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LOCAL

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Pioneering family's land gift at risk from 'petty bureaucracy'

The great grandson of a pioneering premier is furious an elite Brisbane school wants to lock the community out of green space gifted to the state of Queensland using a "Prisoner of War" fence.

Brendan O'Malley, Westside News

+ Subscriber only | May 18, 2020 11:01am



 Arthur Palmer on the QASMT land his great grandfather, former Premier Sir Arthur Palmer, owned. He is furious the Academy plans to fence it off.

THE great grandson of a Queensland premier who co-wrote the state's first public education Bill says the family's gift to the state is under threat from a "POW" fence which will lock out neighbours.

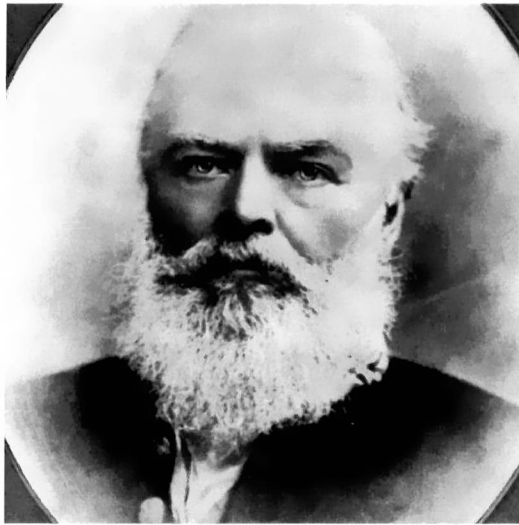
Arthur Palmer's grandfather gave the Toowong land, known as Palmer's Paddock, to the state for the immediate construction of a school.

A rambling homestead, Eastern Gray, was also gifted to the state but fell into disrepair by the 1950s.

The former Towong State High School was built where the homestead once stood, in the early 1960s.

But Mr Palmer said his grandfather and great grandfather, Premier Sir Arthur Palmer, wanted the community to be able to access the site.

After Chinese market gardens there fell into disuse, neighbours were allowed to build vegetable gardens and graze animals on what is now the Vera St community garden.



📷 Sir Arthur Hunter Palmer

Mr Palmer said former premier Anna Bligh gave an assurance to Toowong locals a decade ago, when she was still education minister, that they would have ongoing access to the site.

However the Queensland Academy for Science, Mathematics and Technology plans to build a fence around its ovals by late next month.

It told locals in a letter that the fence was needed after incidents of vandalism and trespassing, protests by an Extinction Rebellion crew and a suspicious fire at a construction site.

The school last Friday reversed its decision to lock the Vera St gate.

“A fence totally reneges on all the promises made by senior bureaucrats,” Mr Palmer said.

“I think a fence in any form is appalling. You don’t put a POW (prisoner of war) fence around a public place to keep the public out.

“It’s offensive and an insult to the community. Not even private schools do this, let alone a public school.

“The school says this is to stop vandalism, but it’s counter-productive and what if it doesn’t work, what’s next — a Palestinian/Israeli Wall or a Trump Mexico Wall?

“The only thing this wall will do is keep honest citizens out of what is a highly valued piece of green space in what is an increasingly built up area.”

QASMT and the Department of Education were contacted for comment.



📷 A new sign that has gone up near the QASMT site.

It is believed contractors have begun surveying an alignment, with work due for completion late next month.

Neighbours said they were told the fence would be 2.1m high, with locked gates and would run within about 3m of Toowong Creek.

A parliamentary petition launched by local Greens Member for Maiwar Michael Berkman, which called for ongoing access to the ovals and community garden, attracted more than 1000 signatures in two days.

Mr Berkman wrote to the school as early as 2018 asking for assurances neighbours would have access to the grounds once construction of new school buildings was finished.

His office also provided *Westside News* with a map, showing no sign of a fence, of the construction work approved by former infrastructure minister Cameron Dick.

THE QASMT EXPANSION SAGA

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Mr Palmer said vandals and thieves could get through any fence if they wanted, so the best way to stop such behaviour was to enlist the community's support to watch over the area.

Indooroopilly State High School, for instance, had an arrangement where neighbours used its ovals as a dog off-leash area in return for picking up litter, looking out for trespassers and fundraising for the school.

Mr Palmer said a fence was a waste of public money which would be much better used building pedestrian overpasses or other safety upgrades of the dangerous Miskin and Stanley St crossing.

He said QASMT and Brisbane Boys College (BBC) students risked their lives crossing the streets.

The irony was QASMT students rarely used the ovals, he said. They were maintained to GPS standards by neighbouring BBC, which used them for training.

"Back in (2010) then Treasurer Andrew Fraser supported us after pressure from developers for the Government to sell the land," Mr Palmer said.

"He said at the time there was no other land to replace it and that it was invaluable public land."

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