

Bassendean: a brief history

Prepared for the Town of Bassendean
by Jennie Carter

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Jennie Carter

Bassendean

a brief history¹

Aboriginal land

Long before Captain James Stirling first sailed up river past what is now Bassendean, several Noongar families called this area home. For more than 45,000 years², Noongar people had developed and sustained a rich, complex culture and religion, and skillfully looked after their Boodja (country).

All this was to change profoundly when in March 1827 Lieutenant James Stirling carried out his first survey of the country on either side of the river which



'Swan River 50 miles up'.

Oil painting by W Huggins. Showing Captain James Stirling's 1827 exploration party and Noongar onlookers.

(National Library of Australia an2260474.)

[Note: The distance given is not correct as Stirling ventured no further than approximately 30 miles (50 km) upriver from Fremantle to what is now Ellenbrook.]

Noongar people knew as Derbal Yerrigan but named the 'Black Swan' River by Dutch explorer William de Vlamingh in 1697. Stirling labelled the Bassendean area as 'the rich and romantic country', but met with a very upset group of warriors on the left bank of the river near what is now the Ashfield Flats, who made threatening gestures to Stirling's boats. This made it extremely unlikely that Stirling shortly afterwards pulled into the narrow strip of land at the foot of the Success Hill scarp to fill his water barrels at the spring.³

The occupation of the Swan River Colony in 1829 by British migrants deprived Noongar people of the rights to their land, an action that was, even at the time, acknowledged. Captain Charles Fremantle wrote:

"We take possession of their Country, occupy the most fertile parts which they are in the habit of resorting to for nourishment, destroy their fishing & Kangaroo, & almost drive them to starvation."⁴

Many early colonists understood Aboriginal land tenure and who owned and were responsible for which tracts of land. Also known were areas of common ground, such as that around Success Hill, which were considered particularly significant.⁵ These meeting places were important neutral grounds where neighbouring Noongar groups could come together, usually in late Spring when food and game were abundant. They gathered for important religious ceremonies as well as for practical purposes such as resolving disputes,



*Unnamed women and children, with Fred Mead and Henry Caporn at Success Hill 1901.
(Caporn Collection Battye Library, SLWA, 54540B)*

arranging marriages, or deciding on hunting and gathering activities to sustain their families over the coming seasons.⁶

To Noongar people the Derbal Yerrigan was especially sacred with the twists and curves of the river being formed by the great spirit Waughal as it travelled from the hinterland to the sea. Bennett's Brook bend, below Success Hill, which became popularly known locally as 'Devil's Elbow', was out of bounds, or 'winarch' to Aboriginal people and there are several accounts of how Noongar youngsters refused to swim there out of respect and fear of the water spirit who lived beneath the surface.⁷

When Aboriginal people resisted the occupation of their land, they were severely punished. As James Henty wrote in a letter back to England soon after arriving here in October 1829.

The natives have been during the last week in many places, and they have been getting quite familiar and in many places too much so. C L's [Colonel Latour] men have written down for arms and ammunition to defend themselves from them.⁸

Relationships between the colonists and Noongars worsened, exacerbated by the rapid depletion of vital traditional food sources. Jane Dodds, who with her husband James, built and ran the Cleikum Inn in West Guildford in 1830, witnessed the effects of the settlers' depredation at first hand.

The erringo root [a type of yam] was boiled as potatoes and the thistle cut up in vinegar as salad, and so eagerly were these ingredients sought for by every class of persons that our supply failed long before [our] vegetables were produced.⁹

Given the rising tensions, it was not long before official reprisals were carried out against Noongar land owners. Jane Dodds' teenaged son, Tom, acquired a collection of weapons and a kangaroo skin cloak which Jane sent to friends in England, commenting ominously; 'the natives



Jane Dodds. Shadow profile portrait on cover of Jane Dodds, 1788-1844: a Swan River Colony pioneer by Lilian Heal (1988).

never part with them but with life'. She went on to recount how Aboriginal families were massacred after stealing sheep belonging to Peter Broun.

[T]he sequel is dreadful to contemplate; they were followed and the soldiers and others fell in with them about midnight, it was supposed that their number exceeded two hundred men, women, and children, ... [They] fired into the midst of the thickest groups, killing some and wounding many.¹⁰

Eventually, Noongar people were pushed to the fringes of settlements. In Bassendean, despite their displacement, several families continued to maintain links with their traditional lands, such as the areas in and around Success Hill.

The first colonists

After his 1827 voyage, Stirling returned to England to sing the praises of the Swan River area. He had named many of the places along the river bank after influential men in England as well as his companions on the voyage. The area now containing Bassendean he hailed as ideal for settlement. Stirling persuaded Sir George Murray, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to sanction a colony on the Swan River and to appoint Stirling himself as governor with rights to large land grants.

In an inauspicious beginning, the *Parmelia*, was damaged when it landed at Garden Island on 1 June 1829 where Lieutenant Governor Stirling and his party, which included his young wife, Ellen, and their two children, made their home for several weeks. Also on the *Parmelia* were Colonial Secretary, Peter Broun, (known at that time as Brown), his wife Caroline, and their son and daughter.¹¹



*Peter Broun Colonial Secretary.
(Battye Library, SLWA 003117D)*



*Caroline Broun (nee Simpson) after her
return to England. (RWAHS M2015-31)*

Land grants, many of them designated as 'ribbon grants' because they were surveyed to allow as many as possible to take advantage of the rich river land, were allocated from 1829. The township of Guildford was gazetted in

December 1829 and its satellite hamlet of West Guildford across the river was laid out early in 1831.¹² Before then more than 3000 acres (approximately 1215 hectares) of rich alluvial land in West Guildford was set aside in November 1829 to be a government farm under the control of James Drummond, Superintendent of Government Gardens, who abandoned the reserve after a quarrel with Stirling. The reserve was then divided into two large blocks (Locations S and Q1) and five smaller ones and granted to settlers, including Francis Byrne and the Henty brothers.



James Henty with his younger brothers, John and Stephen, arrived on the *Caroline* on 12 October 1829 to take possession of the family's land grants on the Swan. James was granted Location S, a 1455 acre (around 590 hectare) parcel of land on the river which he named 'Stoke Farm'. William Dyer, a wheelwright and carpenter, who was a young bonded servant of the Henty brothers described building a large homestead and

sowing wheat and maize, as well as tobacco which thrived in the swampy places. The Henty brothers left Western Australia to join the rest of the family in Launceston, Tasmania at the end of 1831. The move saddened Dyer and he wrote wistfully to his father, 'I do not like this town so well as I did Swan River'.¹³

Peter Broun acquired Stoke Farm and renamed it 'Bassendean' in 1832 after his family's estate in Berwickshire, England. The Brouns lived at Bassendean for only another two years before moving back to Perth and leasing the property to David and Marian Patterson. The Hon Peter Broun died in Perth at the age of 49 on 5 November 1846 and Caroline and the younger children sailed on the *Hindoo* back to England. Unfortunately, the ship caught fire and sank, and although no harm came to Caroline and her children, Peter Broun's papers and private journal were destroyed.

James and Jane Dodds and their young family arrived on the *Rockingham* in May 1830 and built the 'Cleikum Inn' on the bank of the Swan the following year. They also set up the horse-drawn public ferry which, before the first traffic bridge was built in 1885, served as the only method of crossing that section of the river into Guildford.¹⁴

From 1831 to the turn of the century, many of the West Guildford lots changed hands. By the late 1830s William Tanner had acquired a large proportion of the land which was to become the Town of Bassendean and in 1841 sold some of it to Edward Hamersley who named his properties 'Pyrton' and 'Lockeridge'.¹⁵

Convicts and Pensioner Guards

After successful lobbying of the British government by some wealthy landowners keen on a supply of plentiful cheap labour, the first convict ship, the *Scindian*, docked at Fremantle on 1 June 1850, 21 years after the Swan River Settlement's founding as a free colony. Over the next eighteen years,

9,676 British male criminals arrived¹⁶ and their enforced labour did much to change the shape of their reluctantly adopted country.

The convict establishment was initially overseen by military and marine soldiers as well as members of the Enrolled Pensioner Force, who were retired good-conduct servicemen of the British Army, the Royal Marines, or the East India Company. These men were entitled to a small pension and acted not only as guards of convicts on board ships sailing to the Swan River Settlement, but when in the colony provided a militia which could be gathered at short notice if required. On signing up for duty the Pensioners were entitled to free passage for themselves and their families, and on top of what they earned for their pension, were free to seek paid work. Initially they were not to be granted land so as to encourage them to help supply the demand for labour, rather than aspire to be settlers, but within a month of the first convict ship the *Scindian* arriving, the policy was reversed. Governor Charles Fitzgerald was instructed to establish Pensioner 'villages' with blocks of land sufficient for the families to support themselves.¹⁷ One of these was established on a few of the two acre (half hectare) town lots at West Guildford.¹⁸ Pensioner Guards could apply for a block and after seven years working and maintaining their grants, they could claim ownership.

Lieutenant Edmund DuCane of the Royal Engineers was recruited from England in 1851 to assist the Comptroller-General of Convicts, Captain Edmund Henderson, and was given charge of the Guildford convict hiring depot.¹⁹ DuCane, whose responsibilities included overseeing public works, assigned a party of convicts to work on building two-roomed dwellings in West Guildford for Pensioner Guards and their families²⁰. In 1855 DuCane reported that bricks were being made and shingles split for twelve cottages, but convict labour was in demand elsewhere and by the middle of 1856 only four houses were under construction. It was not until December that they were completed.

