

REF0020



J. FOGGIE
UPPER DIAMOND CREEK
OFFICE OF EVELYN OBSERVER
KANGAROO GROUND (1872-1914)

REF 405



*Yarra Glen and Lilydale Hunt Club,
1912 L-R Cecil Towt, Mac Towt, Fred
Lithgow (Master), Charlie White, Flora
White, Leo Poyner (Whip), Don White,
Jack White, unknown.
Courtesy Alma White*

and the hotel — this led to further challenges. Soon its cricket and football teams were becoming a force to be reckoned with — the name they chose, the 'Dahlia's', giving them added incentive to demonstrate they were made of sterner stuff.

Hilly Christmas Hills, with barely a level piece of land large enough to accommodate a traditional oval, opted instead for a rifle range in the gully of Five Mile Creek. Later, when they burnt down their Mechanic's Institute and fought amongst themselves as to where the new one ought be, they chose the old levelled-out site of their former hall as the location for their tennis club. Not to be outdone, those who had disagreed so bitterly over the siting of the hall established an opposition tennis club, fittingly enough, on a levelled out site alongside their war memorial.²

At Kangaroo Ground, the interaction between terrain and community was even more clearly defined. Its farmers were perfectly convinced that their land was for agriculture alone. Not for them the English village green, nor the Irishman's passion for a wager on a foot-race. Life for them centred instead on kirk and school and barn. Better to compete as to who might grow the finest ear of corn than who could sprint the fastest.³

The result was that no land was ever set aside specifically for sport until quite recent times. Instead, each farmer, in turn, threw open an unused paddock whenever national sentiment required a day be set aside for diversions of a more frivolous nature. Being Scottish, the date they chose was of course New Year. Hogmanay must not be allowed to pass without some communal gathering of the clan. Later, their other Sports Day was very sensibly made to fit neatly the niche between the end of harvest and the start of serious ploughing.

In the early phase, conviviality involved a *Grand Ball* in one of the district's barns, followed by a deal of *First Footing* by the young fellows of the clan. By the 1880s it included, also, a day of picnic races. A popular venue for

these was Andrew's Paddock on the banks of the Yarra (at the end of Oxley Road in the Bend of Islands). When James Andrews sold his riverside paddock to James Foggie, a popular local insurance agent with the *Observer*, the tradition continued.

When Foggie married, in 1894, his friends decided the newly-weds must have a 'tin kettleing'.⁴ Foggie, hearing what was in the air, let it be known that he wanted it put off for a while. However, his friends, motivated, no doubt entirely by affection and *bonhomie*, decided the occasion must not be allowed to wait.

On the chosen evening, a large gathering of them silently grouped around the Foggie home by the river, and in traditional fashion began beating their pots and pans with the expectation to being welcomed in and entertained.

Much to their dismay, the Foggies refused all hospitality and sent them packing. A month later, there appeared, in the columns of the *Evelyn Observer*, a clarification of the imbroglio from James Foggie, himself. He explained that on the night in question he and his wife had been indisposed. Regardless, people had gathered:

... the idea was to be treated with unlimited beer, whisky and half crowns. They did not seem to relish my wholesome treatment, and departed vowing vengeance in the shape of a boycott on me which however troubles me little...⁵

That of course saw the end of New Year picnics on the Yarra. The following year they were held on Andrew White's *Garden Hill* property, although, as the *Observer* put it, 'the sparkling river and boating was missed.' In subsequent years, the day — perhaps best described, early, as picnic races, and later as athletic carnivals — alternated between White's *Garden Hill*, McAdam's *Mains Hill*, and Charlton's *Cunis Nillen* farm.

Cricket, when played at all, was either on what was described in the *Observer* as 'a battlefield lent by James Johnston', or in Charlton's paddock behind the Kangaroo Ground Hotel. Eventually, it all became too much for Harris of the *Observer* who (perhaps motivated by Australia's approaching nationhood), remarked in his editorial of 30 March 1900:

The long-felt want at Kangaroo Ground is undoubtedly a recreation reserve. We have no reserve whatever here and in this we are far behind many poorer and less populated districts. For our cricket ground and for a rendezvous for sports and picnics we have to depend upon the humour of private individuals.

The appeal fell on deaf ears. Still none appeared willing to donate land for such a trivial cause. Nevertheless, sport was at last beginning to come to the fore in the work-a-day lives of the Kangaroo Ground farmers.

For example, it was about this time that E.H. Cameron first offered the Cameron Trophy to promote the game of cricket. Eventually Harris took the initiative, too, and organized the district's first tennis club.

On Friday last, about 30 young people assembled at the Rosebank Tennis Club at Kangaroo Ground to celebrate the opening of the court. Mr Harris, President of the club, performed the opening ceremony... after which afternoon tea was served on the verandah of Mr Cameron's residence by a bevy of fair ladies whose charms added considerably to the success...⁶

It was not nearly too soon. Eltham already had its tennis club, and soon after George Coutie launched his Summer Hill Tennis Club on a court between Kangaroo Ground and Panton Hill.

The Rosebank Club appears to have functioned a number of years before going into decline. Then, on 19 October 1920 (with Colin Bell in the chair),

THE
River Pic-Nic
 Will be held on
NEW YEAR'S DAY
 AT
Andrew's Paddock, R. Yarra
 Meet at Harkness' Corner at TEN a.m.
BOATING, SWINGING, GAMES, &c
 Music on the ground.
 Hot Water Provided.
 Bring good temper and your own traps.
A DANCE
 In the Hall, Kangaroo Ground, in the evening.
 J. H. FOGGIE, Hon. Sec.

The Kangaroo Ground Tennis Clubs