

CENTRAL PARK



Central Park Stawell



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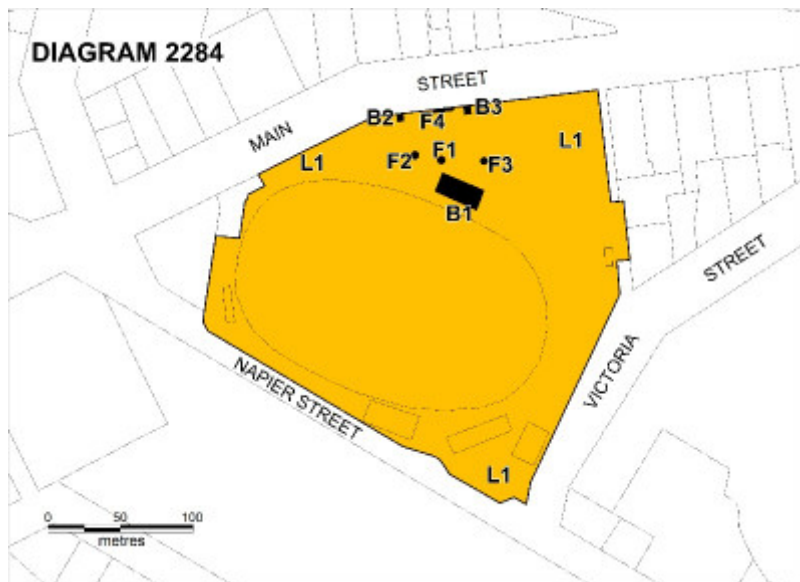
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Central Park Stawell 28 Apr
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central park revised.jpg

Location

10-18 MAIN STREET STAWELL, NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

Municipality

NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2284

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO33

VHR Registration

August 11, 2011

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

Central Park at Stawell is located near the centre of Stawell and comprises a sports oval, a timber grandstand and other buildings and a number of memorials, set amidst ornamental gardens and lawns. The site was used from the 1860s by the local gold miners as a cricket ground, but is best known as the site of the Stawell Gift, Australia's oldest, richest and most prestigious short-distance footrace. The origins of this race lie in the popular sports meetings organised as recreation by the miners and other community groups from the early 1870s. The Stawell Athletics Club was formed in 1877 and held its first meeting on Easter Saturday 1878 at the botanical reserve. The main event was the Easter Gift, run over a distance of 130 yards (118.9 metres) with a first prize of £20. The third meeting in 1880 had expanded to a two day event and its popularity, and the prize money, continued to grow. By 1884 the Gift had become an international event, with runners from around Australia competing against those from Europe and America. In 1898 the Easter meeting was held for the first time at Central Park, where a new timber grandstand was built, designed by the Melbourne architects Kempson & Conolly. The Memorial Gates, made by the local foundry of Kay & Company, were added in 1903, in memory of the fifty-seven Stawell men who volunteered to serve in the Boer War. The Stawell Gift meeting has been held at Central Park every Easter since 1899, apart from the war years of 1942-5. It has grown to a three-day event, culminating in the Stawell Gift race, a handicap race now (since 1973) of 120 metres, with a first prize in 2011 of \$40,000.

Central Park is a reserve of about 7 hectares with views south towards the Grampians. It comprises a grassed sports ground, elaborate cast iron memorial entrance gates supported by masonry pillars, two brick ticket offices, an old timber grandstand and two other newer brick stands, several memorials to past runners and large open areas, including ornamental gardens and lawns. The central feature is the sports oval, around which is a diverse range of mature and semi-mature trees, including both native and exotic species. Between the grandstand and Main Street is a small ornamental rose garden, enclosed by a thick hedge and with a memorial sundial and stone seat. The timber grandstand has a corrugated iron roof supported by timber roof trusses and timber columns and has tiered timber seating. The access stairs have been replaced but to the same configuration as the original. In the ground floor area below are refreshment and change rooms.

How is it significant?

Central Park at Stawell is of historical, architectural and social significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Central Park is historically significant for its long association with the Stawell Gift, Australia's oldest, richest and most prestigious short-distance footrace, which has been held at Stawell every Easter since 1878 (apart from the war years of 1942-45), and at Central Park since 1898. The Gift reflects the importance of athletics events as a recreational activity in the nineteenth century, and the continuing popularity of footracing as a professional sporting event since then. Central Park is associated with the gold mining origins of the town of Stawell, having been used by the miners as a cricket ground as early as the 1860s, and the origin of the Gift lies in the running races held by the Stawell Miners' Association from 1873.

The grandstand at Central Park is of architectural significance as a rare example of a Federation period timber grandstand, and is typical of the era with its timber columns, roof trusses and balustrading and its half-hipped roof.

