

Pimpama Rifle Range (former)

LHR0076

Place details

Address/location	193 Rifle Range Road, Pimpama
Title details	59RP179475
Principle period(s)	1901 - 1983
City of Gold Coast division	1
Other known names	
Area for protection	Area of rifle range contained within the following corner point references (GDA 1994 MGA Zone 56); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 528647 6921860 • 528691 6921860 • 528677 6921708 • 528636 6921708
Place components	Target frames and associated earth mounds in front and behind frames, corrugated iron shed with attached lean-to and material culture contained within included target related components, firing lines, subsurface archaeological material associated with the rifle range.
Place category	Archaeological site
Context	In situ
Other listings	
Register entry date	5 June 2018

Statement of heritage significance

The former Pimpama Rifle Range is a place of local heritage significance for its historic importance, rarity, potential to yield information and class characteristics as evidenced by, but not exclusive to, the following statement of heritage significance, based on criteria (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the Gold Coast Local Heritage Register.

Criterion (a) Historic importance

The former Pimpama Rifle Range, gazetted in August 1901, is significant as an example of the type of facility provided by the Defence Force under the *Defence Act 1884* (Qld), and later Commonwealth Defence Acts, for the use of local rifle clubs and the subsequent training of Volunteer Rifle Companies. Rifle clubs were important for the defence of Australia and the government provided the range facility and infrastructure, qualified training staff, rifles and ammunition. Prior to World War I rifle clubs were seen as sources of a potential guerrilla force for the state and country should invasion occur.

At the time of its closure in the late 1980s, the Pimpama Rifle Range had been in use for 80 years and was the only remaining rifle range between Brisbane and the NSW border.

Criterion (b) Rarity

The former Pimpama Rifle Range is a rare surviving example of the type of rifle ranges established on the Gold Coast from the mid-1880s onwards. The remnants of the rifle range demonstrate the evolution of ranges and their community use through two World Wars.

Criterion (c) Potential information

The former Pimpama Rifle Range area, including the target structures, earth mounds, firing lines, associated corrugated iron sheds and the material contained in the sheds have the potential to yield information pertaining to the layout, use and development of Defence Force controlled rifle ranges on the Gold Coast. The site also has archaeological potential and when combined with associated documentary evidence, allows for further research into the use of early rifle range sites.

Criterion (d) Class Characteristics

The target structures that remain in situ on the former Pimpama Rifle Range demonstrate the typical style and arrangement of targets erected by the Defence Force for the use of rifle clubs. The remnant targets demonstrate the particular class characteristics of target structures of the period which consist of a steel frame construction with winch mechanism to raise and lower targets.

Image



Pimpama Rifle Range target frames and sheds, 2018. Image courtesy of City of Gold Coast.

History

The former Pimpama Rifle Range is closely tied with the histories of the Pimpama and, later, the Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Clubs. These and similar clubs were an important part of the social structure of the Gold Coast during the early and mid-twentieth century at a time when much of the Gold Coast was still rural in nature and men, especially, were still expected to know how to handle a rifle. The Pimpama Rifle Range was one of the earliest ranges established on the Gold Coast and was both a venue where shooters could practice and a place where inter-club competitions could be held. Both rifle clubs regularly travelled to participate in competitions with other rifle clubs in the Logan and Albert area.

The Rifle Club movement was established in 1884 when the formation of the Rifle Volunteers was approved to meet the demands of the settlers for some form of defence under the *Defence Act 1884*. When Imperial troops

were withdrawn from Australia in 1870 the rifle clubs of the time were considered to be the only form of organised defence for many towns in the colony. During the Second Russian Scare in 1884 many rifle clubs were incorporated into the military forces through the various state rifle associations. They were mounted and developed into the Light Horse.¹

At a Logan and Albert Rifle Clubs' Union reunion dinner held on 2 October 1937 at the Surfers' Paradise Hotel it was commented, during toast speeches, that;

*... the rifle clubs are part and parcel of the Australian defence organisation and they would have to go a long way to find a more efficient and better organised body of riflemen than the Logan and Albert Rifle Clubs' Union. The Union comprises nine clubs; Beaudesert, Beenleigh, Nerang, Southport, Ormeau and Pimpama, Tallebudgera, Tweed Heads and Coolangatta, Southport Militia and Waterford.*²

To support these and other rifle clubs around Australia, the Federal Government granted £66,000 for the support of these clubs, largely used as to supply free .303 ammunition to the clubs.³ This level of support was not always forthcoming though and in some years the Unions had to purchase their own ammunition. Sometimes only partial grants were received towards the cost of ammunition.