The little cottage at 1 Surrey Street is the only extant free standing two-roomed Pensioner Guard cottage remaining of the 80 or so built in the metropolitan area, and is the oldest building in Bassendean.²¹ The first occupants were



John Law Davies²², a former private in the East India Company, and his wife Amelia, who he had married in July 1856, and on 28 November 1864 the title was transferred to Davis for an annual peppercorn rent. John and Amelia raised seven children and after John died in July 1870, Amelia married John Bates in 1873 and had a further two children. Amelia continued to live in the cottage until 1893 when it was sold to Edmund Brockman and the adjacent house built.²³

Several other Pensioner Guard families made West Guildford their home. Among them were Thomas and Elizabeth Young, James and Ann Clinton, and John and Eliza Hyland. Thomas, James, and John died at relatively young ages leaving their widows and children to carry on as best they could. Some of them worked in the big houses in Guildford or took in laundry and most struggled to make ends meet. Eliza Hyland's son, also named John, recounted an incident which happened when he was a little boy and was waiting with his mother to catch the ferry to Guildford. Young John fell into the river and the ferryman, whose name Hyland said was Williams, dived in to rescue him. Eliza had no time to take her son home as she very likely depended on her work to support them, so the ferryman dried John off and looked after him for the rest of that day. For his kindness the convict was reportedly granted a remission of his sentence.²⁴

John Law Davies' eldest daughter Amelia married William the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Young, thereby knitting together the strands of the little Pensioner Guard community in West Guildford.

The convicts

Convicts built the cottages and operated the ferry. At the expiry of their sentences or after receiving their Tickets-of-Leave or Conditional Pardons, some of them continued to live in West Guildford. John Picken, convicted for forging a marriage licence, worked as a cobbler and amassed enough money to purchase the block owned by Pensioner Guard Henry Chartres, but lived there for less than a year before returning to England. The most prominent ex-convict resident of West Guildford was Malachai Meagher, a qualified engineer, who aged 22 was convicted of forgery and sent to Western Australia in 1859. Meagher received his ticket-of-leave not long after he arrived in the colony, became a successful landowner, a shrewd businessman, and licensee of the Stirling Arms in Guildford. In 1862 he married Caroline, the only daughter of George Stubberfield, owner of the Guildford Hotel. Meagher leased the Bassendean Estate, then owned by the Clune brothers, and made it his family home. An energetic member of the community, he was elected to the Guildford Municipal Council before becoming a foundation member and chairman of the Swan Road Board. He was possessed a good deal of personal magnetism and Gaelic charm which he employed in improving services to West Guildford, including collecting subscriptions



*Malachai Meagher c.1900
(Courtesy Alan Campbell)*

for a bridge to be built between the townships which was ultimately successful in 1885. Malachai Meagher died at his son's property in Bridgetown in 1906 and was survived by eight children and several grandchildren.

A separate identity

West Guildford residents had reason to be unhappy with the lack of action by the Guildford Town Trust toward supplying needed services to the little hamlet over the river. In 1880 the Swan Road Board decided to discontinue the ferry service even though the rail bridge over the Swan River had not yet been built. This decision was compounded when residents learned that, despite assurances, the railway bridge built in 1881 did not provide for wheeled traffic and had no proper footpath. It was not until 1885 that a separate traffic bridge was built alongside it.



*Railway bridge at West Guildford with Santa Rosa Winery tower far left 1921.
(Battye Library, SLWA, 111567PD)*

Rail transport opened the district up to visitors and when Herbert Parry had the Lockeridge Hotel in River Road built in 1896, it was to capitalise on the allure of the riverside spaces for day-trippers, boating parties, and weekend guests. Sunday trains from Perth made an informal stop at a point just below the hotel to allow patrons and picnickers to alight.

Despite initial difficulties, West Guildford continued to grow steadily, if slowly, until the 1890s when the discovery of gold spurred a rapid influx of people and the Western Australian population grew four-fold from less than 49,000 people in 1890 to almost 200,000 in under a decade. The effect was felt in all sectors of society and manifested itself in a critical demand for housing, public works, transport, health services, and education. Developers made fortunes in buying and subdividing suburban land. In West Guildford syndicates of influential men in business, politics, medicine, the civil service, and the law, had by 1899 purchased most of the large pieces of land north and south of the rail line as investment speculations. Subdivision advertisements made much of the advantages of the district.

[It is] a most desirable place for a home where the business man, fagged and worried with cares can breathe pure and revivifying air, and recuperate his exhausted energies...²⁵

Several West Guildford blocks were bought by high ranking civil servants and businessmen who built large houses in or close to North Road. These included the homes of George Tuthill Wood who was a magistrate, Charles Wicks a master builder, John Tregurtha Short the Commissioner of Railways, and Cyril Jackson who was recruited from England in 1897 with a comprehensive agenda to reform the State's education system.

These new residents quickly became impatient with the lack of action by the Guildford Town Trust and the Swan Road Board to provide much needed



Earlsferry House built for John Tregurtha Short, Commissioner of Railways in 1902.)

amenities in their little township. After a strong campaign spearheaded by Cyril Jackson, the West Guildford Road Board was gazetted and the first meeting held on 12 July 1901 in the billiard room of Jackson's imposing river-side house. Although boasting only 180 residents in 34 houses, West Guildford was well and truly on the map. By the following year the infant Board had persuaded the State Government to shift the alignment of the main road from Perth to Guildford from a position roughly parallel to the railway line, to deviate through the township giving it an awkward dog-leg configuration, but encouraging housing development.²⁶ Trees were planted on verges along North Road and Surrey Street, including a stand of English oak trees, of which only two remain.

To cater for the increased population in Perth metropolitan and suburban areas, rail transport became a vital service. The railway workshops at Fremantle could no longer cope with the work piling up, but could not easily extend operations where they were. The decision was made to shift to a large site in Midland Junction where a running shed was built in 1897. By 1904 the Midland Railway Workshops were in full operation and workers who continued to live in and near Fremantle made the daily journey to and from their homes on a special train, the 'rattler'. Some employees decided to move closer to Midland and developers, particularly of land north of the rail line, increasingly

pitched their sales at the 'railway men' in the hopes they would choose housing lots in West Guildford.

The new residents, many of them ardent unionists, soon took a proprietary interest in their suburb and pushed for practical improvements, most urgently, a railway station and a primary school. John Hyland, son of the Pensioner Guard, was elected to the Road Board in 1902. He was a railway linesmen and one of the leaders of the working class men who came to dominate the Road Board by 1910, ending the influence of senior civil servants, men of business, and self-described gentlemen.

In the decade between 1904 and 1914 the population of West Guildford multiplied five-fold from 485 residents to well over 2,000, most of them young. Improved community facilities were sorely needed and in 1912 a new Roads Board building incorporating a town hall was constructed.

Schools

The earliest school building in the district was the private Guildford Girls High School which had been established in the former Lockeridge Hotel in 1904 to



Now known as Success Hill Lodge, the building was constructed in 1896 as the Lockeridge Hotel. The building was occupied as the Guildford Girls' High School from 1904 to 1910-1911. (BLHC, P775)

accommodate the daughters of farmers, pastoralists, and wealthy families of Guildford. The first purpose built state school for the district's children was the two-roomed West Road primary school (now Bassendean Primary School) which was sited on swampy land donated by two of the largest landholders in the district, Stephen Parker and Dr Daniel Kenny. Originally intended to cater for 85 pupils, enrolments ballooned to 197 less than six months after the school opened in October 1906. Despite many

hastily erected additions over its first decade, the school remained chronically overcrowded.

The Roman Catholic school operated out of St Joseph's church under the tutelage of five Sisters of Mercy and classes were held in the enclosed verandahs which ran down each side of the church. This arrangement lasted almost 40 years from the time the church was built in 1914 until St Michaels primary school was constructed in 1953.

The school in Ivanhoe Street Eden Hill, originally designated 'North Guildford', opened to students from grades one to five at the beginning of 1915. By October that year the Education Department acquiesced to the Board's request for a name change to 'Eden Hill Primary School'. The school soon became overcrowded and in 1919 the Education Department was petitioned by residents to increase classes.

After the initial flurry of building there were no more primary schools constructed in the district until the new Roman Catholic school, to be renamed St Michael's, was built in 1953. Ashfield primary school followed in 1955 and Anzac Terrace primary school in 1969. Cyril Jackson High School, built in Ashfield in 1962, was converted to a special senior campus for students in 1990. The private, parent-run Casa Mia Montessori School opened in 1999.



The Dedication Of St. Joseph's Catholic Church In Hamilton Street, 1914. (BLHC P137)

The coming of industries

The river and its environs played an important part in the growth of local industry. In 1898 Jeremiah Asquith had a thriving boat building yard at the end of Anstey Street where he made river craft, rowing boats and punts, to complement his other business at Fremantle for the construction of pearling luggers and large sea-going vessels.

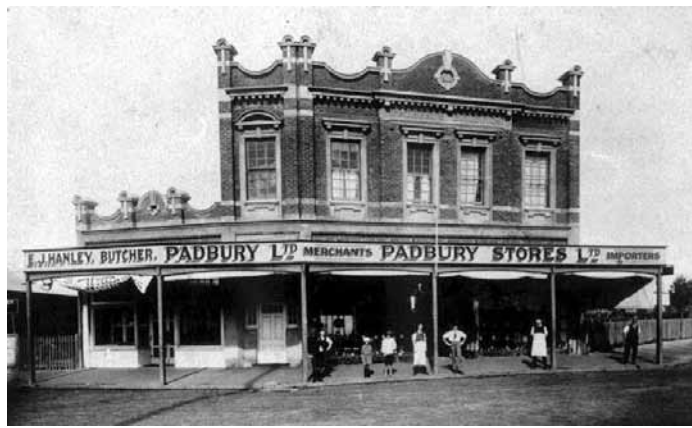
Brick-making was another early pursuit and the heavy clay deposits near the river helped in the construction of many early houses including Stoke Farm (the old Bassendean homestead) and the convict-built Pensioner Guard cottages. By 1901 there were several brickyards, including those north of the railway line near Success Hill and the swampy areas just south of what is now Walter Road, with one of the largest on the Bassendean Estate run by Mrs Millard and her daughter.

