



## A modern history of Blackburn Lake Sanctuary

- \* 1889 – The lake was formed by the damming of Gardiners Creek. The Freehold Investment and Banking Company, an early land speculative syndicate in Blackburn, is credited with having built it for the purpose of enhancing land values and to provide a reservoir for local orchardists.

The company built a refreshment room and jetty at the water's edge. Four rowing boats were available for hire. Picnic excursions were organised from Melbourne, with passengers riding in converted cattle trucks: the journey took up to two hours by steam train.

- \* 1893 – Around this time, the artist Frederick McCubbin set up his easel in the bushland surrounding Blackburn Lake and painted some of his best known works, including *Down on his Luck* and *The Bush Burial*.
- \* 1890s – Blackburn Lake was to have been the centrepiece of a model township planned during the boom years of the 1880s. In the 1890s, the land boom burst and the Freehold Investment and Banking Co went bankrupt. The legacy of their planning – curving streets, tree planting and the lake as a focal point – remain today as an excellent example of the 'garden suburb' style of urban planning.
- \* 1903 – The Blackburn Lake Paddock estate was first subdivided for sale.
- \* 1909 – The Adult Deaf and Dumb Society (now Victorian Adult Deaf Society) purchased 75 acres (30.4 ha) of land, including the lake. They built a substantial home in Central Road, established a men's wing, cleared the land and cultivated a flower farm. A women's wing was later constructed. The property was known as Lake Park, a place for the "aged, infirm and feeble-minded deaf mutes" to live and work in. They grew flowers and vegetables, which were sold at the Victoria Market.
- \* 1916 – 14 acres were under cultivation, the remaining land remained uncleared and had an abundance of wildflowers. The flower farm grew narcissi, gladioli, chrysanthemums, dahlias, carnations, roses, gaillardias, violets, jonquils, daffodils and watsonias.
- \* 1914– 1918 – During the war years, large gatherings of wounded soldiers were frequently brought to the lake for picnics, as part of their recuperation. On these

occasions, the whole northern bank would be dotted with groups of soldiers and nurses.

- \* 1921 – Following a decision by the High Court, the flower sales ceased, as a charity organisation could not earn money and would be liable to pay municipal rates.
- \* 1927 – The Herald ‘Learn to Swim’ drive was held and continued until 1931. Many swimming carnivals were organised by the Blackburn Swim Club at the lake.
- \* Because the lake was owned by the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society, its immediate surrounds were protected from development for many years after the society ceased to use the property as a flower farm.
- \* 1938 – The Blackburn Progress Association was keen to acquire the lake and surrounding land for development as a public reserve. The government of the day promised to assist with “improvements, construction of baths, etc.” While ownership of the entire 75-acre site remained in the hands of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society, the area continued to be popular with the general public.
- \* 1954 – The Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Planning Scheme zoned the area around the lake as public open space, but it was still owned by the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society.
- \* 1962 – The MMBW (now Melbourne Water), decided to deepen the lake to form a ponding basin, to stop flash flooding. This would have destroyed the ‘natural’ lake concept. Many local conservationists urged the Nunawading Council to discuss with MMBW an alternative plan. The council invited Edna Walling and Ellis Stones “to give an opinion on the lake’s potential”. Both ranked the lake area with the Botanical Gardens of Melbourne. The council accepted their findings and a plan was developed to build a retaining wall and outlet at the southern end of the lake. It would be constructed in such a manner that the vegetation surrounding the lake’s edge would not be destroyed.
- \* 1960s – The lake was used for speed-boating, water skiing, canoeing, yachting, and fishing. Rubbish was also dumped illegally. These activities were harmful to the fragile environment. The sensitive vegetation along the lake fringe, which was habitat for wildlife, was destroyed in many parts.
- \* 1964 – The Adult Deaf Society (as it was known by this time) sold 13.4 ha of land, including the lake and some surrounding bushland, to the MMBW. Camberwell Grammar School purchased 6.5 ha of land east of the lake.
- \* 1965 – A committee of management, comprising of local residents, was formed to preserve the flora and fauna in the reserve. Blackburn Lake was declared a sanctuary by the council.
- \* Early 1970s – The Adult Deaf Society demolished their premises and constructed a new complex further west, at the corner of Central and Lake Roads. During the summer months, when the grass dries, the foundations of the old home, dormitories and outsheds are clearly visible on the lawn between the playground and the Visitor Centre.

