, placed a request to use the reserve so that he could fence the land and protect the grass from cattle and sheep grazing. The animals ate all the grass where the fishermen hung their equipment to dry, and they would eat the fishing nets as well. White and Blundell held the grazing licence so the request was again refused as the Lands Department wanted to ensure that the land was available for all fishermen, not just Felix and a handful of men.

With the popularity of the town growing, in 1885, the township of Puebla was proclaimed, the first land sales



1936 Charles Pratt Photographer
Courtesy State Library Victoria

taking place during September 1886. The land for sale only extended from Bell Street to Anderson Street.

During 1899 James Follett Jnr, claiming to be a fisherman and owning no land in Torquay, gained a permit for a fisherman's licence to build a hut on part of the reserve.

Six years later, when nobody held a grazing lease on the land, Felix once again requested to use the reserve so that he could make use of the grass and wood. Felix also requested to manage the Marl Pit next to his hut (located on Yellow Bluff where the Elephant Walk play equipment is). He offered to fence the reserve at his own expense, plant trees and attend to growing shrubs. His offer also included allowing fishermen to camp there and take sites. The Bailiff heard objections from community members therefore it was suggested that tenders should be called for grazing and removal of Marl. The open tender was gazetted on August 29, 1906 but there were no offers, mainly because there was no fence around the land. A 6-year lease was eventually awarded to Carl Voss twelve months later. Felix had not been happy with the lack of a fence around the land to contain the wandering cattle so he erected his own fence around his Fisherman's Hut, but this fence also encroached onto the allotment now leased to Voss who was responsible for clearing the scrub and fencing the land. Subsequently Voss asked the Lands Department to approach Rosser for him to alter his fence to the correct boundaries. Another obstacle for Carl Voss in fulfilling the obligation of his lease was that the fence would often be pulled down. Carl always suspected Felix Rosser as the culprit.

Needing more recreational activities for visitors to Torquay the Torquay Improvement Association (TIA) approached Carl Voss in April 1908 requesting that the reserve be ploughed and grass sown on a portion of the land for golf links. They wanted to create holes and bunkers and would see to the fencing. With no objections from Carl Voss, the TIA approached the Lands Department with their proposal and asked that the land be gazetted for 'Golf and Recreational' purposes. The Lands Department approved this venture, also giving permission for a club house to be erected providing it could easily be removed.

Carl Voss moved to Germantown in 1911 and wanted release from his lease. Consequently, after approval from the Lands Department, the licence was transferred to the TIA. The golf club and a 3-hole course was completed that year. Games were played by going around the course three times. With the support of South Barwon Shire Council, JW Taylor, as President of the TIA, began pushing the Lands Department to have the golf links proclaimed a reserve.

Originally set apart for the use of fisherman's huts, the Torquay Reserve was once again reviewed for its use. By the end of 1916 the Lands Department was refusing the extension of Ocean Boulevard (The Esplanade) through the reserve because it was intending to subdivide the land for sale. South Barwon Shire Council along with the TIA urged the Lands Department to put the allotments at Point Danger up for sale first because that area was already subdivided. Further encouraging the Lands Department to reconsider subdividing the land, South Barwon Council offered to buy the land so that it could stay as a reserve. After a lot of discussion and consultation, in 1917 when

the reserve was gazetted to be temporarily reserved from sale, South Barwon Council recommended that the land be managed by the Torquay Reserve Trustees, and the Lands Department agreed to the recommendation

By Christmas 1920 a new 9-hole course was developed in front of the Palace Hotel with a new committee and club also established. Bowling was popular at the Melba Guest House so it was decided on 10th January 1924 to form the Torquay Bowls Club on the Reserve where the old golf links were. Carl Voss was contracted to build the green and club house.

The name TAYLOR PARK came about in 1921 just before the death of John William Taylor who had worked very hard for the development of Torquay. He was one of the first trustees of Torquay Reserves and Parks being appointed in 1893. John William was chairperson of the Trustees and also President of the TIA at a crucial time when the Lands Department had to be convinced by him



TAYLOR PARK c 1920

View of Taylor Park from the front veranah of 'Happy Days'.
Courtesy Andrew Jones

to maintain the land as a public reserve and not subdivide the land for sale. John William also planted gums and pines in a series of straight lines across the park and organised nurserymen to propose other vegetation for planting.

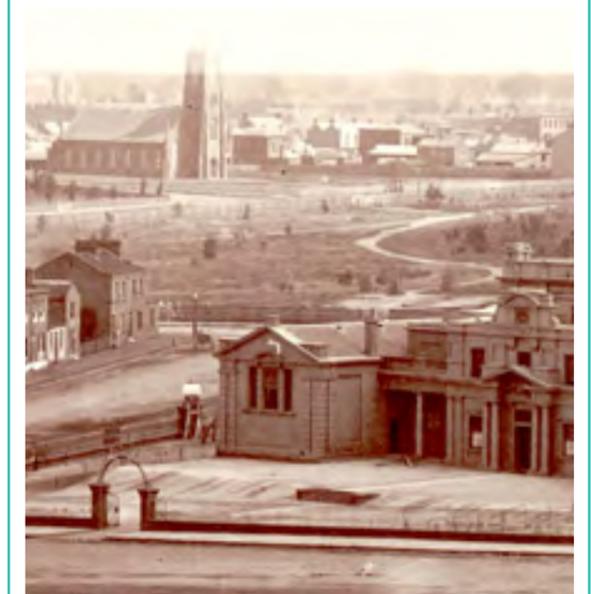
In 1935 when J.C. Taylor & Sons had the contract to build the College of Surgeons for the British Medical Association in Spring Street Melbourne, Alan Taylor (EJ Taylor's son) was the site manager. This College was built on the site of the Model School, built in 1852. As contractor for the site, surplus materials from the demolition belonged to the contractor. EJ Taylor liked the cast iron fence and the two gates with their blue stone gate pillars. He didn't want to see them wrecked, so he dismantled them stone by stone and had them re-erected on The Esplanade entrances to Taylor Park. EJ had always hoped that the boundary of the