The river flats supported primary industries such as dairy farming, poultry yards, market gardening, and seasonal cropping of wheat, oats, hay, and corn. As early as 1829 William Dyer grew tobacco and maize on the wetlands around Stoke Farm while also practising his trade as a wheelwright. By 1900, apart from home gardens and poultry runs, surpluses from which were often a profitable sideline for the women of the house, there were several commercial market gardens and orchards. Some of the largest ones were run by Chinese families - the Ah brothers in Elder Parade, the Hoons in Hamilton Street, the Ing syndicate at Bennett's Brook on land leased from Hugh Hamersley, and Wong Noon Sack's garden at the corner of Railway and First Avenues. Other prominent market gardens were those belonging to Thomas Barnes on land between Palmerston Street and Guildford Road and the largest orchard, owned by Frank and Georgina Piaggio, in North Road.

The Santa Rosa vineyard was planted near the river north of the railway line in 1894 and the large brick Santa Rosa winery and distillery was built in 1897.²⁷ The estate was purchased by R B Young in 1940 who used the winery to store grain and manufacture poultry food.²⁸ The distinctive building with its large square tower remained a landmark in the district until it was demolished in the 1970s.

Retail businesses were also popular undertakings with the largest being William Padbury's graceful two-storey emporium built in 1918. The Lord Street dairy and gardens owned by Thomas and Kate Grogan provided produce for Kate's shop in First Avenue. By 1924 there were several grocers, greengrocers and household suppliers, including Everingham's Co-operative stores. Different

types of commercial enterprises also operated in the years between the two world wars including restaurants, cafes, butcher shops, fishmongers, bakeries, tobacconists, clothing and hat shops, chemists, hardware supplies, motor garages, cycle and repair businesses, hairdressing salons, barber shops, a printery, and newsagencies. Boarding houses and guest houses catered for workers and visitors to the district, and in 1930 a hotel was built to vociferous opposition.



Padbury Stores Ltd c1920. (BLHC P180)

The first metals factory was the blacksmith forge and coach-building works established in First Avenue in 1911 by Arthur Ebenezer Yelland, who later branched out as co-owner of the Bassendean Motor Garage.

John Smallman and E. E Ireland were cabinet makers who both became chairmen of the Bassendean Road Board and it was Ireland who crafted the large jarrah table which is still a feature in the Town's council chamber.

Small to medium-sized manufactories were also encouraged into the district after the establishment of the Cuming Smith's fertiliser factory. The company, which pioneered the production of superphosphate in Australia, had made approaches to Bayswater in 1901 to set up a factory, but had been refused because sulphuric acid, which was a central part of the process, made it a noxious industry. West Guildford Road Board members had no such qualms and when contacted by Cuming Smith in August 1909 were enthusiastic about the proposal. The extensive brick and iron works with its own rail branch line was constructed just north of the rail line and opened in September 1910. Senior staff at the plant built large homes in West Guildford and in 1913 the



Interior of Cuming Smith Works (with horses). (BLHC)

manager, Alfred Youlden Garnsworthy served a term as chairman of the Road Board.

Other large enterprises included Richard Purser and Co which set up on land fronting Railway Parade in 1912 and specialised in agricultural machinery, and Hadfields Pty Ltd which built a large modern foundry in 1920 on a large block bought from Purser.

These and other firms were further encouraged into the district after the Road Board purchased electric power from the State Government in 1915, with the help of a loan provided by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Workers. A sub-station to supply single-phase power was built which powered homes and street lamps throughout the suburb as well as bridge lights.

Railway stations

The unofficial stop just below the Lockeridge Hotel operated until the railway station fronting Guildford Road was built. The long-running campaign for a passenger station was bolstered by the support of Cuming Smith senior management and the station was opened with much fanfare on 30 April 1910.

It was to be decades before another station was built. Ashfield station was opened in 1954 after the State Housing Commission resumed large tracts of land between Guildford Road and the Ashfield Flats to build around 400 homes



Bassendean Railway Station was upgraded in 2004. (BLHC)

to house many of the post-war influx of migrants to the district. The Success Hill station near the site of the earlier unofficial stop was constructed in 1960.

Social and political life

Social life for Bassendean families in the first quarter of the 20th century revolved around home, sport, and church activities. So much so that residents took pride in the fact that their suburb was known locally as 'the holy city' because of the presence of many churches but no hotel.

The first specially built house of worship was the Methodist church in Hamilton Street. Volunteers erected the building in 1905 and it was the district's first permanent public meeting hall. The Presbyterian congregation opened

their church in Lord Street on 27 July 1907 with a small gymnasium attached. Before St Mark's Anglican Church's weatherboard building was erected in Lord Street in 1909, services were held at the old Lockeridge hotel which became the Girl's High School. Physical activity was decreed vital for boys and a larger exercise facility and youth club was a popular feature of the Church of Christ, famously built by volunteer labour over the course of a single day on 14 January 1913.

From 1912 the suburb's Roman Catholic parishioners used the basement of the Road Board hall for Sunday mass until the brick and iron St Joseph's church was erected in 1913. The following year the Sisters of Mercy religious order established a convent, initially to house the small congregation of nuns who taught at St Joseph's Church as well as undertaking pastoral care work in the district. A brick convent building was constructed in 1925 and some school lessons were held in the downstairs rooms.

Both Protestant and Catholic churches concentrated on youth outreach, supporting a variety of sporting clubs and other recreational activities for children and young adults, such as the Christian Endeavour Group and the Dorcas Society for girls.



*Methodist Young People's Society Of Christian Endeavour, 1912.
(Edna Bindemann, BLHC P90.)*

Church halls, the Road Board rooms, and the later Trades Hall built in Broadway in 1932 with funding from the Railway Employees Union, were venues for frequent social functions and tea dances where single men and women could meet and families would mingle and cement friendships. Silent movies were first shown in 1913 in the Road Board hall. These proved so popular, that a permanent bio box and theatre seating were installed in the lesser hall in 1917. The lure of the movies was considered pernicious by some and in 1916 the West Guildford Mothers' Union sought to have cinema sessions restricted and called for greater State supervision of the films that were shown to young people, to little effect. An outdoor theatre, the 'Wonderview' opened

next door to the hall in 1925 and was heavily patronised on summer evenings despite the nuisance of the suburb's mosquitoes.

Music was an important part of the life of the district and not only did the primary schools support brass bands, but amateur musicals proved popular. In 1914 both the West Guildford Orchestral Society, which had been formed the previous year, and the Choral Society held their first public concerts and the West Guildford Orchestral Society went on to win prizes across the state over the years. The WG Orchestra refused to change its name to Bassendean after 1922 retaining the original name right up until the 1960s when the orchestra was disbanded.



West Guildford Orchestral Society c1914. (Tom Doyle, BLHC P644)

Special interests were encouraged by the establishment of the Daffodil Society, the Mothers' Union, the Rifle Club which began in 1915 in response to the outbreak of war, and the Returned Servicemen's League founded after the war in 1919. The West Guildford Masonic Lodge held its first meeting in 1920.

One of the most significant and long-lasting organisations was the Volunteer Fire Brigade which was held its first meeting at the Road Board offices on 31 January 1911. Among the foundation members were Charles Wicks, Vern Howe, Ben Bailey, John Bull and Richard Ellis who became the first captain of the Brigade. To begin with the men were called out to fires by a band of call-boys, youths interested in the Brigade but not yet old enough to be members who ran or cycled around to knock on doors. Later on a bell was installed to summon the volunteers. In 1913 the members built a clay running track and ladder stand on the recreation reserve, which is now site of the Swan District's Football oval. In 1914 the Brigade won its first trophy at a meet at Kalgoorlie and this marked the beginning of a long career of successes including Australian Champions in 1922 and Champion Brigade of Australia in 1951. The Fire Station was built on the highest point of land in Parker Street in 1934 and the Art Deco building is now on the State Register of Heritage Places. After more than one hundred years of service, the Brigade was disbanded in October 2013.

War and peace

When war was declared in August 1914, many of the district's young men were swift to enlist. One of the first to die in battle was Ben Bailey, a founder of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, who was killed during the landing at Gallipoli on 25



Bassendean Volunteer Fire Brigade 1911 (BLHC P270)

April 1915. Other notable West Guildford identities who fought overseas were Edward Clay, George Wyndham, then secretary of the Road Board, William Wilson, who was killed in the final days of the war, and Richard Alexander McDonald. McDonald was a railway worker, who had not long moved into the district, fought in France, and was wounded in 1918.

The sons of leading citizens also served. John, the son of John Tregurthen Short, Commissioner of Railways and second chairman of the Road Board, was killed at Bullecourt, France, on 11 April 1917. John Hyland's son William fought in France, as did Aubrey and Frances Brown's son, also Aubrey. Brothers Francis and Frederick Young, who were the grandsons of two Pensioner Guards, John Law Davis and Thomas Young, were both killed in action. Alfred Garnsworthy's son Stanley, wounded more than once, was promoted to lieutenant. Ernest and William, the sons of Charles Wicks, were both wounded in action with Ernest being promoted to lieutenant as well as being awarded the Military Medal and the Military Cross for bravery.