In 1900 the Commandant Queensland Defence Force requested that, in order to provide range accommodation for the Pimpama Rifle Club, a Camping Reserve, being portion 59 parish of Pimpama, be proclaimed a reserve for rifle range. It was noted at the time that the reserve was poor, rocky country, unfenced, and apparently unused and was the only unalienated Crown land in the area.⁴ The local Coomera Divisional Board had no objection to the request.⁵

In August 1901 the camping reserve status of the land was rescinded and proclamation of 80 acres (32.4 hectares) as a reserve for rifle range purposes made.⁶ As part of this change of land use, a public road was closed and a butt formed for safety purposes.⁷ An inspection of the site in late 1901 noted that the proposed range and line of fire would be oriented from north to south.⁸ The sum of £150 was put aside by the Queensland Military Force to construct the range.

The Pimpama Rifle Range was opened on 5 September 1902, by Mr Thomas Plunket, Member for Albert, with his wife firing the first shot on the range.⁹ The event was a formal occasion. The member for Albert and his wife were met by the Secretary of the Pimpama Rifle Club and driven out to the range where lunch was provided along with the obligatory toasts to the King, club officials and the health of Mr and Mrs Plunket. Messrs Orr, Coulter and Williamson finished first, second and third respectively in the first firing match.¹⁰ It was noted in newspaper reports at the time that the range was a 'really good one' and that the club had 'all the thanks due' as no help was received from the Federal Ministry of Defence in construction of the range; a comment at variance with earlier records that Federal funds had been set aside to support the construction of the range.¹¹

By December 1903 the Pimpama Rifle Range had been inspected by the military and declared officially open for use.¹² The range was considered an A grade range and shooters travelled some distance to use the facilities.¹³

In 1908 ownership of the rifle reserve was transferred from the State of Queensland to the Commonwealth for a cost of £80.¹⁴

Repairs and maintenance were undertaken at the rifle range during the 1917/18 financial year. A report on the range from this time notes that one target had been reconstructed while a second was in the process of being so. These targets are identified as being revolving, or windmill, target types. The report also notes that there are firing mounds at 200, 300, 500, 700 yards and that the 800 range was no longer available. The range was not used for practice by the military at the time of preparation of this report.¹⁵ Inspection of the rifle range in May 1918 notes, amongst other matters, that targets swing on two posts bolted to headstocks and, in addition to the two 600 metre 'windmill' targets there are two 2nd class and two 3rd class 'windmill' frames in fair order.¹⁶

World War I saw the continuation of club activities at the rifle range although numbers of club members was noticeable down due to many members leaving to serve with the military. In March 1918 the Captain of the Pimpama Rifle Club noted, in a letter to the Supervisor of Rifle Clubs 1st Military District, that;

...as the members are so far apart it is not easy to see them and area filling the places of the boys that are gone to the front. As all our young men are gone from here, so we are trying to do our best till this war is over.¹⁷

In 1928 the butts were burnt out and the club's property destroyed. As a result it was decided to disband the club with some members linking up with the Beenleigh Rifle Club.¹⁸ By September 1934 however, the Pimpama Rifle Club was reformed (later renamed the Ormeau - Pimpama Rifle Club) and work was underway in preparation of opening the range once again.¹⁹

The range was reopened on 19 January 1935 by Mr T. F. Plunket, Member for Albert, whose father had originally opened the club nearly 35 years earlier for the Pimpama Rifle Club. The range is described at this time as having two modern targets, with ranges at 200, 300, 500 and 600 yards.²⁰ Mr Plunket held the distinction of being the first person on the newly reopen rifle range to shoot a bullseye at a range of 600 yards.²¹

Following the opening ceremony, Mr Plunket opined that;

It was necessary that all young men should have some idea how to use a rifle although it was not anticipated that they would be called upon to do so on active service.²²

Within five years' of these words many local men and women would be serving in the Second World War.

