

Newsletter

MANDALAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

Celebrating



MANDALAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION 1974

Article written by James Devereaux

In October 1973, the Devereaux family moved into 34 Romanella Street, Fig Tree Pocket. The area at that time was known as Mandalay Estate, developed by Alfred Grant.

There had been significant rainfall during January 1974 culminating in the third largest flood to inundate Brisbane's inner and outer suburbs. On the Sunday morning my wife, Madeline, indicated that she would go to church, then come back afterwards and help if needed; drove our car to the crest of Tofanella Street to be greeted by a sea covering the park and up Fig Tree Pocket Road almost to the crest near the now Equestrian centre. Houses in Fig Tree Pocket Road, Kenny Street facing the lower ends of the park, Donatello and Mandalay Streets were completely under water. Some houses in the park area covered by water hyacinth that had floated off the lake.

We had been watching the river steadily rising and able to see through to Botticelli Street, due to the fact there were very few houses or trees to impede the view. Unbeknownst to us the river had broken its banks and come through the 'Off leash area' cutting us off. By the time she came back home, I and my young brother-in-law were asked to go to the end of Botticelli Street (boat ramp end) to help with sandbagging.

With the river rising rapidly, we were then asked to help move furniture, clothes and household items, from homes in immediate danger of flooding, and store them in our home as it was a double storey. The residence at 26 Romanella Street was empty at the time and was also used to store residents' belongings.

Finally, the order was given to evacuate as all services were to be cut off. Geoff Bowden, one of the original residents, volunteered to ferry all evacuees across the park in his boat. Most of us with many small children, necessary belongings and perhaps a pet or two. All of us wondering where we would be going and what we would find when we could eventually return to our homes.

Most of the families returned within a week or so to see whether their homes were liveable, some with the knowledge that they would not be, but hoping that something could be salvaged and to start the heartbreaking chore of cleaning up, most realising that they would have to find alternative accommodation elsewhere.

We found that there were volunteers already hosing out the ground floor of our home and as

the amount of flood water that had penetrated had been minimal and the walls were brick and the floor concrete, there was no major damage. Some kind souls had been in and lifted our piano up on bricks saving it from damage.

Once home, everyone that was available started checking the homes that had been flooded and started clearing the homes and yards of everything that was not salvageable and the corner of Fig Tree Pocket Road and Mactier Street became an enormous tip.

Weeks after the cleanup, a 'thank you party' was organized for the volunteers and the residents who had worked so hard to try and get the area back to some sort of normality. It was held on a spare block next to the Bowden residence near the corner of Fig Tree Pocket Road and Tofanella Street.

On the Sunday, whilst cleaning up after the party, Geoff Bowden, David Hall and myself, James Devereaux, looking at the devastation, agreed that what was now necessary was a progress association to get the Council assistance needed to rehabilitate the park and the area generally.

For a start, because the river had split, diverting through the now 'off leash area' with the rest flowing around past the boat ramp it caused the current to slow. The result being the depositing of hundreds of tonnes of sand along the boat ramp end of Fig Tree Pocket Road, beside the old dairy farm (behind Nearco Street and the end of Romanella Street) that was not part of the estate development. It took weeks for a constant stream of tip trucks to remove it.

A meeting was held, and many meetings afterwards, at our residence, 34 Romanella Street, and the Mandalay Progress Association was born. Geoff Bowden was elected the first President with various residents offering to form a committee. These included, David Hall, James Devereaux, Peg Turley, (previously of Botticelli Street, deemed to be the most effective negotiator with the Lord Mayor's office) and William Robinson, (previously of Nearco Street), who drew up the constitution and registered the association. Apologies if I have omitted anyone from that original committee.