MODEL SCHOOL

FIRST VICTORIAN STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL

DEMOLISHED IN 1935 BY J. C. TAYLOR & SONS

The Model and Training School had been established in Spring Street during 1852. Renamed in 1872, the Central Common School No. 391, the Model School became the first Victorian state secondary school in 1905 to be known then as the Melbourne Continuation School. When the boys were moved to new premises in 1927, they became known as Melbourne Boys High School. Between 1931 and 1934, the girls moved firstly to a section of Government House, then they used a section of King Street Central School and finally to their own new premises in Albert Park renaming the school as MacRobertson Girls' High School.



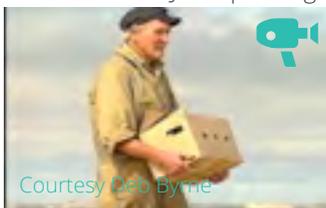
1852

park would be fenced up to the blue stone gate posts.

During WW2 a unit of Engineers from the 10th Field Regiment (Artillery) were camped at Taylor Park. They constructed gun emplacements, barbed wire barriers and concrete objects on the beach to impede any invading force.

With the growth of natural habitat for birds, Taylor Park, under 'The Game Acts' was proclaimed a sanctuary for native game in 1950.

After retiring from the building trade and serving many years as an official of the Building Worker's Industrial union and later President of the Geelong Trades Hall Council, Jack O'Mara moved to Torquay in the 1970s. He and his wife spent much of their time caring for native birds. Backed by Torquay Improvement Association, Jack O'Mara (committee member 1974 - 76) suggested to the Trustees in March 1974, that a man-made pond be built to lure more species of birds. The Taylor family liked the idea of a memorial pool dedicated to the many family members who had been very active in the town and were prepared to donate funds and arrange construction. The pond was completed in 1976 with the help of some government funding and has become home to many varieties of birds as well as a source of enjoyment and relaxation to many over the years. Jack had become known as the 'bird man' and caught the attention of the national television program *A Current Affair* hosted by Jana Wendt with the work he was doing saving penguins. Watch on our website Jack speaking with Debbie Byrne about the



penguin problem

www.torquayhistory.com/jack-omara-bird-man-of-torquay

During 1974 there was much discussion about the ownership and use of Taylor Park. The Torquay Improvement Association had been looking for a site to develop a swimming pool, and not knowing who owned the land upon which Taylor Park is situated made enquiries sparking speculation and concern about the retention of the land as a recreation reserve and the potential subdivision of the allotments. The outcries prompted Mr. A. Bumpstead, Secretary of the TIA to write to the *Geelong Advertiser* stating that Taylor

Park was Crown Land. The article was followed up by J.A. Taylor writing a brief history of Torquay for the *Geelong Advertiser* and clarifying that his grandfather John William Taylor never owned the land. Later that year the Lands Department revoked 1 ha of the 1917 order to recognise the bowling club area.

In 1989 the park was under threat of development again. A South Barwon Shire Councillor had suggested that the council look at earning revenue from having the land sold (which couldn't happen because the land never belonged to the shire). Consequently, a volunteer group, Friends of Taylor Park, was formed to fight any action that could jeopardise the existence of the park. This small group, in partnership with the Great Ocean Road Coast Committee, has kept up the legacy of John William Taylor by maintaining the park through weed eradication and revegetation so that others can use the park for their walking pleasure, picnics and barbecues. Over time many of the pines carefully planted by JW Taylor have been removed and revegetated with indigenous plants. The pond is enjoyed by many as they watch the birds attracted to the park.

Today the Crown Land status of Taylor Park is Temporarily Reserved for Park and Recreation (1974). The Bowling Green status is Temporary Reserved for Public Purposes (2003).

Sources:

- Ferguson, J.M., In Defence of the Surf Coast – 1939 - 45, "Investigator" 2000 p 82 - 93
- Geelong Advertiser
- Lands Department correspondence files
- TIA (1989) One Hundred Years – a short history
- Trustees Torquay Parks and Reserve minutes
- Victorian Government Gazette [📄](#)

**FRIENDS OF
TAYLOR PARK**

MEET 10:00 AM BEHIND BOWLS CLUB

2ND SATURDAY OF MONTHS FEB - DEC

BRING HAND TOOLS, GLOVES & WEATHER PROTECTION. WORK FINISHES AT 12 NOON WITH A CUPPA AROUND THE TABLE.