Of the total of 203 men who enlisted from the tiny town of West Guildford to fight in the First World War, 33 died on active service, a figure of one in six fatalities, or 16%.²⁹ The loss of so many of their fine boys had a profound effect on West Guildford.

Several organisations were formed to aid the war effort. In West Guildford, the Red Cross Society and the Ugly Men's Association³⁰ were particularly active in fundraising and providing volunteers to help war widows and children. The Ugly Men's Association which, unlike the local men's lodges, had both men and women members, became a key part of the social life of the district. A

Guildford branch, which included West Guildford residents, was formed in 1918 and proved so popular that a separate West Guildford Branch was established in May 1921. The Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) sub-branch had its inaugural meeting on 30 July 1920.

After the cessation of hostilities, the Soldiers' Memorial Committee, headed by Road Board chairman, Charles Wicks, organised busy bees to erect a memorial in the town, with some materials being donated by Cuming Smith, Padbury's Stores, and the Road Board.³¹ The granite obelisk on a concrete base was designed by two returned soldiers, Wales and Gillies,³² who also helped supervise the volunteer labour crew which was sustained by lashings of tea, scones, and sandwiches, prepared by 'the ladies'. The war memorial on the corner of Wilson Street and Perth Road was officially opened by Governor Sir Francis Newdegate on Sunday 12 December 1920.

Change of name

In the years between the world wars, the suburb's population grew by leaps and bounds. Twenty one years after its founding as a local authority,



Dedication of the War Memorial. (BLHC P.225)

the West Guildford Road Board resolved to change the name of the suburb to distinguish it from what was believed to be the 'smaller', 'less progressive', and 'has-been', township across the river. The assertion that the district needed its own identity was unanimously supported by the Board, but had a mixed reception from residents. The Board's suggestion of 'Stirling' was not popular, nor was 'Florida', or 'Mandoon', the Noongar name for a greater part of the district, so it was resolved that a competition open to primary school children would be run and F Taylor offered a one guinea (£1.1s) prize for the winner. Clare Drysdale and Sylvia Sharman shared the money for their suggestion of 'Bassendean', which was chosen by the Board at their meeting on 9 May 1922 for its association with the Broun family farm, and in the hope that the new name would satisfy the traditionalists among the ratepayers. On the anniversary of the founding of the road board, in July 1922, 'Bassendean' was gazetted as the new name for the district.

R A McDonald (1885-1967)

Richard (Dick) Alexander McDonald, the most enduring architect of Bassendean's growth and development, trained as a carpenter and was employed at the Midland railway workshops as a carriage builder. He and his



RA McDonald. (BLHC P155)

wife Ethel moved to West Guildford and lived in the house he built in Kenny Street, and they almost immediately became part of the lively social life of the district. McDonald was elected to the Road Board in 1915, but resigned to enlist as a sapper in the v1 Field Company of Engineers and fought in France. He arrived home six days after the armistice in 1918 and immersed himself in local politics and the Labor Party. McDonald was re-elected to the now renamed Bassendean Road Board in 1922 and was to become its longest serving chairman and, except for a period between 1948 (following the death of his wife) and 1956, he retained office for 34 years. He was Chairman of the Board from 1929 to 1947 and after his return to local politics,

was the first President of the Bassendean Shire Council from 1961 to 1962. His influence was such that he was often referred to (not always kindly) as the 'king of Bassendean'. Dick McDonald died on 20 March 1967 aged 82.

McDonald saw the establishment of the Swan Districts Football ground as one of his finest achievements and it was an uphill battle. His first step was to lobby the Western Australian Football League for acceptance of a district team with headquarters in Bassendean. With tentative agreement from WAFL, he pushed the Road Board for a £3,750 loan to upgrade the recreation reserve bounded by West Road, and Surrey, Brook, and Dodd Streets to convert the reserve into a football oval with all facilities required. To say that not all Bassendean residents were happy with the scheme would be an understatement, and a concerted effort by a group of ratepayers defeated the loan proposal by



Bounce down by RA McDonald at Swan Districts' first game, Bassendean Oval, 1934. (BLHC P788)

forcing a referendum on the issue. At the same time Midland was actively working to reform the Midland Junction Football Association, which had been disbanded during the war, and there was strong support for the team to be located in the more populous district.

McDonald was determined, however, and as chairman he managed to persuade the board to hold another loan referendum. With assurances that all revenues from games at the oval would go to pay off the loan, and with WAFL guarantee that no players signed up by Swan Districts would be allowed to join another team for at least two years, this time McDonald was successful. When, as inaugural President of Swan Districts Football League, Dick McDonald kicked the ball for the start of the first game in 1934, it was one of his proudest moments.

Another recreation reserve that McDonald became involved in creating is the BIC which fronts Guildford Road. When eccentric journalist, naturalist and historian Jose Guillermo Hay died in June 1923, members of the Road Board and local businessmen established the Bassendean Improvement Committee (BIC) to purchase the strange wooden castle, which had been Hay's home, and the wetland surrounding it from Hay's estate. Various schemes were undertaken to raise money for the purchase, but none of them were successful except for the popular fundraising activities run by the newly formed BIC Ladies Auxiliary under the banner of 'Bassendean Beautiful'. From 1923 to 1927 the women



Hay's Castle. (BLHC P777)

of the district amassed sufficient money to buy the twelve acre (almost five hectare) property with enough left over to begin an ambitious beautification project.

McDonald and members of the Road Board were tempted in 1928 by an offer from hotelier Paddy Connolly who offered a handsome donation to the BIC project if the board would give support to the

building of a hotel in Bassendean. Although the board was, in general, in favour of the proposal, members of the powerful Temperance movement in the suburb were outraged and a 'no licence' campaign swung into action. The wishes of local business proprietors, the board, and workingmen's groups, however, held sway and the licence was granted. Construction of the two-storey Bassendean Hotel began in 1929 and it was open for business in August 1930.

The Bassendean Road Board enthusiastically celebrated the State's 100th anniversary of European settlement in June 1929 and staged a 're-enactment' of James Stirling's exploratory voyage up the Swan River in March 1827 where he was supposed to have stopped at Success Hill spring to 'fill his water barrels'. Appealing as the account is, there is no record of any of the exploratory boats, neither Stirling's nor the one in which botanist Charles Fraser travelled, stopping at the spring. The tale apparently first emerged in a 1922 report written

by the West Guildford Road Board secretary, Reg Sargent, who misinterpreted Stirling's account of the voyage upriver.³³ It was perpetuated in Paul Hasluck's 4 July 1929 article 'Guildford memories' in the *Western Mail* where he claims the event was 'according to local tradition'. Similar re-enactments staged since 1929 have cemented the story into enduring local belief.



Bassendean Hotel in the 1930s (BLHC P745)

BIC drainage works had just commenced when the world wide Depression beginning in October 1929, brought it all to a halt. Ultimately, the Depression was to prove a godsend to Bassendean as the 'BIC Park', as well as several other major projects, including the building of the new road board hall, were completed by sustenance, or 'susso', labour at a minimal cost.³⁴ In March 1931 the board transferred the site to the Crown to be vested in the Bassendean Road Board as a reserve.

By 1934 the park had two soccer pitches, a football field for junior players, a cricket pitch, bowling greens, croquet and tennis courts, a playground, and a band pavilion. Construction had also begun on the Volunteer Fire Brigade's training track as well as the installation of floodlights for night games. Beautification efforts resulted in lawns, gardens and shaded areas for picnics. The official opening of both the park and the new hall was performed by Premier James Mitchell on 9 November 1935 with an estimated 5000 in attendance.³⁵ Early the following year a competition was held to name the new reserve and the board chose 'Temple Park', although several members wanted it to be called 'McDonald Park' in recognition of the chairman's role in its creation. Neither names took hold and to this day the reserve remains simply 'the BIC'.



One of the unsuccessful designs for the BIC. (BLHC 551)

May Holman (1893-1939)

Alice Mary (May) Holman was the eldest of nine surviving children of John (Jack) Barkell Holman and his wife, Catherine, who were both heavily involved in the Australian Labor Party. Jack was a state politician and Catherine prominent in Labor women's groups. In 1920 the Holmans bought a 20 acre property in Ida Street and extended the house into a large family home.³⁶ May was a talented musician and, with her sisters and brother Ted, formed a musical revue group, 'the Entertainers', which performed around the state with profits being channelled to the Labor Party and local charities. In 1924, under the leadership of May Holman, Bassendean raised the greatest sum for the Perth Hospital Appeal, roundly beating Claremont who were runners-up.



May Holman (BLHC P178)

After Jack Holman died on 23 February 1925 from complications following surgery for appendicitis, May was encouraged to nominate for her father's south-west timber milling seat of Forrest at the resultant by-election, which she won on 3 April 1925. On taking her seat in the Legislative Assembly she became the first Labor woman parliamentarian in the British Commonwealth and the second woman elected in Australia.³⁷ While a member of parliament, May was instrumental in the passage of bills aimed to protect workers' rights, maternal and infant health, and was

active in establishing the Central Executive of Labor Women, and the Young Labor League. Attractive, intelligent, and charming, she made good copy for the press, but the sexism of the times hampered her political rise. In 1930 she was an Australian delegate to the United Nations where she campaigned against drug trafficking and child labour.

While touring her electorate for the 1939 elections, May and her sister Iris were involved in a car accident near Bunbury. May Holman died of her injuries three days later on 20 March 1939, just hours after receiving the news that she had been elected to State Parliament for the fifth time. Her funeral was one of the largest seen in Perth and tributes to her came from all over the country, but to her many friends from Bassendean, she remained 'our May'. Her brother Ted then ran for and was elected to the seat of Forrest, although he relinquished his place in Parliament to enlist in the Second World War.