Unfortunately, progress was slow as our Alderman, Lex Ord, deemed that there were not enough residents to justify the allocation of any funding. We petitioned for the Mandalay Estate to be part of the Lone Pine bus route, installation of a postal and public telephone box and for the park to be regularly mowed



These photos were taken whilst watching the Brisbane River rising during the 1974 Flood. These are the original homes that were situated at 33 and 35 Botticelli Street, going left to right. It is just possible to see the height of the river in between the roofs of the 2 homes.

and maintained. All to no avail and this attitude basically remained until after Expo 1988.

I drew up a plan for the park, with a gravel path and stone wall around the lake, including a play area, similar to what we have now. The council again denied that we were eligible for funding due to the area's small population. The fact that some of these facilities were shown as part of the approved development in the original Mandalay Estate brochures distributed by the developer, Alfred Grant, was not considered.

We had working bees to mow the park and to plant trees, but these were destroyed when the Council finally sent a team to slash the park. Another resident, Gavin Smith, (previously of Botticelli Street) then organized the purchase of Jacarandas, Poincianas, She Oaks and some other varieties of trees. Another working bee then planted and staked these around the perimeter of and through the park. On a number of occasions, I mowed around them to prevent them getting collar rot.

Besides the working bees there were many

social gatherings, BBQS and a dance with a dance floor, whilst a full pig cooked, Hawaiian style in a pit dug on the spare block next to No. 34 Romanella Street. My wife organized several Christmas parties for the children, with Geoff Bowden playing Santa. She used to purchase bulk supplies of sweets and ice creams to make up lolly bags and treats to be handed out. Alan Bloore, teenage son of Arthur Bloore, (previously of Botticelli Street), mowed a running track in the park for the children's races and the committee members would organize these and games for the children to participate in. A Baby-sitting group was also formed. It was invaluable for parents with young children who did not have family living close by to look after the children when parents wanted 'a date night' or had a work function to attend. It worked on a point system and the sitters were only those parents belonging to the group. Those were days when there was still a lot of open space, we all knew one another, our children could wander freely, and we all felt very safe and secure.



The view is from the back of No.34 Romanella Street into Botticelli Street. Left is facing the previous property in 35 Botticelli Street prior its recent 2023 redevelopment. Right is approximately 2-3 properties further along Botticelli Street towards the boat ramp area.

The Presidents prior to Expo.88 were, Geoff Bowden, Col Chesmond, James Devereaux and Warren Fletcher (the longest serving president).

Their achievements during this period were that:

1. The Lone Pine bus would, in the afternoon, transport the area's school children to a bus stop at the corner of Fig Tree Pocket Road and Tofanella Street. Prior to this the children would be dropped off at the Lone Pine Sanctuary terminus and then walk down Gunnin Street and Fig Tree Pocket Road (the Straightaway) to their various homes. A very long walk for some who were quite young.
2. We negotiated with CementCo on the Oxley side of the river, for maintenance to limit the noise of the barges, the 'Darra' and the 'CementCo.' dropping the coral at the wharf and then picking it up with 'grabs' to deposit onto the conveyor belts to transport it up to the cement works.
3. The gravel works (no longer in existence), opposite the area where the Montessori school is located, donated \$5000.00, again after some negotiation, to purchase and plant trees for noise abatement along the banks of the river. Unfortunately, the trees were destroyed by fires being lit.
4. Kerry Packer tried to purchase the land on which the Equestrian centre is located, to build a Polo club and facilities. The Association started fund raising, with the help of 'The Westside News' a local newspaper of the time, and support of local businesses, to challenge the Packer Corp. development in court, to prevent the loss of

the then Pony Club. We received full support from Pony Club members and the residents of Mandalay and reaching up into Gunnin Street, Kenmore Road, Jesmond Road and surrounds, in the raising of funds.

5. We lobbied for the bus service, which was inaugurated for Expo. 88, into the estate to be kept and it has been maintained and extended.

These details of the Association's beginnings are as accurate as possible, given that my memory has had to span 50 years of recollections. So many people who contributed to the development of Mandalay as it was known, have passed on and some moved to other places. I am sure there are some long-standing residents with many more stories and anecdotes for that time, that are not included here.

