

'WALLY TEW RESERVE'

Since 1882, when the Ferntree Gully Cricket Club; the oldest operating community group in Knox was established, organised sport has been a big factor in the recreational activities of those whose reside within the boundaries of the City of Knox and its predecessor; the Shire of Ferntree Gully (before 1964).

Public recreation was first mooted in March 1893 when the Shire's Medical Officer; Dr. Donald Simpson M.D., (Chairman) and Robert Minns (Secretary) united with five other leading Ferntree Gully identities to form the Ferntree Gully Recreation Reserve Co. Ltd., responding to a request from Ferntree Gully Cricket Club Secretary; James Crawford. It was their intention to raise an amount exceeding £250 for the purposes of constructing Ferntree Gully's first Public Reserve. On the 29th March, 1895, a Shareholders' Register, complete with the names and occupations of 34 Shire ratepayers was submitted to the State Government by the Shire Auditors and the company representatives set about searching for a suitable land holding.

Unfortunately, the telling nature of the 1890's depression and ultimately the collapse of the private Banking system in Victoria had an immediate effect on the State and in particular on the Shire, who had just borrowed heavily to build its own Shire Hall. The Shire was in heavy debt and many of the residents, who had committed to the Company, were also in a similar position. The company floundered and any activities towards forming a Public Reserve went into abeyance for almost another 20 years.

After many failed attempts in between, finally in 1909, serving Ferntree Gully Shire, Cricket, Football and Tennis Club President (he held all four Presidential positions at once!); Henry Monk, led a strong campaign to rekindle the development of a Public Reserve. This time the financial situation of the Shire was stronger, the banking laws had changed for the better and the Shire purchased outright 9 acres of Crown Land that had previously been identified as appropriate, alongside Ferny Creek. For the next three years works were undertaken by the Shire and the three clubs: clearing and grubbing trees, fencing, levelling and planting the surface to create a playing field and courts from what had previously been flood prone and lightly timbered pasture.

In December of 1911, Monk directed a working party that dismantled the playing pavilion that had long served as the Cricket and Football Club's home base, in its location at the rear of the Ferntree Gully 'Middle' Hotel. It was moved board by board and stump by stump using log rolls and bullock dray across the creek. This was done at a time before Lysterfield Road (now Brenock Park Drive) was built! He then had it re-erected and improved, with a second tier open air grandstand added and it became the pavilion and new 'home' base for the local Cricket and Football clubs.

On the 25th May, 1912, the first Public Recreation Reserve in the Shire of Ferntree Gully was formally opened with much fanfare and entertainment at a gala Sports and Football Day, which included cycling and foot running races as well as novelty events, which were very popular at the time. Seven years went by with access to the Reserve only possible over one of two wooden footbridges, until in 1919, a returned World War 1 servicemen's employment project saw Lysterfield Road built and vehicle access to the Reserve became possible for the first time.

In 1949 another 8 lots were added to the Reserve which saw it stretch further along Ferny Creek to almost the junction of Glenfern Road and Main Road (now Burwood Highway) taking in all the land that now also serves as the current base for the Ferntree Gully Community Centre and the Knox Environment Society.

In the late 1970's the Country Roads Board (CRB) entertained the idea of straightening Burwood Highway. This would have cut a swathe through the original Reserve, so Ward Councillor, ex Council President and long term Ferntree Gully resident; Wally Tew, convinced the Council to overhaul the Shire Tip site on Lysterfield Road to create another oval as an alternative playing venue. The Council partnered with the Cricket & Football Clubs' and created the new Oval and the construction of the magnificent two story 'W.H. Tew Pavilion', named in Wal's honour after he had led the charge to keep the Reserve and the Cricket and Football club on the present site (the CRB never straightened Burwood Highway and both ovals remain today!)

The Council fully funded the oval construction and in turn funded 1/3 of the cost of the new pavilion. The remaining amount for the construction of the pavilion was raised via a Cricket & Football Club Cooperative which secured promised funding of \$65,000 on generating \$6,500. Most of \$6,500 was raised in one night expressly set aside by the Clubs for the purpose, at a joint Cricket Club and Football Club Reunion function held in the old Ferntree Gully Technical School Hall.

The Cooperative then borrowed another \$100,000, which was paid back over the next 10 – 12 years by the two clubs. These funds were augmented by the outright sale to the Council (and in turn now leased to Scouts Victoria) of the Club owned 'old' Pavilion. It had been built by the two Clubs in 1962 after the original 1912 wooden Pavilion burnt down in dubious circumstances, in August 1959. Overall the new building works cost \$300,000, which in 1980 was a significant investment by the Clubs and Council. Almost four decades later this amount seems minimal, and would not compare to the value of the property and the asset base it now provides for the Clubs, the Council and the local residents.

In 2010, with the new Oval and Pavilion celebrating its 30th Anniversary, the clubs successfully lobbied the Council to have the name altered from its original 'Ferntree Gully Recreation Reserve' to 'Wally Tew Reserve' in honour of the man who did so much in his 80+ year association with the area and in particular with the two major tenant clubs.

Walter Harry Tew M.B.E. (b 18/5/1915, d 17/7/2007) served as the Knox Shire's last Mayor after it was formed in 1963 and as the first Mayor when Knox was declared a City in 1969. He spent almost his entire life living in Ferntree Gully (he moved to the area as a 7 year old in 1922). He was a huge figure in the history of both the Cricket and Football Clubs and has left a legacy of service to them and the wider community unrivalled in many aspects of normal life. He served as a Ward Councillor for over 30 years, was Mayor of Knox four times, received an M.B.E. for his service to the community and truly deserves the honour of having the oldest Public Reserve in the municipality named after him – in over 100 years it would be hard to find another person who contributed as much...