War again

Barely 21 years after the cessation of hostilities known as the Great War, the Second World War began on 3 September 1939, and the district again sent its sons and daughters overseas to serve. More than 700 people, who lived in Bassendean enlisted, including 37 young women.³⁸ Among them were well-known residents, Dorothy Evans, Elsie and Jean Craig, Joan Faulkner, Jessie Townsend, Elsie Minchin, and Dorothy and Sylvia Taylor.

During the Second World War both the Midland Railway Workshops and

Hadfields became munitions factories which employed skilled local people, many of them women as there was soon a critical shortage of metal workers. The Great Depression had now ended and new manufacturing jobs created. In 1941 Hadfields produced more than 6000 mortar shells and artillery gun carrier wheels, spare parts, and ships' castings. Male foundry employees were manpowered, despite the fact that in 1942 conscription was introduced.

Community activism which had helped Bassendean weather the rigours of the Depression were channelled into supporting the war effort. The women of the district organised scrap collections, fundraising, and first aid lectures as members of the Bassendean branch of the Red Cross and the women's auxiliary of the RSL. Dick McDonald, became head warden for the district and

*Hadfields Steel Works :
Ord River Dam Gate In
Construction, C.1963 (BLHC
P368)*



set aside the BIC for the RSL Defence Corps training, authorising the placement of obstacles on the ground to thwart the landing of enemy aircraft. He also ensured that the board had reserves of petrol and oil stockpiled in case of emergencies. A letter was sent to Bassendean's pigeon fanciers warning them not to set their birds loose because they might be used to communicate with enemy agents. After the 1942 bombing of Darwin, the road board constructed several air-raid shelters, the Army took over the football ground and matches were suspended until February 1943 when the soldiers moved out. Bassendean residents also opened their homes to children who had been evacuated from Fremantle because of the fear of bombing, and Midland high school students were transferred to Bassendean Primary School for the duration of the war.

After Allawah Grove in South Guildford was taken over as an army camp, Aboriginal families living there were forced to relocate, and several had no option but to move in with relatives living in Eden Hill.

Post war migration

At the end of the Second World War, plans were made to materially encourage migration to Australia. Non-British migrants from Italy, such as the Ghisalbertis, and Malta, particularly the Calleja family, had settled in Bassendean beginning in the 1920s, but the numbers of new residents increased markedly after 1946, the year the State Housing Commission (SHC) was established.³⁹ Partly in a bid to encourage migration from England, the SHC acquired land

in selected Perth suburbs for subdivision and low cost housing development. Bassendean, Eden Hill, and Ashfield were among the first places to be developed and resulted in a population boom in the district from the mid 1950s. The need for orderly planning to house large numbers of new residents impelled the Bassendean Road Board to adopt in 1952 its first, and for its time, revolutionary Town Planning Scheme. This scheme established three separate areas for the district: 1) residential and commercial, 2) industrial and manufacturing, and 3) 'other purposes', which excluded housing but could encompass public open space and administration requirements. It was made very clear that no further 'noxious' industries, such as Cuming Smith or Cresco would be permitted to operate within Bassendean's boundaries, although light industrial and manufacturing was encouraged.



Guiliana Grassi cleaning a copper kettle at Grassi's vineyard, 1960. (BLHC P488)

Bassendean residents were dismayed to learn that the Railways Department intended to build an extensive railway marshalling yard and chord line from near Scaddan Street through the Ashfield Flats to cross the river to the Ascot racecourse. The proposal would have had the rail line slicing Bassendean into three distinct parts. A public meeting in 1950 attended by more than 400 residents had little sway until the Chairman of Directors of Hadfields opposed the plan because it required resumption of part of the factory's land and Hadfields was 'essential to the national interest'.⁴⁰ The issue dragged on until the State election in 1953 resulted in a Labor government which shifted the focus of industrial development to Kwinana.

Between 1947 and 1961 Bassendean's population increased by almost 60 percent as young families moved into new housing in the SHC developments of Eden Hill and Ashfield. Aboriginal people, most of them women, owned several large lots of land at Eden Hill which were acquired by the SHC in the early 1950s and special 'native houses' were planned for some of the subdivided blocks, the first being built in 1954.⁴¹ When some Aboriginal families got into financial difficulties and were unable to keep up the lease payments on their new houses they were evicted and lost both land and home.

One controversial decision made in the 1960s was to remove a large amount of sand from Success Hill. Its known significance to Aboriginal people and their distress at such desecration was



Aboriginal landowners at Eden Hill 1940s. (Bevan Carter)

of not a consideration when in 1962 a 'beautification' scheme which covered Sandy Beach, the Point Reserve, as well as Success Hill was adopted by the Shire Council. Beginning in 1963, as part of a proposal to clear the bush for conversion to grassed sporting and playground areas, more than 61,000 cubic yards (around 47,000 cubic metres) of soil was removed from Success Hill with most of it sold as a commercial venture. Some of the sand was used on sites around Bassendean, including the old Hamersley Estate which had been taken over as a mental health training facility, and to build up the banks surrounding the Swan Districts Oval.

Post-war schooling and social life

Schools at Bassendean and Eden Hill were extended and a new primary school in Margaret Street Ashfield opened on 1 February 1955. Cyril Jackson Senior High School was built on land fronting Reid Street in Ashfield in 1962. The rise in numbers of school-age children was the impetus for local organisations to provide an outlet for youthful energies. To counter fears of delinquency, teenage gangs, and 'fast' behaviours churches, sporting clubs, and community groups provided structured activities for young people and the Bassendean Primary School established an after-school youth centre offering instruction in dressmaking, motor mechanics, as well as a very popular ballroom dancing class.

After its new hall, boasting a dance floor and pool table among other amenities, was built in 1960, the Returned Services League (RSL) became enthusiastically involved in providing activities for young males. Youth groups supported by the RSL included the Aboriginal-run Mudulla Club, organised by 20 year-old Ron Kickett. Other activities for both boys and girls took place in church halls and the Masonic hall. Friday and Saturday evening dances were popular after the youth centre shifted to Cyril Jackson Senior High School, especially when the 'jive' was permitted, despite being frowned upon by older members of the community. The Bassendean Council also provided space in the undercroft of the new administration building for a youth drop-in centre in 1972. Alf Faulkner, who was first elected to council in 1952 and was Shire President 1962 to 1970 is remembered in the name of the hall erected at Mary Crescent Eden Hill in 1974.

To cater for the large numbers of children growing up in the district, from the early 1950s successive ratepayer associations formally requested Bassendean Council to provide a library service. All requests were resisted, not only because of the supposed cost, but also as councillors saw little community value in the scheme. By the late 1950s attitudes began to change, particularly after



Alf Faulkner Hall in 2012 (BLHC) 213002_1455513517

the Road Board became a Shire Council in 1961 when the population of the district neared 8,500 residents and a group of younger men were elected.

A dedicated senior citizens centre funded by the State Government and the Lotteries Commission, was constructed in 1966. Services for older and house-bound residents were largely volunteer-driven but in 1964 Shire President Alf Faulkner, with the support of Beatrice (Beattie) Chape, championed the establishment of the district's much-needed meals-on-wheels scheme. It was immediately popular and among other social benefits helped to keep older residents living independently in their own homes. The 25 unit Hyde retirement housing complex, named for a family of early residents and business owners in the Town, opened in 1980.

The Pyrton centre for intellectually and physically disabled children was acquired by the State Government and opened in 1966 on the site of the Hamersley family's property bordering Success Hill. By the early 1970s, Pyrton had expanded its role with the establishment of a training centre to equip residents with skills which, depending on their level of ability, would allow them to become more involved in wider society.

By the late 1960s, the lovely art deco town hall and administration building which had been constructed in Old Perth Road in 1936, was deemed to be inadequate for the burgeoning suburb and, despite community opposition, plans for new council buildings incorporating a community centre and a library



*Bassendean Road Board in the 1950s
(BLHC OP7)*



*Bassendean Town Council administration
building, 1988 (BLHC P800)*

went ahead. The new complex was opened on 1 February 1970. Negotiations with the RSL allowed the war memorial to be relocated to a spot outside the administration block to make way for the Bassendean Memorial Library to be built on the site. The library opened in July 1972 with Allan Caddy as inaugural librarian.

Community services were enhanced when Beattie Chape, who was instrumental in establishing Wind in the Willows child care centre as well as the meals-on-wheels service, was elected as the first female councillor in 1973.⁴² The indefatigable Gwen Fenech was appointed the Town's first welfare officer in 1979 and remained in that role until her retirement in 2004. Her community service throughout the years, including establishing the Broadway II band⁴³ and leading the Melody Club, was honoured with an Order of Australia Medal in 1992. Both women were made Freepeople of the Town - Beattie in 1996 and Gwen in 2009.



*Beattie Chape (L) and
Gwen Fenech (R):
Freewomen of the
Town of Bassendea.*



The mighty Swans

The Swan Districts Football Club has played an important role in the sporting life of the Town for decades. Stalwart of the club, Stan Moses, is remembered in the pavilion named for him at Jubilee Reserve in Eden Hill. Stan coached junior football for many years from 1952, became the club's general manager serving in that role for almost a decade, and in 2011 was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia Medal for services to Australian Rules Football.⁴⁴

Key players for Swan Districts were also Bill Walker and Haydn Bunton. Bill joined Swan Districts in 1961 and went on to play a record 302 games, winning four Sandover medals, being made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1978 and inducted into the Australian and Western Australian Football Halls of Fame. After retirement from the game Bill served for more than a decade as President of the club. The Bill Walker stand at the oval is named in his honour. Football legend, Hadyn Bunton junior joined Swan Districts in 1961 as Captain Coach and steered the club to a three grand premierships in a row from 1961 to 1963, before leaving in 1964.