An anecdote regarding the area, now occupied by the Montessori school and the Gan Gani Kindergarten; it was, originally, a designated sewerage treatment plant site. The Council changed this plan to a residential area development instead. Infrastructure and roads were constructed. The individual blocks were not formally surveyed and sized. The purchasers decided what dimensions, square metres, they wanted and paid according to the Council's valuation per square metre at the time. However, The Fig Tree Pocket Estate did not go ahead, as at the first sale it was discovered that the Council had neglected to have the area rezoned as a 'residential A' development. The sign 'Fig Tree Pocket Estate' stayed in place for many years but the land laid fallow.



The view is from the right-hand side of No.34 Romanella Street looking down the street to the old dairy farm.

The house on the right-hand side is no. 26 and was vacant at the time.

The flood water had broken through the farm heading down Romanella Street.

ONE FAMILY'S MANDALAY JOURNEY

Article written by Alan Inglis

When we (Inglis family) moved from Milton to live in Fig Tree Pocket in 1984 – first 15 years in Romanella street and since 1999 at 833 Fig Tree Pocket road – we immediately detected an innate sense of community among our neighbours. This was even before we had heard of the Mandalay Progress Association (MPA) which we would come to realise later added another layer, epitomising and promoting that sense of community.

Often it is just the little things. For example, we had arrived recognising the many physical attributes of the area but apprehensive about the lack of such a basic amenity as a corner store. We would have to drive a considerable distance just to do basic shopping. It didn't take long before we came to realise this only added to the area's charm. Cooking dinner and find you don't have the necessary egg, lemon or whatever. No problem, just pop next door and your friendly neighbour will provide one.

Not long after we had settled in, then MPA president Warren Fletcher knocked on our door and explained the MPA to us. We have been a member ever since.

We soon learned it was a great place to raise a family.

With our aging parents living an hour or more away while we had two very young children, Pam and I faced the usual problem of finding baby sitters. Again the community stepped in, with other parents telling us about the Baby Sitting Club that existed in Mandalay at the time. With many young children in Mandalay, we soon got to meet other parents further afield than our immediate neighbours and all harboured that welcoming sense of community.

Fortunately our children were born before mobile phones and social media. It was a safe area for kids. They were outdoors roaming the local streets and parks where they met other children to play with – often games they invented themselves using their imagination, and only sometimes with adult input. These included children's concerts, Christmas carols and street cricket. The trivial inconvenience of having to stop the car's progress down Romanella street for 10 seconds while kids removed the rubbish bin (wickets) to clear the car's path was more than compensated by the joy of seeing children playing together and having fun.

One memorable occasion did involve the parents. The children challenged the parents to a game of basketball on the Montessori school

court. The challenge was accepted and we unfit parents tried to counter the speed and energy of the youngsters, to no avail. The next day there were some very sore adults limping around the community.

While we parents were comfortable in the knowledge that it was a safe area, we would have been less comfortable had we known then of the stories that came out after the children somehow made it to adulthood. In the early days when the riverbank was overgrown, our son Austin and his local mates (I'm guessing aged about 5 or 6) came across a dinghy in the long grass. Too young to have developed a full appreciation of such concepts as other people's property, let alone recognise danger, our adventurers decided it would be great fun to take the dinghy (minus oars) for a ride down the muddy, tidal, flowing river. What could possibly go wrong? They then discovered the dinghy was secured with a padlock to a post set in concrete in the ground. No problems. Austin ran home and returned with my hacksaw. It took a long time and a lot of perseverance, but eventually they sawed through the lock. By then the light was starting to fade and they were getting hungry so they decided to postpone their adventure until the next day. They returned the next day to find they had met their match. There were now 3 padlocks securing the dinghy.