- \* 1975–76 – Following extensive efforts by local residents, the City of Nunawading purchased a total of 47.4 acres (19.2 ha). An environmental assessment was done and a master plan prepared by the Committee of Management and Nunawading Council's Parks and Recreation Department.
- \* 1980 – Land owned by Camberwell Grammar, south of the Lake, came under threat of subdivision. Following a report on the land prepared by the Committee of Management, the area was acquired by the City of Nunawading, bringing the total area of Blackburn Lake Sanctuary to 63.8 acres (25.8 ha). Deliberate measures to reduce visitor impact and encourage regeneration began. The network of walking tracks and access to the lake's edge were reduced and landscaping was done to reduce erosion around the lake.
- \* 1985 – Friends of the Lake Education Program was initiated.
- \* 1986 – A revised Blackburn Lake master plan was prepared.
- \* 1991 – The Visitor Centre was extended to accommodate the expanding Education Program. The project, jointly funded by Nunawading Rotary Club, State Government Eastern Area Scheme and the council, cost \$143,000. A hexagonal activity room and storage areas were built, and landscaping, including a pond and enclosed courtyard, was done.
- \* 1992 – Land for Wildlife status was achieved. The council purchased 0.5 ha along Central Road, at the northeast corner of the sanctuary, from the MMBW.
- \* 1995+ – A major playground upgrade and extensive lake edge revegetation works were completed. The Committee of Management became the Blackburn Lake Sanctuary Advisory Committee.
- \* 2000 – After discussion with Melbourne Water, Whitehorse Council and Blackburn Lake Advisory Committee, the wetland area at the eastern end of the lake was developed to improve the quality of the water entering the lake.
- \* 2003 – Monthly water monitoring began to record the water quality and discover what lives in the lake. The results were provided to Melbourne Water as part of the state-wide Water Watch program, which monitors the waterways. The water monitoring is an ongoing activity.
- \* 2004 – Juby's Garden, an Indigenous trail around the Visitor Centre, was designed and built by students from Warawa College and Whitehorse Council staff. Funding was provided by the Nunawading Rotary Club (as part of their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration) and Whitehorse Council. The trail is used by the Educational Program and named after James Wandin, a respected Wurundjeri elder.
- \* An analemmatic sundial (a human body clock) was built in the playground area with funding through the Council and designed by Su Dempsey from the Advisory Committee.
- \* In collaboration with the Blackburn Creeklands Advisory Committee and Blackburn Lake Sanctuary Advisory Committee, a 'Bushland Corridor' brochure was developed. This was to encourage those living along the habitat corridor to plant indigenous plants and strive to protect these sensitive areas.

- \* 2015 – As part of the Rotary Club of Forest Hill's 50 years anniversary celebration, a yarnning circle was funded as a place to gather and tell stories in the bushland.
- \* 2017 – Melbourne Water was funded to consult with community groups working on litter reduction projects in Melbourne Water catchments. Blackburn Lake Sanctuary was the first site to initiate a project. The aim project audited the catchment area to identify major sources of litter and pollutants, and work on strategies to reduce these over a three-year timeframe. The project was led by Su Dempsey from the Advisory Committee.
- \* 2019 – Sugar gliders were confirmed to be living at the Sanctuary.
- \* 2024 – A two-year project began to regenerate the wetland area. The project includes include major weeding, mulching and planting. More than 4000 plants, grown at Bungalook indigenous nursery, will be planted. Work will be done by the community in conjunction with contract work through the City of Whitehorse Parks and Natural Environment.