At the opening ceremony it was noted by the Hon. Secretary of the Logan and Albert District Rifle Clubs' Union, Mr E. Stewart, that the newly established Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club would be joining the other seven local Union rifle clubs; Beenleigh (54 members, although some would be returning to the Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club), Beaudesert (41 members. This rifle club removed itself from the Union during the war years), Tweed Heads and Coolangatta (37 members), Nerang (36 members), Southport (36 members), Waterford (29 members) and Tallebudgera (25 members). The Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club had a membership on opening day of 31 members.²³

Mr Stewart also observed that both the Militia (26th Battalion Rifle Club) and Coomera clubs had dropped out of the Union, although he understood that some of the Coomera members were intending to join the Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club.²⁴ The Militia Rifle Club were, however, soon back in the Union although their participation in the Union proved to be short lived due to reasons outside of their control.²⁵ Mudgeeraba Rifle Club was not formed until 1949.²⁶

As part of the re-opening of the Pimpama Rifle Range, Coomera Shire Council agreed in late 1934 to extend the road to give vehicle access to the range.²⁷

Unlike many other clubs belonging to the Union, the Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club did not initially permit shooting to be carried out during Sundays.²⁸ This prohibition against Sunday shooting may have cost the club members who, as due to convenience, were members of other clubs that permitted Sunday shoots or shot privately. This also resulted in the club not participating in Union competitions scheduled for Sundays.²⁹ This stance also prevented the club from hosting open and inter-Union meetings on Sundays at the Pimpama Rifle Range.

The restored 'windmill' type targets soon proved to be unsuitable for the demands of modern rifle shooting. In September 1935 the club applied to the Supervisor of Rifle Clubs for funding to install two 'shutter' type targets, the 'windmill' targets being slow, clumsy and in windy weather difficult to operate.³⁰ The Supervisor of Rifle Clubs replied that there were no funds available at that time for the a grant towards the purchase of targets however suggested that two angle iron 'shutter' target machines were available on the abandoned rifle range at Coolum, one of which could be made available for the range if the club were prepared to cover the cost of freight and installation.³¹

By July 1936 the club were in possession of both ex-Coolum angle iron 'shutter' target machines (one Smith & Sons & one Wieland type) and in September was successful in obtaining a grant of £35 to install the targets, reconstruction of the mantlet and raising of telephone poles as well as other works at the range.³² This work had been completed by the middle of 1937.³³

The advent of World War II saw a curtailing of club shooting as ammunition was in restricted supply along with grant monies and other supplies. By the middle of 1940 the Defence Department had suspended all rifle club shooting until further notice.³⁴ In July 1946 an application from a member of the public to purchase wood from the Pimpama Rifle Reserve notes that the only persons using the rifle range at this time were members of the local Volunteer Defence Corp.³⁵

In line with other rifle clubs, the Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club permitted women on the range however there are few records of women participating in practice or competition.³⁶ Reference is made to women participating during special events such as the annual Christmas Prize Shoot & Picnic and other social events. These events were in the form of miniature shoots with pea rifles.³⁷ A “number of ladies” also participated on the range during the opening day of the newly formed club in January 1935.³⁸

To help control the vegetation and maintain fencing on the rifle ranges, leases of varying lengths were offered under tender by the Federal Government to graze the grounds of the rifle ranges, including Pimpama Rifle Reserve.³⁹ In some instances the tender conditions also required the successful party to install fencing, gates and padlocks as well as maintaining low vegetation within the firing line of the targets. During and following World War Two, any successful party was also required to make a statutory declaration, and provide other evidence if so required, that they were a natural born British subject.⁴⁰

Further repairs and maintenance works were carried out in 1953 on the mantlet, targets and target pits.⁴¹ The report associated with these works records that the rifle range now possessed three angle iron ‘shutter type target machines, a target storage shed, shelter shed, a half pit and half bank gallery along with a terraced hill and two telephones. Ranges in use are noted as being 300, 500, and 600 yards.

In 1974 a portion of the rifle range was surrendered to the Crown for the purposes of resumption of land by the Main Roads Department to be used in association with the Pacific Motorway.⁴²

The following year four clubs were using the Pimpama Rifle Range; Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club, Nerang – Mudgeeraba Rifle Club, Gold Coast Rifle Club and Gold Coast Gun Club. The latter two organisations were the most frequent users of the range. Although club activity was now limited to once a month, the Ormeau – Pimpama Rifle Club still retained its’ tradition of only shooting on Saturdays.⁴³

References

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