We also found out much later that our children, when a little older, joined with other local kids in regularly swimming from the boat ramp to the other side of the river. The attraction was a rope dangling from a large tree branch. Using the rope, they would swing out over the river and drop into the water. (Warning to current parents: I'm told the rope is still there.)

Even when they were in their twenties the "Pocket People", as the local kids called themselves, continued the fun. Ben Reid from Goya street organised an annual boat float. The now young adults would spend weeks building rafts which they would float downstream on the tide in a flotilla from Jindalee to the Mandalay boat ramp. Most participants, some in colourful outfits, rode on the main large raft. Other had built their own smaller rafts. One of these was covered with artificial grass. Armed with a tee, a bucket of old golf balls and a golf club, they proceeded unsustainably to hit the golf balls out into the water as they drifted downstream. Yet another raft was decorated with an old couch and TV set. The raft's owners sat on the couch as if they were watching TV while drinking their beer. (An esky was a large focus on all the rafts now that the "kids" were legal adults.)



2011 flood

Having arrived a decade after the 1974 flood, we had not witnessed the community in a crisis until the devastation of the 2011 flood. During that otherwise horrendous time we experienced community spirit at its zenith. As the floodwaters rose, with no electricity, no landline phone connection and mobile phone batteries drained, the old bush telegraph or word of mouth became the only method of communication. Word quickly spread of what to expect and who needed help. Right down to the method to prevent the floodwaters backing up through your toilets: put sand in a heavy duty plastic bag and place it in the toilet with a heavy weight on top. There was a pile of sand at a building site in River Park Place so we all went there where the young helped the older residents transport the sand back to their homes.

While everyone was extremely busy trying to raise their more valuable possessions to high points in their homes, they were also keeping an eye out for the needs of their neighbours. One such example stemmed from the residents at 846 Fig Tree Pocket road having wisely left the area just before the flood waters blocked vehicular traffic. They had left their furniture vulnerable to the rising flood so several of us carried much of it to an empty home in a higher part of the street.

We were very lucky at our split level home. We were able to move our cars to higher ground in time. While we did get 25 centimetres (1 foot) of water in our lower level encompassing our garage and passageway through to the rumpus room, the flood stopped about 20 centimetres below the level of the main area of the house. But nobody knew when or at what level the water would peak.

At around 6pm, local councillor Julian Symonds and a couple of rescue personnel arrived at our front steps in a rubber ducky. He said the experts were telling them it could go another metre higher. If we were going to leave, we would need to do so now while it was still daylight as it would probably be too dangerous for them to try to rescue people after dark. So Pam grabbed

our passports and family photos, climbed into the rescue vessel and left with them for the "mainland". I wanted to continue lifting as many items as possible up onto tables, benchtops etc so I opted to stay behind, knowing that I could move to our higher ground neighbours, Peter and Lee, when ready. When that time came, I held a change of clothes and a supply of wine at shoulder height and waded through the waste deep muddy water to the neighbours.

It was a sleepless night, worrying if I would have a home to return to. At about 2am both Peter and I were standing in his driveway wearing just our underpants as he shone a torch on the stick he had used to mark the flood level before we went to bed. Fortunately it showed the level had receded a little but we knew we were at the mercy of tides and any more rain. We were up at first light. Ironically, after so much incessant rain and floodwaters everywhere, it was a beautiful sunny day. The water had receded further, but not enough to do anything more than survey the damage.

Residents wiped out in the flood found shelter with their neighbours lucky enough to live on higher ground. But all were impacted by the loss of electricity power and landline phone communication. No power meant no way to recharge mobile batteries. It also meant those fridges spared during flooding would quickly lose all the food in their freezers. So our neighbour Peter spread the word to bring your freezer meat to his place that night where he would cook it up on his gas BBQ for a community dinner. We all brought our meat, salads etc plus wine and sat at tables Peter and Lee had set up in their yard. In the midst of all that misery, we had a great night eating, drinking and swapping stories about the horrendous event. Again community spirit carried everyone through.