Planning for the future

Bassendean strenuously resisted amalgamation with neighbouring local authorities during the Boundaries Commission Inquiry of 1974 and in July 1975, with the suburb reaching a population of nearly 12,000, its status was changed from a shire to a town council. Dr John Paterson, who had been elected Shire President in 1970, became the Town's first Mayor.



Mayor Dr John Paterson and his wife Patricia c1975) (BLHC P739)

The North Western Town Planning Scheme No. 2 which had been launched in 1969 was expanded in 1974 to open up land north of the railway line for housing development, the establishment of Anzac Terrace primary school, and an industrial area. Tom Wardle was encouraged to open a 'Tom the Cheap' grocery and shopping centre on Morley Drive at Eden Hill which later grew to house a service station and a hotel. By 1978 most of the building lots had been sold and new houses were adding to the vibrancy of the Town.

In addition to the shopping centre at Eden Hill, land south of the railway line on Guildford Road and bordered by Whitfield Street, West Road and Old Perth Road was cleared of buildings, including the Bassendean Police Station, to make way for a shopping centre. The loss of police presence in the Town sparked some heated community opposition but eventually the Bassendean Village Shopping complex was opened to the public in 1977. Access to the centre from Guildford Road had been made easier when the Guildford Road



Police station Whitfield St (BLHC P401)

bypass, which diverted traffic from Old Perth Road, was constructed by the middle of that year.

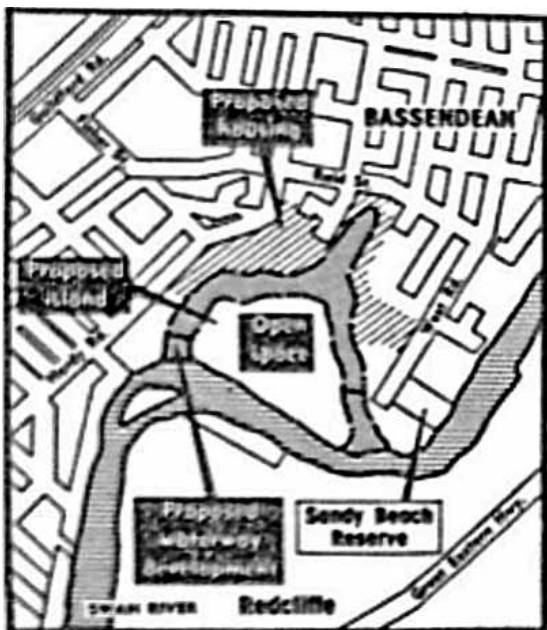
With involvement in the looming State's sesquicentenary, long-running community action to construct an Olympic sized swimming pool in Bassendean was channelled into creating a water playground on the Wilson Street side of the BIC. Funds raised for the pool were put to the water playground which was named after entertainer Rolf

Harris and opened in 1979.⁴⁵ The 150th celebrations also included another staged 're-enactment' of the supposed landing at Success Hill.

Environmental concerns came more to the fore in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A major recurring problem was that of managing municipal waste, which had traditionally been collected and dumped or buried on council owned vacant land, with many of the sites being on the flood plain. Spurred by Mayor John Paterson, who was an agricultural scientist, in 1979 Bassendean joined

with the neighbouring local government areas of Swan, Bayswater, Belmont, and Mundaring to set up the Eastern Refuse Disposal Zone Committee which was the forerunner to the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC). The group cooperated to share the costs of rubbish disposal and purchased land at Red Hill to create a landfill facility which opened on 23 October 1981.⁴⁶ The EMRC was formally established in November 1983 with Paterson as its inaugural chairman.

In 1980 the Town Council began work on an ambitious town planning scheme to retain and enhance riverside land at the Ashfield Flats and Bindaring



Map of proposed canal development from the Daily News.

Swamp. Community support for the preservation of public open spaces was threatened when a proposal to create a canal development for 108 houses encroaching into the Ashfield river flats was supported by Council in 1984. Land earmarked for the development was owned by the Town of Bassendean, the Metropolitan Region Planning Authority, as well as private owners who were notified that their properties could be resumed if they were not willing to participate in the scheme.

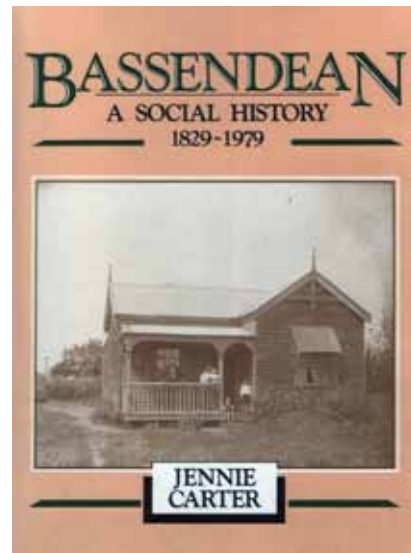
The Department of Conservation and Land Management warned that the construction of artificial canals could impact adversely on the fragile ecosystem of the low-lying river

flats and the samphire heath which were key bird breeding grounds. Almost immediately, community protest meetings were organised which agitated for the establishment of a large regional reserve to preserve Bassendean's significant riverine habitat. The furious reaction of so many residents to the canal development seemed to have caught the Council off guard. John Cox, a champion of the canal scheme, had in May 1984 just been appointed Mayor after the surprise defeat of John Paterson who had first been elected to Council in 1969.⁴⁷

Activism sparked by the canal proposal resulted in the formation of the Bassendean Preservation Group (BPG) on 17 March 1985. Concerned residents also looked to the Town of Bassendean for support and in 1985 Paul Bridges, who was prominent in the BPG, was elected to the Bassendean Council as East Ward representative. By 1988 environmentally active residents had been voted onto Council in sufficient numbers to elect Bridges as Mayor. From that time onwards a rift became manifest with environmentally focussed councillors on one side and pro-development ones on the other. Although Bridges retired at the 1990 election and John Cox was re-established as Mayor, the protection of Bassendean's environment and heritage were now firmly established as key drivers of progress.

Greater interest in Bassendean's history also became a factor stemming from community involvement in the State's 150th anniversary celebrations in

1979 and Council members resolved to publish a history of the district.⁴⁸ The Town Clerk, Clarrie McCreed, and Mayor Patterson sought advice from Professor of History at University of WA, Tom Stannage, who had grown up in Bassendean where his father was the Anglican minister. Stannage had also played for Swan Districts Football Club from 1964 to 1967 and retained a distinct fondness for the home of his youth. In 1982 the Town advertised for a historian and Jennie Carter, who had moved to Bassendean the year previously, was the successful applicant. She immediately began a program to interview many of the old-time residents.⁴⁹ *Bassendean: a social history 1829*



to 1979 was published in 1986 and records, documents, photographs and other information gathered and donated during Carter's research for the book was given to Allan Caddy, who was in charge of the Bassendean Memorial Library. These materials became the nucleus of the library's local history collection which is now the responsibility of the Bassendean Local History Librarian.

As part of the celebrations for the 1988 Australian Bicentenary history and heritage were celebrated with enthusiasm. Among the many events planned was a installation of 64 plaques commemorating some of the Town's early or notable residents which were embedded in the river-side footpath of North Road and Bassendean Parade.⁵⁰ The Town Council also purchased 1 Surrey Street which contained the old Pensioner Guard cottage together with an adjoining house which had been constructed in 1893. Plans were made to preserve the cottage and convert the next door building into a community learning and sharing centre with a focus on the history of the district.

The arts and performance sector also grew in importance during these years, and with the encouragement of Allan Caddy, the Bassendean Arts Council (BAC) was established in 1989. That same year the Town revived the youth service and drop-in centre in an effort to engage the district's young people.

In 1991, with the support of the Town of Bassendean, the Bassendean Historical Society (BHS) was formed to be responsible for the Pensioner Guard cottage, supervise its opening to the public for regular visits, and to promote the creation of a museum and historical interpretive centre in the adjacent house. In 1994 the cottage was placed on the State Heritage Register followed later that year by the inclusion of Earlsferry House.⁵¹

The Town's first female CEO, Stephanie (Steve) Smith was appointed in 1992 and served for four years.

A prison for Bassendean?

The State Government under Premier Richard Court closed the Pyrtton Training Centre, which had been purchased in the 1950s as a hostel for severely disabled children, after the relocation of all remaining residents by 1997. The buildings were put into caretaker mode with limited community access while plans for their future use were developed. The State Government was interested in maximising a return from the large area of riverside land by

selling it as prime residential lots, but the rezoning application was vigorously opposed by the Town and knocked back by the Planning Commission. Given the fact that the land was located on part of a registered site of Indigenous significance, Bassendean councillors and staff were keen to see a sensitive development of Pyrtton that would acknowledge its importance to Western Australia.

It came as a shock when it was subsequently announced that Pyrtton would become a women's prison. Community opposition was immediate and vocal. The Bassendean Town Council set up a community advisory panel to consult with residents and at a public meeting held at the Swan Districts oval on 27 July 1998, the proposal was soundly rejected.

