

The forgotten story of Cottesloe Beach Oval

When I was first trawling Trove and came across Cottesloe Beach Oval, I instantly thought it would be a venue in what is presently known as Cottesloe. I then assumed it would be Cottesloe Oval, and beach had just been dropped off the end over time as the name was too long

Then when researching I saw that in the 1920's there was two venues that sport was played at Cottesloe Oval and Cottesloe Beach Oval. The historical record in publications such as Soccer Anzacs said Caledonians played at Mann Oval, there was no note of it being called Cottesloe Beach Oval. I needed more evidence to find out what and where Cottesloe Beach Oval was located.

It wasn't until a photo on Trove titled Cottesloe Beach (now Mosman Park) that I looked further afield and didn't look for evidence of a soccer pitch on the world famous Cottesloe Promenade .

In a long forgotten story the town of Mosman Park was called The District of Cottesloe Beach, much to the disdain of the government at the time. It was named after Cottesloe Beach Railway Station, which is now called Mosman Park Station on the Fremantle Line. Mosman Park was called Cottesloe Beach for 21 years from 1909-1930 before eventually being renamed along with the ground.

I used spatial archaeology to confirm that Mann Oval, named after the President of Cottesloe Beach Council was in fact Cottesloe Beach Oval, a name long forgotten by supporters and historians alike. The field is more square shaped than oval and is quite compact compared to ovals such as Fremantle Oval.

The archaeological spatial boundaries show a ground that held rectangular codes and Australian Rules in the 1920's as Cottesloe Beach Oval did. Williamson noted that community acceptance of both codes in the 1930's at the ground. However the major football code of the region was Association Football. Australian Rules Football was not hated, but it knew its place, that it was not as popular as the world game in many parts of the western suburbs.

Caledonians success in the 1920's relates to the community and local decision makers passion for the game which carries on for much of the early 20th century

On the 31st March 1933 the council had allocated a Caledonians home game ahead of a WFAA fixture which had to be rescheduled to the following weekend. The opposite occurred in other parts of Perth such as Leederville and Subiaco where soccer would often be kicked out or denied entrance to sporting fields. .Showing the pre-eminent position held by the code in this part of Perth

Today Mosman Park's major football code is Australian Rules Football not soccer.

Preliminary research on how this occurred leads back to the entrance into the WAFL of Claremont Tigers in 1925. Due to the strength of soccer the Tigers were very weak at the same time Caledonians were at their peak.

In John Williamson's Soccer Anzacs, Williamson argues that local councils defined how Perth interacted with sport. A particular election would change the attitudes, rates and access to a particular ground depending on which councillors had been elected.

The decision by the neighbouring Claremont Council in 1925 to spend 5000 pounds on Claremont Oval and evict Claremont Soccer Club from the ground is evidence of a council decision that changed a communities sporting interest.

So why did the Claremont Tigers get established in a region that was an island of British Soccer hegemony?

Much like the establishment of Greater Western Sydney Giants, Claremont Tigers came into the WAFL based on being an untapped population, despite other sides based on talent and interest being more

applicable to join the top league. It was an Australian Rules Football administration decision to be represented in every district and thus Claremont was the only district which was not represented in the top competition.

This administration decision changed the region from Association Football to Australian Rules Football and thus a ground that used to hold three football codes, with soccer being given priority has only the Australian game being played on it today. The name of Cottesloe Beach Oval, when soccer was at its peak is long gone.

But grounds such as Cottesloe Beach Oval have stories to tell, its spatial shape shows the legacy and prominence of the rectangular codes in the region.

As in my other articles on my blog, spatial archaeology can be used in sports history to interpret stories not written down in the historical record.

The WACA ground went from an oval suited to Australian Rules Football, to squared off boundaries in its last redevelopment because it wanted to be home to Perth Glory after its contract with the AFL had finished. The growth of soccer in the late 1990's is reflected in the spatial archaeology of the WACA.

Field spaces are simply an expression of a community and sports will adapt venues according to the social demands of the time. Grounds and stadia are often the creation of a surrounding community, whether at regional or a more city bound level.

The lost name of Cottesloe Beach Oval, from both memories and historical interpretations in the region reflects a community that no longer sees Association Football as its most popular football code. However the archaeological footprint remains to elicit the fact that in this region in the early part of the 20th century, the world game reigned supreme.

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References:

The West Australian, March 31st 1933

A Tiger Tale - History of Claremont Football Club

Soccer Anzacs