The next day the flood level had dropped further. Our home having had the least amount of water of the affected homes in our vicinity, it also was the first drained of the

stinking flood. Almost immediately, neighbours friend and total strangers descended to help remove the sodden carpet and other unrecoverable items. Peter and Lee's brother-in-law, Hugh Cushing, brought his pressure hose and they cleaned out the whole area before moving on to help at the next house now free of floodwater. I joined them initially, before the water receded enough for the magnificent mud army to arrive with their younger, stronger volunteers better suited for the role.

I returned home to find Pam, helped by other local women, had set up an R & R drop in centre on our driveway and in our garage. A friend in the hospitality industry had donated a dozen loaves of sliced bread, other food and drinks and these were put to use. Pam also spread the word around the mud army female volunteers that our toilet was available for their use. She figured the men could just pee behind a rubbish pile, of which there were many.

2022 flood

One of the good things to occur after the 2011 flood was provided by MPA committee member Max Beckett. The Brisbane City Council was looking at where along the river bank to place backflow valves to help provide some protection in any future flood.

Originally Council rejected Mandalay on relative population size and economic grounds. Max used his background as an accountant and general numbers man to produce a chart showing Council had underestimated the quantity and quality of benefit that such a backflow valve would provide here. Council then changed its position and installed the valve in the riverbank behind Mandalay street.

Despite more rain falling on Brisbane in 2022, surpassing even the 1974 level, Mandalay was spared the worst of the damage wrought during the devastating 2011 flood. One reason was probably better management of Wivenhoe dam this time round. The other was probably the existence of Max's backflow valve preventing river water flooding back up through the main storm water drain to flood the centre of the estate, as had occurred in 2011.

Oldies

This year I joined the OBE (over bloody eighty) crowd and was able to witness again what a special place we live in, not only for young families such as when we arrived 40 years ago, but also for the older generation being given special consideration.

Long live Mandalay.





MANDALAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION HISTORY

Mandalay Progress Association was born out of the 1974 floods when Brisbane River broke its banks, surrounding the estate. Mandalay residents were cut off from Brisbane and all services, an island within the devastating floodwaters. This spawned a remarkable ethos, with neighbours rallying, creating an effective self-help network, supporting each other through the disaster.

The incredible community efforts during these trying times forged a special bond and can-do spirit among residents. The idea of Mandalay Progress Association was overwhelmingly supported within a neighbourhood wanting to sustain the community's self-concept and optimism. A committee was elected and has collectively worked as representatives for the local community ever since. Meaning for 50 years generations of neighbours in this area have volunteered their time and skills to the committee for no other reason than to make their neighbourhood a nicer place.

We would love it if you would bring your families along to a picnic in the park to celebrate 50 years of neighbours becoming friends. There is a food truck, band, entertainment for the kids and some free drinks. The committee will also be placing a time capsule in celebration of their 50th birthday with some contributions from local schools and other supporters. The hope being that some of them will still be around and living in Mandalay to see it opened in 2074.

If there is something you might like to include in the capsule, please contact the secretary mandalaysecretary@gmail.com.

The committee has received funding from Penny Wolff, Michael Berkman and Elizabeth Watson-Brown to help put on the event. We did want to make special note of two long term supporters of the MPA who have also, yet again put their hand in their pockets to pay for the kids' entertainment for this party. Without their ongoing support over many years the events literally couldn't happen... Cathy Lammie and Damian Lacey thank you for your generosity.



MICHAEL BERKMAN MP
Member for Maiwar

Michael Berkman
Member for Maiwar



Dedicated to a better Brisbane
Councillor Penny Wolff



ELIZABETH WATSON-BROWN
MEMBER FOR RYAN
Elizabeth Watson-Brown
MP for Ryan



GET INVOLVED

Please consider joining the committee. As for time commitment, we meet for 1.5 hour every six weeks and we are flexible with how much time you can offer. So why not give it a go to help out and do something for your community, and for yourself.

