

Albert Park Protection League

I know nothing of the politics involved,

and little enough about landscaping. I speak only as someone concerned with the amenities & appearance of our city.

I don't wish to dwell on the present state of the park. There's no need to.

In any case, big areas of it are beyond criticism. However, they are not beyond redemption, and I wish to be constructive.

The problems of the park are, as I see it, primarily architectural — that is, it is most beautiful in the north-east corner where the golf links are, where the trees are thickest and the buildings are rare; and it is most distressing in the diagonally opposite corner where there is practically no planting, merely scruffy grass, and a great number of buildings. In other parts the trees and buildings compete with each other, to the detriment of the former — the trees — which should claim priority in a park, as even an architect must admit.

The solution to all the problems seems to me to start with a plan — as all solutions always do, to architects.

I am not aware if the park already has a master plan, but if it has I can only assume that it has been lost, or changed at intervals, or in any event not followed very conscientiously.

I suggest that the first essential is the preparation of a map of Albert Park showing the existing conditions. On this there should be laid a master plan. The ultimate aim should be to make the south, west, and north sides as beautiful as the eastern golf links side is now.

If that seems a wild dream, I must admit that it will cost some money and take some time, but it is certainly not impossible.

The master plan would have to take into consideration three elements: buildings, planting, and furniture.

Under the first heading it is clear enough to anyone that the park is at present crowded with a motley selection of unloved-looking sheds and other miscellaneous structures. More, probably, than any other park in Australia. Whether these are good or bad individually is not the question. The fact is that there is no uniformity. The materials range from cement-render, to timber, to bricks of many shades and hues — often all on the one building.

Some of the shabbier buildings clearly should go. I think that this is the final and only solution for the army huts in the south, and a similar ruthless approach should surely be made to the oldest of the public-lavatory blocks, *at the very least.*

For the rest I have a suggestion which will possibly sound too simplistic. Nevertheless, I put it forward seriously: I recommend that all other structures that cannot, for political or economic reasons, be removed immediately should be painted out in some inoffensive soft neutral colour such as olive green. When I say paint out, I really mean that they should be covered with protective colouring like a chameleon — that means painting in one colour every element, including bricks, and roofs, and barge boards, and windows <sup>frames</sup>. Certainly this would mean an additional maintenance problem, but modern paints last ten years or so and the cost would be minimal compared with the rebuilding that really is called for.

If you question this suggestion, thinking that it might lead to an extremely dull uniformity, I recommend that you look again at the present motley collection of buildings and see if you don't agree that the only acceptable ones are the oldest. These old ones usually have obsolete neo-classic mouldings on them, and are cracking a bit at the seams. One even has "out Menzies" still clearly visible in letters two feet high on one side.

Nevertheless the older buildings are acceptable, because they were done in a grey cement which has darkened and softened over the years and has blended with the trees and shrubs.

The one exception, <sup>(in parenthesis)</sup> that I think I must mention <sup>A</sup> to this recommendation of protective, concealing colouring, is the one historic building in the park. It is in the north east corner, and anyway I don't imagine that it comes under the authority of the park. It is MacRobertson Girls' High School, which was built in 1934 and was in truth one of the very first modern buildings in all Australia. I think we could leave it in its yellow, ~~red~~ and blue bricks.

The second element to be included in the master plan is, of course, the planting. I realise that there may be considerable problems in caring for trees and shrubs in conditions of salty winds and rough handling. Nevertheless, the object of the master plan should be to build greatly the number of trees in the areas which are now bare.

I cannot <sup>understand</sup> ~~explain~~ or imagine why there are no trees at all over most of the ground west of Aughtie Drive.

Admittedly this area is largely occupied by sportsgrounds, but there is plenty of room for trees between the ovals.

I cannot explain why healthy trees are pollarded down to trunks and tufts of leaves. In some places the old suburban explanation applies: they are underneath wires. But in other places there is no need at all. Some are out in the open — for instance, those on the west side of Aughtie Drive. I can see no reason why they should be made symmetrical with those on the east side which are underneath wires (assuming that this is sufficient reason for sawing trees off level at ten feet — which does not seem to be necessary in other countries of this world).

The third element which the master plan should direct and control, is, as I mentioned, the furniture. By this I mean all the minor man-made elements which are necessary in a park, such as fencing and seats and rubbish bins and notice boards. There is at present no apparent uniformity nor even any desire for a design theme running through these elements. Even in the beautiful golf links area the protective wire mesh screens and the cable fence on Queens Road are far from new or handsome.

Other areas of the park are furnished with the kind of benches which I thought had at last gone out of fashion — in fact have, I believe, gone out everywhere else — their planks are painted in the multi-colour style: blue, yellow and red alternately. There would be no cost problem in adopting some daring new policy here — such as deciding to paint all the planks in just one colour, like white.

In short, the three constructive suggestions <sup>which</sup> I have to make are: to plan, to plant, and to paint.