Attorney General, Peter Foss, was adamant that the prison would go ahead and all that was needed was a rezoning of the land to be approved by the WA Planning Commission. To highlight opposition, Mayor Bevan Carter and Bassendean MLA, Clive Brown, supported by a group of residents, walked the twelve kilometres from Bassendean to the office of the Minister for Planning in Perth to hand over a petition and numerous written objections. Aboriginal community members under the leadership of Robert Bropho of the Swan Valley Nyungah Community persuaded Federal Minister for Heritage, Robert Hill, to halt proceedings to investigate possible desecration of the site if the prison went ahead. For almost another three years, nothing was resolved, but the State Labor Party, then in opposition, publicly supported the claims of Aboriginal people and the Town. In February 2001 Labor was elected with Dr Geoff Gallop as Premier and the Pyrtton Prison scheme was quietly mothballed.⁵²

The changing town

In the early 2000s plans were finalised to construct a new railway station at Bassendean. The scheme involved demolishing the steep ramp and long overhead bridge that spanned Guildford Road. The removal sparked a community debate but, steered by the Town's CEO, Gary Evershed, Bassendean forged a partnership with the State Government and the new station went ahead. It was opened by Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Alannah MacTiernan, on 31 May 2004.

It had become clear by the end of the 20th century that the library constructed



New Bassendean Memorial Library building (BLHC P1605)

in 1972 was in need of a major overhaul and that ideally an entirely new building was needed. A proposal for resiting the library to the Swan Districts Oval was considered but rejected by the WA Planning Commission. The old library was demolished in December 2004 and the new building, which included a secure archives area, was opened by Mayor Tina Klein in October 2005.

The new railway station was seen as part of a comprehensive plan for the revitalisation of the town centre which found expression in the Council's *Vision 2030 Community Plan* publication. Optimistic estimates of a growth in Perth's population of more than 50 percent over 25 years would inevitably place pressure on suburbs close to the city to increase housing density, but also provide opportunities to improve employment, recreation, and transport options. Fifteen years on and, for a variety of reasons, a rapid rise in population has not yet eventuated, but issues of housing density, transport and business hubs, and use of community spaces remain as relevant as ever.

In 2005, the Town approved the *Mary Crescent Reserve Concept Plan*, and obtained Federal grant funding to implement it. The reserve, which is located



*Mary Crescent Reserve - artwork by Peter Farmer.
(BLHC P1226)*

on a site of Indigenous significance, was redeveloped after consultation with Aboriginal residents with its major feature being a gathering site with an art work created by Peter Farmer in 2012 depicting the Noongar six seasons of the year. A nature playground was constructed on the reserve in February 2019.

Over the years residents in Ashfield had voiced concerns that their part of the suburb was overlooked. As a way to address the issue, in 2008 a

review was launched which resulted in the *Ashfield Precinct Plan*. One of the improvements made during these times was the Town's decision to partner with the State Government and guarantee half the funds needed to provide Ashfield with underground power. The State Underground Power Program was first launched in 1996 and with the backing of the Town of Bassendean, Ashfield was chosen for round five of the rollout across selected suburbs in 2011. This was the year that Ashfield residents formed a community access network under the title Ashfield CAN and obtained funding for street beautification schemes and hosted regular local events. The underground power supply work was completed in 2013.

Town centre revitalisation continued with encouragement for street art and colourful murals. The Old Perth Road Markets which operated on Sundays during the summer months, and the outdoor film screenings by Telethon Community Cinemas were established with the enthusiastic backing of Mayor John Gangell in 2009. It was also a time of controversy when a plan to shift the war memorial to the BIC on the corner of Wilson and Guildford roads and upgrade it met with concentrated public opposition. Despite consultation with

and the approval of the RSL, a petition circulated in 2011 gained significant support. For a while it seemed that the relocation would be abandoned, but Council members voted overwhelmingly in favour of the move. On 11 April 2015, a fortnight before the Town's centenary commemoration of Gallipoli, a refurbished obelisk, a new wall of remembrance, and a reflection pond, were officially dedicated.

The amalgamation threat

The concern over the war memorial became overshadowed by the possibility that Bassendean would be swallowed up by neighbouring Bayswater with the intent of the Colin Barnett government to slash the number of metropolitan local authorities from 30 to 14 new 'super councils'.⁵³ Under the amalgamation process, first mooted by the Alan Carpenter government in 2005, but reinvigorated by an announcement made by Premier Barnett in July 2013 that mergers would be compulsory, with most new councils supporting around 100,000 residents.

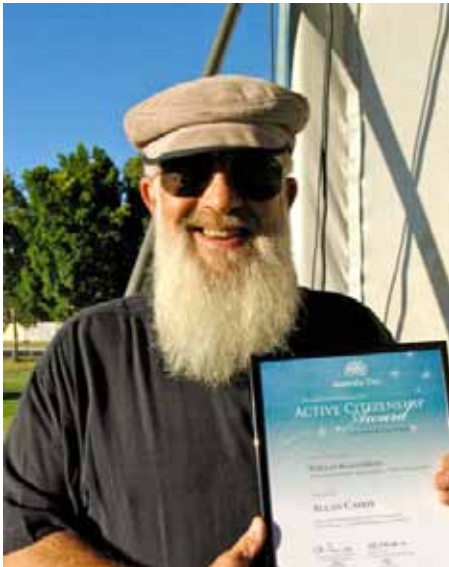
There were to be definite winners and losers. Instead of abolishing all metropolitan local authorities, redrawing boundaries, and renaming the new districts to make the process seem equitable, under this scheme some councils would be totally subsumed by neighbouring ones, while others remained untouched. The small western suburb councils of Nedlands, Cottesloe, Peppermint Grove and Claremont, were to retain their separate status, while others, like Bassendean would cease to exist as a local authority.

Despite an earlier assessment by the Department of Local Government that the Town was, 'a sustainable local authority with the capacity to provide for its community into the future',⁵⁴ Bassendean was to be largely taken over by Bayswater⁵⁵ with the confirmation that the suburb would not even constitute a separate ward and that the name would disappear. Bassendean councillors and staff cooperated by reviewing and coordinating administrative systems and staffing matters, while trying hard to negotiate some degree of autonomy for the Town. The fight appeared lost when on Christmas Eve 2014 the Town of Bassendean was formally abolished by a brief notice in the *Government Gazette*.

Bassendean was not the only council to be profoundly affected. The drawn out amalgamation process proved to be highly unpopular with the public and influenced politicians across the spectrum. The Labor Party, the Greens, and the Nationals remained staunchly opposed, and even some Liberal Party colleagues were vocally critical. Nevertheless, it still came as a surprise when the Premier announced on 17 February 2015 that 'Governor's orders will be revoked for mergers that aren't supported by the councils'.⁵⁶ With that statement, the local government reform agenda was abruptly terminated and less than a month later the Town of Bassendean was quietly reinstated as a separate local authority.

Towards the future

Allan Caddy, the Town's popular and longest serving officer retired after 38 years as Bassendean's Librarian. Anne Brinkworth, who had been Bassendean's longest serving Town Councillor, announced that after 27



Allan Caddy with his recognition of long service to the Town of Bassendean.

years she would be retiring before the local government elections in October that year. In recognition of her service and community involvement over the years, Anne was made a Freeperson of the Town in March 2016.

Renee McLennan was elected in 2017 as the Town's third female mayor, after Vicki Philipoff's one year term in 1995-6, and Tina Klein's six years from 2003 to 2009. In July 2018 Bassendean's population had grown to almost 16,000, with a total revenue of just under \$22.5million. The CEO, Bob Jarvis, resigned in 2018 and Bassendean's second female Chief Executive Officer, Peta Mabbs, was appointed in October of that year.

The ambitious 'BassenDream Our Future' project was launched in 2018 and by the middle of the following year 3,000 residents had been involved in providing their views. Mayor McLennan reported

[W]e now have a greater understanding of our community's vision and priorities for the future. ... We want to create an inclusive community with a vibrant, sustainable future while honouring the foundations of our past in partnership with the people of Bassendean.⁵⁷

Analysis showed that residents were most concerned about the environment of the Town and preserving its green spaces, natural parks, and river foreshore. History and heritage was also high on the list of its residents' views on what makes Bassendean such an appealing place in which to live.

All plans for community events had to be cancelled in early March 2020 as Western Australia enforced strict social distancing to cope with the world-wide outbreak of the Covid-19 virus pandemic. Local businesses were hard hit with cafes and independent shops closing or providing only a take-away service. Community facilities such as sporting grounds, senior centres, youth facilities, and children's playgrounds were closed. All public events and bookings for venues and halls were cancelled and wherever possible staff were assisted to work from home. While the building was closed, the Bassendean Memorial Library maintained a reduced service providing online information, phone contact for residents, and a popular expansion of the Books on Wheels program for residents retitled 'Pick and Drop'.⁵⁸



Anne Brinkworth

At a special council meeting held on 23 March 2020 emergency measures were passed to deal with the crisis in the community which included no rate increases and delaying financial impact of the proposed underground power north of the railway line until 2021. A series of initiatives to contact and assist

vulnerable residents was announced in April. Restrictions began to be eased in June,

Whatever the future brings, it is clear that the people of Bassendean will, as they have throughout its history, remain a close and engaged community.

Jennie Carter

May 2020.

