

Carss Park

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The Gameygal (Kameygal) clan, members of the Dharug language group, originally inhabited the area now known as Carss Park, on the foreshores of Kogarah Bay. After white settlement of the Sydney Harbour region, the area was slow to develop and remained, until the early twentieth century, a rural farming and bushland community. However, when the first auction of land on the Carss Bush Estate took place on 26 January 1924 amidst great fanfare, development of the area got a foothold.

Jonathon Croft purchased land in the area now known as Carss Park from the Crown in 1854 for £123. The land changed hands several times before being acquired in 1863 by William Carss, for whom the area is named.

William Carss and his family moved to the property where they built their home, Carss Cottage, one of the oldest properties in the district. Today Carss Cottage is the museum for the Kogarah Historical Society.

Carss was a Scot, who migrated to Australia with his wife, Helen, in 1831. He became prominent in the colony as a cabinetmaker and licensed victualler. Together they had five children in Australia – three daughters – Elizabeth Maria, Mary Neilson and Anne, and a son, James. Another child was stillborn.

After the death of the last of Carss's children in 1917, the property was released to the trustees of the Sydney Sailors' Home for the use and benefit of that institution.

At the time, the surrounding area was a rural community of small, family-owned, mixed farms, containing a variety of animals and orchards of fruit trees and vines. The surrounding countryside was mostly bushy and covered with forests. But this idyllic setting was under threat.

Rumours circulated that it was likely the Carss Estate would be sold to developers. The thought of this happening galvanized the local member of state parliament, Thomas Ley, to make representations to the state government for it to be purchased as a public park. The local community, advised that the government could not provide funds, were forced into action. Spurred on by Harald Coxhead, who later became the park's first resident ranger, the Blakehurst Progress Association was formed in April 1921. They too approached the state government, but were unsuccessful, so they approached Kogarah Council. Despite Council passing resolutions to look into the matter, most of 1922 passed without progress. The Association's next move was to support candidates in the municipal elections in December 1922. Three candidates in support of

the cause were successful at these elections, and with the support of other aldermen set about achieving their goal of purchasing the Carss Bush Estate.

By 30 April 1923 negotiations with the Sydney Sailors' Home had been completed. Kogarah Council had reached agreement to purchase the entire Carss Estate for £12,000, just over £100 per acre. A compromise was reached, whereby Council was to dedicate a portion of the land as a park for the public and subdivide and sell the remainder.

Thomas Ley, by then New South Wales Minister for Justice, performed the opening ceremony of the dedication of 50 acres (20.2 hectares) of public park on 26 January 1924. This was followed by the auction of 374 homesites. In the minutes of Kogarah Municipal Council of 4 February 1924, it was stated that 294 lots were sold for £33,800. With an eye to the future, special conditions of the sale stated that all buildings were to be of brick or stone, at a cost of not less than £600 for each main building, and with roofs made of tile or slate.

However, the idea that so many sales were made at the auction on 26 January 1924 is not borne out by later events, for many sales lapsed, especially during the Depression years. The first sale recorded as completed was on 27 October 1924 when Lot 354 (19 Bunyala Street) was transferred to the purchaser. By April 1929 a total of 154 lots had been transferred to purchasers. This number had increased to 254 by August 1937, but it took many years to sell the entire estate with some lots not sold until 1961.

The residential suburb of Carss Park is a rare example of a garden suburb development undertaken by a local council in the interwar years. Carss Cottage is of outstanding cultural significance and is classified in the register of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) and a permanent conservation order on it was gazetted on 27 June 1988. Carss Bush Park is also classified and today is a valuable recreation area with its tidal pool, sandstone walls and remnants of Australian vegetation predating European settlement.

References

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