Central Park is of social significance as the site of the running of the Stawell Gift, one of Australia's greatest sporting events.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage

Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. **General Conditions:** 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. **General Conditions:** 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. **Note:** A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. **General Conditions:** 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. **General Conditions:** 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. **Signage and Site Interpretation :** The following Signage and Site Interpretation activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) signage and site interpretation activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures; b) the erection of non-illuminated signage for the purpose of ensuring public safety or to assist in the interpretation of the heritage significance of the place or object and which will not adversely affect significant fabric including landscape or archaeological features of the place or obstruct significant views of and from heritage values or items; c) signage and site interpretation products must be located and be of a suitable size so as not to obscure or damage significant fabric of the place; d) signage and site interpretation products must be able to be later removed without causing damage to the significant fabric of the place; **Note:** The development of signage and site interpretation products must be consistent in the use of format, text, logos, themes and other display materials. **Note:** Where possible, the signage and interpretation material should be consistent with other schemes developed on similar or associated sites. It may be necessary to consult with land managers and other stakeholders concerning existing schemes and strategies for signage and site interpretation. **Minor Works :** **Note:** Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted. **Landscape maintenance:**

The process of gardening, including mowing, hedge clipping, bedding displays, removal of dead plants and replanting the same species or cultivar, disease and weed control, and maintenance to care for existing plants.

Removal of dead or dangerous trees if the tree is an immediate risk of personal or damage to property

Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; *Pruning of amenity trees* AS 4373

Replanting to maintain the landscape character or planting theme identified in the Statement of Significance

Repairs, conservation and maintenance to hard landscape elements, buildings, structures, sculptures, fountains, monuments, ornaments, roads and paths, edges, fences and gates, drainage and irrigation systems

Non-commercial signage, lighting, security, fire safety and other safety requirements, provided no structural building occurs.

Repainting in the same colour of previously painted surfaces

Removal of plants listed as noxious weeds in the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*

Non-structural works and installation, removal or replacement of garden watering and drainage systems that occur at a distance greater than 5 metres from the canopy edge of a significant tree, plant or hedge, (structural works may require a permit if still on the registered land)

Pruning or removal of trees in accordance with the *Code of Practice for Powerline Clearance[Vegetation] 1996*, unless they are identified as significant

Removal of vegetation to maintain fire safety and to conserve significant buildings and structures

Removal of (intrusive) plants not identified in the registration or management report

Theme

6. Building towns cities and the garden state 8. Building community life 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates 1854,

Heritage Act Categories Registered place,

Hermes Number 2048

Property Number

History

[From Shire of Northern Grampians Stage 2 Heritage Study, 2004]

The large number of British diggers at the Pleasant Creek (Stawell) gold diggings meant that cricket was a popular recreational activity, and the site of Central Park was gazetted as a cricket ground in the 1860s. The site was chosen because the land was fairly flat and it was close to the diggings. The first matches were played against teams from the Ararat diggings, and later against those from the Landsborough, Deep Lead and other nearby diggings. The Borough Council built a picket fence around the ground in 1869, but in 1874 the visiting English cricket team, led by W G Grace, complained the ground was too small, and played the local team at the botanical reserve instead.

Central Park is famous as the site of the running of the Stawell Gift, one of Victoria's most well-known athletic events. Its origins lay in the popularity of sports meetings as recreation in the nineteenth century, and specifically in the weekend events organised for their relaxation by the local gold miners. The earliest organised meetings in the town were held by the Stawell Miners' Association from 1873, but local sports events were also organised by the Easter Fete Committee, the Fire Brigade, the Free Library and some Friendly Societies.

The Stawell Athletic Club formed in 1877, with the recommendation that an athletic meeting be held annually on Easter Saturday. It held its first meeting at the botanical reserve on Easter Saturday 1878, with £110 in prize money which attracted 200 entries and a crowd of 2000. The first prize for the Easter Gift, a 130 yard foot race,

was £20, second was £3 and third £1. There were twelve events, including 150 yard, 220 yard, 600 yard, and 3 mile events, as well as an Old Men's Race (first and second prizes were a pig, third prize a sheep), a Sack Hurdle Race, vaulting and high jumping. The town celebrated the event with a carnival complete with sideshows and merry-go-rounds. For the second meeting, which was held at the show grounds, the total prize money was increased to £152, with the Gift receiving £50. The third meeting, held again at the botanical reserve, was held over two days, on Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, and it was to continue as a meeting of at least two days. A small profit was made by the club in each year.

The Stawell Gift became an international event in 1884, when the amateur champion of Ireland, Tom Malone, competed, though he was disqualified for three false starts. An English competitor won in 1886 and an American in 1899. In 1911, when professional running underwent a boom in popularity, a record crowd of 8,500 saw two Australian champions and the United States Champion compete.

The annual event was held at the botanical reserve until 1898, but the club struggled financially during the 1890s and in 1898 the committee made the decision to hold that year's meeting at Central Park, which had been declared a public park in 1894 and was much closer to the town. A good profit was made that year, which helped to reinvigorate the event.