Endnotes

- 1 *Author's note:* unless otherwise indicated, information about the pre-1980 history of Bassendean is drawn from *Bassendean: a social history 1829-1979*.
- 2 Archaeological evidence from Devil's Lair in the South West show human habitation dating from around 50,000 years ago.
- 3 There is no contemporary record of Stirling stopping at or naming Success Hill in 1827.
- 4 Lord Cottesloe (ed.) *Diary & letters of Admiral, Sir C H Fremantle GCB relating to the founding of the colony of Western Australia 1829* [first published 1928]. Fremantle; Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979 pp.91-92.
- 5 Kings Park was another traditional meeting ground which like Success Hill, has never been freehold land. There are nine registered Aboriginal sites in Bassendean including Success Hill Reserve and all of Bennett Brook.
- 6 Noongar people divided the year into six seasons which roughly approximate the following months: December to January - Birak (dry and hot), February to March – Bunuru (very hot), April to May - Djeran (cool change), June to July – Makuru (cold, wet and windy), August to September – Djilba (wet but warmer) and October to November – Kamarang (dry periods and increasing heat).
- 7 For example interview with Mervyn Woods 1982 (J Carter BLHC)
- 8 JS Battye Library of West Australian History *Extracts of letters from the Swan River* 994.11 EXT p.11.
- 9 Jane Dodds in a letter to her family. The early colonists dug up so many yams, that it is estimated that within a year or so a crucial vegetable that had sustained Aboriginal people for thousands of years had completely disappeared. The loss of their main source of starch might explain why Noongar people were so often caught raiding potato patches cultivated by settlers.
- 10 *Morning Herald* 23 October 1832. Published in Ian Berryman (ed) *Swan River letters Vol.1*. Glengarry, WA, Swan River Press, 2002 p.233.
- 11 Another six children, two sons and four daughters were born in Western Australia.
- 12 See Sunderland's survey map 1829 SROWA Cons 3868 169/141.
- 13 William Dyer to his father. 'Letters from Swan River and Tasmania (1830-1848)' Acc.1598A.Battye Library, SLWA.
- 14 It is believed that their daughter Mary Anne Thompson planted the magnificent Moreton Bay Fig tree in the 1870s on the family home on the corner of Lamb and Thompson

- streets. See Heritage Council register place no. 25929 <http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/Details/ab289974-4437-4c88-8cc8-c9e59067b832>
- 15 Interestingly , the Hamersley's large house, Lockeridge [note spelling], was resumed in 1955 and erroneously named Pyrton, while the original Pyrton land became part of the suburb of Lockridge.
 - 16 Bevan and Jennie Carter 'For their country's good: ending transportation and the last convict ship' in *Early Days: Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society* No.102, 2018.
 - 17 The change of heart came from the British Government. Geoffrey Bolton 'Who were the Pensioners?' In *Convictism in Western Australia: Studies in Western Australian History IV* University of WA 1981 p.85.
 - 18 Other Pensioner villages were set up in the metropolitan area at Perth, South Perth, Claremont, North Fremantle, Coogee, and Willagee. Country ones were at Bunbury, Busselton, Albany, Toodyay, Northam, York, Kojonup, Greenough, and Port Gregory. See 'History of the EPG' <https://enrolledpensionerforcewa.org.au/about-us/history-of-the-epg/> accessed 10 January 2019. See also *1 Surrey Street, Bassendean Pensioner Guard Cottage (1856-1857, 1991-1993) Residence (c.1893, c.1952) Conservation Management Plan* Prepared for Town of Bassendean by Laura Gray in association with Irene Sauman December 2007.
 - 19 DuCane was 21 years old when he arrived, he built a house in Guildford which is still standing, and designed the first bridge over the river at Guildford. He married Mary, the daughter of Georgiana Molloy, in 1854 and the marriage was a long and happy one. DuCane was recalled to England, leaving in February 1856, where he later became a leading prison reformer and was knighted.
 - 20 Initially twelve were planned, but because of shortage of labour and materials, only four started construction.
 - 21 The largest village was at North Fremantle where 21 cottages were originally built. See <http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/Details/aac258cf-aaa6-4a9a-bc63-0e0dfd5dfb56>
 - 22 Davies was originally listed as John Davis when he came to Western Australia as a former soldier, but when he took possession of the cottage, he was recorded as John Law Davies and his descendants confirm that was his name.
 - 23 Amelia Bates died in 1909.
 - 24 Alf Thomas *A history of Bassendean: compiled and published for the Bassendean Roads Board*, Bassendean, 1947 p.27.
 - 25 *WA Record* 19 October 1895.
 - 26 Now the Old Perth Road.
 - 27 Geoff Spiller *Micro-breweries to monopoly and back : Swan River Colony breweries 1829-2002*. Perth; Western Australian Museum, 2003 pp.130-131.
 - 28 Alf Thomas *A history of Bassendean* p.58.
 - 29 Research by Janet Megarrity, Local Studies Librarian, Bassendean Memorial Library. <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/groupstories/196> This percentage is slightly higher than the 15% of AIF casualties overall. <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war>
 - 30 The Ugly Men's Voluntary Worker's Association of Western Australia Inc. first established in 1917, was a uniquely Western Australian charitable organisation.
 - 31 Information supplied by Janet Megarrity.
 - 32 Wales & Gillies monument manufacturers were also responsible for a number of other war memorials in Western Australia including those at Bayswater, Mt Lawley, and Claremont.
 - 33 Jose Hay attempted to debunk the story in a long letter to the editor of the *Swan Express* 17 March 1922. He was the author of a 1906 booklet annotating Charles Fraser's survey of the Swan River in 1827 which had been given as a talk to the WA Natural History Society on 20 March 1906.
 - 34 Sustenance labour was the system brought in during the Depression to provide work to unemployed men (women were not included) for a small subsidiary payment. 'Susso'

- work in the metropolitan area was keenly sought after, as men were often sent to the country to labour on large public schemes such as major dams, bridges, and roads.
- 35 *West Australian* 11 November 1935.
 - 36 The block was subdivided and in 1997 the house was demolished. A plaque in Mann Way now marks the site.
 - 37 The first was Edith Cowan who was elected in 1921 but lost her seat in 1924.
 - 38 <http://www.wv2roll.gov.au/PlaceSearch.aspx> Search for 'Bassendean', Ashfield, and Eden Hill.
 - 39 The *State Housing Act* was proclaimed in 1947.
 - 40 Hadfields records. Correspondence from Bert Meecham to Hon. DR McLarty 6 September 1951.
 - 41 Menck, Clare *A Thematic history of Government housing in Western Australia. Prepared for the Department of Housing. Final report November 2014* p.361 "... 'a special type of house for Natives' had been developed, using the labour-only pre-cut method. It was designed to have 'all the features for good standard living' while keeping costs as low as possible. The Commission planned to sell these homes under Leasehold condition to 'Natives who are deserving of better living conditions' in both the Metropolitan and regional areas. The first such home was erected in York in 1954. The first Metropolitan example, also built in 1954, was at Eden Hill. Both the York and Eden Hill houses were built on land owned by the Aboriginal families. It was reported at the time that the SHC had purchased the land from them to erect the houses. No other information has been located regarding this, and it is not known what the situation of land title was for families who later left the houses."
 - 42 Beatrice Chape served until 1979. She died in 2017 aged 97.
 - 43 Gwen is the daughter of Rita Smith (nee North) who formed the first Broadway musical group in 1926
 - 44 Stan Moses was born in 1925 and died in 2014.
 - 45 The water playground closed in 2004.
 - 46 In 1993 became the EMRC with offices at Belmont and in 1995 member councils expanded to six with the entry of Kalamunda.
 - 47 From 1960 to 1995 local government elections in Western Australia were held on the 3rd Saturday in May. Councillors were elected for three year terms with one third of the council facing election each year and presidents and mayors being elected yearly. In 1995 a new *Local Government Act* was passed. From 1997 elections are held every second year with four year terms for elected members with closest to half of councillors elected every two years and the mayor elected for a two year term. Polling day was moved to the 3rd Saturday in October. In 2011 The number of Bassendean councillors was reduced to six, with the mayor holding a casting vote, and the three ward system (North, West and East wards) which had been in place since West Guildford days was abolished. In 2015 the number of councillors was increased to seven to revert to uneven numbers.
 - 48 A previous short history was *A history of Bassendean: compiled and published for the Bassendean Roads Board* by Alf Thomas in 1947. Morva Cogan had also written the text for *Bassendean and Guildford sketchbook* with drawings by Bruce Wroth, one of 'The Sketchbook' series of slim volumes published by Rigby in 1976, she also wrote a short manuscript which indicated intended work on a larger history of the town.
 - 49 Several of these recorded interviews are stored in both the Bassendean Local History Collection and the Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia.
 - 50 A brochure giving biographical sketches of people whose names are on the plaques has been produced by the Bassendean Memorial Library.
 - 51 As at April 2020, the following have been entered onto the State Register of Heritage Places: Bassendean Oval Entrance Gate, Daylesford House, Earlsferry House, Guildford Road Bridge, Bassendean Oval, Bassendean Oval Grandstand, MacDonald Grandstand, Bassendean Fire Station (former), Success Hill Lodge (formerly the Lockridge Hotel), the Pensioner Guard Cottage, the Bassendean Masonic Lodge building, and the cast iron red post box on the corner of Surrey St and North Road.
 - 52 A land use proposal, *Korndin Kulluch - A Place of Reconciliation; Bennett Brook Nyungar*

Cultural and Environmental Concept Plan, which incorporated an Aboriginal culture centre was released in May 2012 for comment, but has not been progressed to date (March 2020).

- 53 Perth Now 31 July 2013 <https://www.perthnow.com.au/news/wa/premier-colin-barnett-local-government-minister-reveal-council-mergers-ng-83d7fb6e9e3e0f3fdbce3204d9850cb0>
- 54 Annual Report 2008-2009 p.11.
- 55 The City of Swan would take over a small section north of Eden Hill.
- 56 Media Statement from the Premier's Office 'Future of LG reform now rests with councils'. <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/Barnett/2015/02/Future-of-LG-reform-now-rests-with-councils--.aspx> Tuesday, 17 February 2015
- 57 2018-2019 Annual Report.
- 58 Information provided by Janet Megarrity.

Appendix 1

Local Government name changes

1901 - 1922	West Guildford Road Board (Chairman)
1922 - 1961	Bassendean Road Board (Chairman)
1961 - 1975	Bassendean Shire Council (President)
1975 - to present	Town of Bassendean (Mayor)