Archives Office of Tasmania NS434

Hobart's Beaumaris Zoo was operated by the Hobart City Council at the Queen's Domain for fourteen years between February 1923 and November 1937, when a cycle of ill fortune and economic problems forced its closure. Beaumaris Zoo started life in 1895 as a private collection of birds and animals at the Beaumaris estate of Mary Roberts (1841-1921) in Sandy Bay Road (near St Ive's).

The new site of the Zoo was chosen by its curator, Arthur Reid, and covered a 5½ acre parcel of land near Government House and the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. A hundred years earlier, in the 1830s, convicts quarried sandstone from the site. Following the completion of Government House in 1858 the quarry was virtually abandoned.

Between 1891 and 1922 the site was a public park. With the use of prison labour and seedlings germinated at the Botanical Gardens, the site was landscaped and planted with a combination of native species on the upper slopes while the lower slopes were planted with exotic trees. Many of the larger trees which are currently located on the reserve relate back to this period of the site's use.

Early Zoos

The phenomena of the urban zoo has evolved only during the last two and a half centuries from what were principally the menageries or collections of the rich and powerful. London Zoo which was established in 1828 and was soon followed by countless other zoos throughout Europe, America and eventually Australia.

Australian Zoos

The introduction of the first zoos into mainland Australia was dominated by groups called acclimatization societies, whose principal objective was to *improve* the nature of the environment by introducing a selection of flora and fauna more in tune with a European environment (foxes were one of their major successes). It is perhaps fortunate that these societies faded away leaving only the zoos which they once ran.

Melbourne zoo was the first to be established in Australia in 1861, this was followed by Moore Park Zoo in Sydney and Adelaide Zoo in 1883 and finally the Perth Zoo. The famous Taronga Park Zoo was not opened until 1916 as a replacement for the old Moore Park Zoo.

Tasmania's First Zoo

Mary Roberts' zoo at Battery Point was opened to the public in 1895. It housed principally native Tasmanian and Australian animals, birds, reptiles and fish, with a small number of exotic birds also being held.

It was however most famous for the number of Tasmanian Tigers which passed through the zoo. Mary Roberts was the largest and most successful trader in these animals. Mrs Roberts was also the first person to breed Tasmanian Devils in captivity.

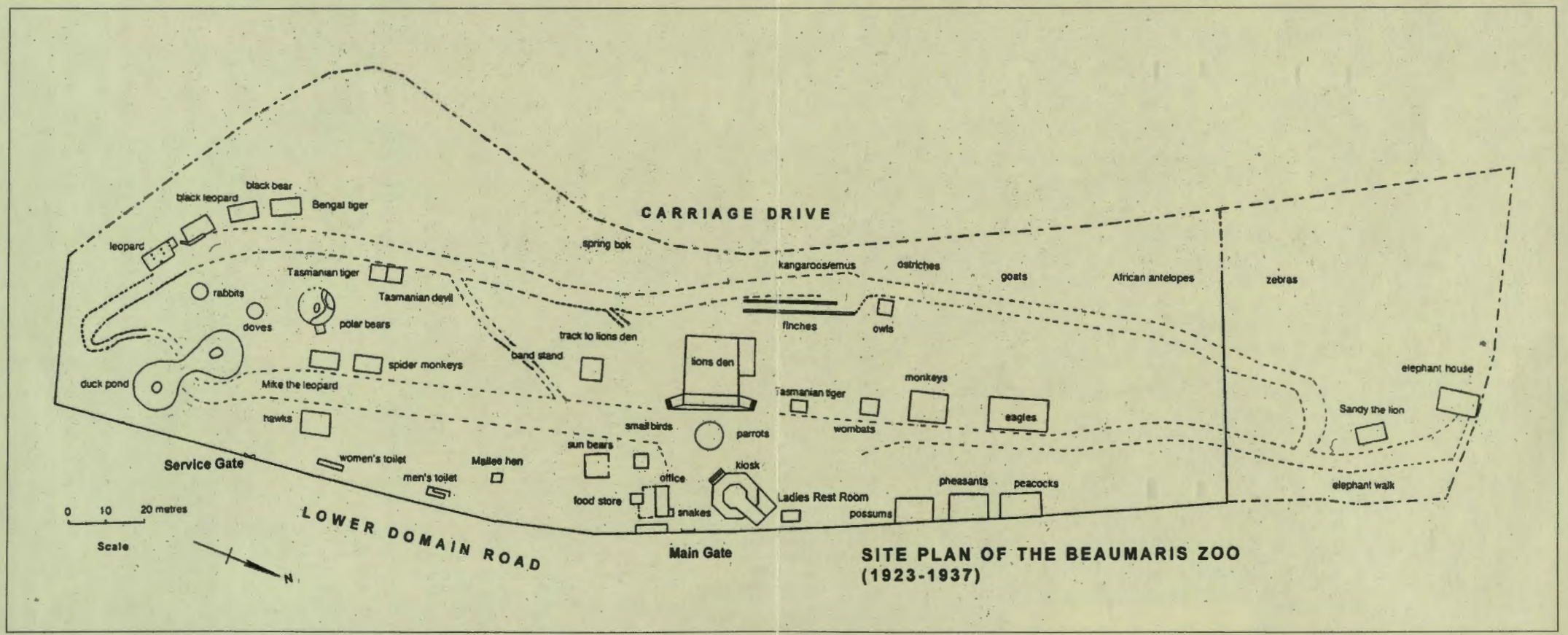
The Roberts' Zoo closed after the death of Mary Roberts in 1921. Following her death the Roberts family donated the collection to the Hobart City Council.

A Zoo On The Domain

In 1922 the Hobart City Council began plans to house its newly acquired collection of animals in Tasmania's first public zoo. On the appointment of Arthur Reid as Curator of the Zoo he recommended the Domain site as the most favourable due to its sheltered position and sunny aspect. Mr Reid, who was born in Scotland, was sent to the Colonies at the age of 21, with £100 "to make his fortune". Even as a young boy he had been interested in animals and continued this interest throughout his life.

Although still incomplete, the new Zoo was officially opened to the public on the 2 February 1923 during the Regatta.

Though there were many interesting displays in the zoo, three of the most popular were the polar bears, the leopards and the ornamental pond of birds. Fortunately these three enclosures have remained virtually intact till the present. The polar bear pit is located at the southern end of the site, while the leopard cage is located nearby at the top of the hill.



SITE PLAN OF THE BEAUMARIS ZOO (1923-1937)

The Thylacine

The philosophies underlying the formation of zoos during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generally related to a concern for the protection of threatened species from around the world, with providing opportunities for scientific research of animals at close quarters and with fostering public interest in animal life and nature. The Beaumaris Zoo played an important role in the life of Hobart during its period of operation. In days before television and ease of travel to exotic locations, the Zoo gave many people the opportunity to view and learn about animals from all over the world.

For these reasons it was not surprising that the exotic animals attracted the most attention from the Zoo's patrons. Little did many of these visitors realize however, that they would be a witness in the demise of the world's largest marsupial carnivore - the Thylacine or Tasmanian Tiger. By all accounts, the last Thylacine at the Zoo was a quiet animal which was so tame that the famous film footage of it, was shot from within its cage. Unfortunately nothing now remains of that enclosure, though it is known that it was located at the top of the hill near the polar bear pit.

The last Thylacine held at the Zoo died on 7 September 1936 and its body was sent to the Museum. It was the last one known to exist in Tasmania, although some still maintain that the species exists in the wild. In November 1937 the Zoo closed its doors and, as with its now most famous occupant, passed into Tasmanian history.

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