Since then the Stawell Gift has been held every Easter, apart from four years from 1942-45 during WWII, and has become Australia's premier short-distance professional running race. The event brought prestige to the town and injected much-needed income, especially during the 1930s depression.

The presence of bookmakers and betting on the races was recorded for the first time at the 1881 meeting, and became an important part of the events, with forty bookmakers operating in 1946 on the lawns under the poplar trees.

In 1973 all races at the meeting went metric, with the Gift becoming a 120 metre race rather than 130 yards. A Women's Gift has run since 1989.

The race is run on a grass track, with competitors handicapped according to their form, and each competitor 'marked' or given a head start, by between 0 metres and 10 metres to theoretically reach the finish line at the same time.

The Stawell Gift by 2011 had grown into a professional footracing meeting with sixty-six events over three competition days, culminating in the Stawell Gift race, which is now the most prestigious footrace in Australia, with a first prize of \$40,000 and which is televised live around Australia. In all, more than \$100,000 of prize money was competed for over the weekend, with much more working its way through the bookies ring.

The grandstand

The site for a grandstand was chosen in December 1898, when the first Stawell Gift was held in Central Park, and was designed by the Melbourne architects Kempson & Conolly. It was built in three months by the Stawell builder A H Barnes at a cost of £593, and was completed in time for the 1899 Easter meeting.

Restoration works were undertaken in 1990, which were officially opened by the Premier Joan Kirner at the Easter meeting in 1991.

Memorial gates

These were the subject of a design competition, which received forty entries and was won by the Stawell Foundry of Messrs Kay & Company, as a memorial to the fifty-seven Stawell men who volunteered to serve in the Boer War between 1899 and 1902. The gates were unveiled in 1903 by the then Premier W H Irvine. They consist of decorative wrought iron gates supported by solid masonry piers, and provide an impressive entry to the park.

The gardens

The ornamental gardens between Main Street and the oval have been a feature of Central Park since it was established in the 1890s. The gardens are enclosed by a thick hedge which creates a visual barrier, and comprises a series of garden beds with concrete paths between, with a sundial and a stone seat to the memory of Walter C Simmons on the eastern side.

Other memorials

Other memorials near the entrance to Central Park are: a simple stone plinth with a brass plaque erected in 1986 and dedicated to all past runners; and a more elaborate granite memorial dedicated to Jack Donaldson (1886-1933), known as 'the Blue Streak', who competed several times in the Gift but never won, despite being, according to the plaque, a 'World's Professional Sprint Champion Runner'.

Main Street ticket offices

On either side of the main gates are ticket offices, small brick buildings with terracotta tiled roofs. They appear to have been built in the 1920s or 1930s.

Central Park continues to be used as Stawell's premier sports and recreation venue, used by the community and by the Stawell Athletic Club, Football Club and Netball Club, and by the Grampians Cricket Association cricket throughout the year.

The Park is managed by the Northern Grampians Shire Council, which commissioned a master plan for the site in 1990 from Stratcorp Consulting.

Assessment Against Criteria

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

Central Park is historically significant for its long association with the Stawell Gift, Australia's oldest, richest and most prestigious short-distance footrace, which has been held at Stawell every Easter since 1878 (apart from the war years of 1942-45), and at Central Park since 1898. The Gift reflects the importance of athletics events as a recreational activity in the nineteenth century, and the continuing popularity of footracing as a professional sporting event since then. Central Park is associated with the gold mining origins of the town of Stawell, having been used by the miners as a cricket ground as early as the 1860s, and the origin of the Gift lies in the running races held by the Stawell Miners' Association from 1873.

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

The grandstand at Central Park is of architectural significance as a rare example of a Federation period timber grandstand, and is typical of the era with its timber columns, roof trusses and balustrading and its half-hipped roof.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

Central Park is of social significance to Victorians as the site of the running of the Stawell Gift, one of Australia's greatest sporting events.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Plaque Citation

This is the site of the Stawell Gift, one of Australia's greatest sporting events, held in Stawell every Easter since 1878 and at Central Park since 1898. The rare Federation period timber grandstand was built in 1898.

Extent of Registration

1. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2284 held by the Executive Director being all of Crown Allotments 11, 12, 12A, 13A, 20, 21 24A and part of Crown Allotment 24, Section 24, Parish of Stawell, and all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 702590, Lot 1 on Title Plan 606857, Lot 1 on Title Plan 376352, Lot 1 on Title Plan 226732 and Lot 1 on Title Plan 941620.

2. All of the buildings and features marked as follows on Diagram 2284 held by the Executive Director:

B1 Grandstand
B2 & B3 Ticket booths
F1 Memorial to Jack Donaldson
F2 Memorial to past runners
F3 Sundial and stone seat
F4 Gates

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>