

THE CORONATION OAKS REVISITED

Three Coronation Oaks stood in the grounds of the School House at 807 New North Road.

By the late 1960s the School House building had become very tired and no longer fitted the bill as a boarding school. It was the desire of the Senior Housemaster, Ron Hemus, to have a modern, purpose-built School House erected behind the old one and have the old one demolished. Had that been done, the six and a half acres would have remained in the Board's ownership.

Headmaster Nairn wanted the new School House on the School site. And, of course, his wishes carried the day. The new School House was built on the lower hockey field. The old School House land reverted to the Crown and most of it, and the Housemaster's house at 809 New North Road, sold off.

Two fragments of land remain. The larger includes the driveway and turning circle and the land east to Burch Street. This is now known as the Alice Wylie Reserve.

The smaller fragment is the Coronation Oaks Reserve on Burch Street.

The trees for King Edward VII (1901) and his son George V (1910) were planted when the House was under the control of the Child Welfare Department. The matron of the day was Sarah Jackson.

The Albertian of 1936 mentioned oaks but only in the context of cutting them down to build a tennis court on the side paddock:

"Shirtless boys were yielding picks and shovels with eminent gusto, while there was an almost incessant progression of dirt-laden barrows. Axes whistled and oak trees groaned and fell."

The Albertian of 1937 reports that on Coronation Day, 12 May 1937, there was an assembly to hear the Coronation Address by the Rev George Coates:

"Because the Crown was the symbol of unity, representatives from the Dominions had gathered at Westminster to give their voices to the Coronation of their monarch."

It was a big day for the Chairman, too. In the Coronation Day honours list Professor APW Thomas had been knighted. The newly-minted Sir Algenon, after speeches in the Hall, repaired to the School House to plant the Coronation oak. It was said that it had been grown from an acorn claimed to have come from a "Westminster Park". (There isn't one).

The New Zealand Herald for 13 May 1937 p14 made mention of the planting (and there are many at various schools). *The Herald* noted that the acorns had come from "Windsor Park". Windsor Great Park has stands of ancient oaks).

Miss Jackson was present at this planting, the one person who had been at all three. There is no Elizabethan Oak at the School House. The *Newsletter* of the Mount Albert Historical Society for 6 March 2008 pp5-6 noted that the oaks for King George V and King George VI were growing on the Reserve and the tree for King Edward VII was nearby at 10 Burch Street.

This was the residence of Peter Singh who took an interest in the oaks and it was he who convinced the Council to call the reserve Coronation Oaks Reserve rather than Burch Street Reserve.

There is a plaque which was erected by the now defunct Mt Albert City Council.



There is no reason to disbelieve that these are the true Oaks. One Albertian who was at the George VI planting, (the late Kim Ryder 1937-1939) claimed that the planting was elsewhere, but as he couldn't say where, the only true way to decide would be for a dendrochronologist to take core samples. That would no doubt prove that the declared Oaks are indeed the correct plantings.

Brian Murphy