

THE HISTORY OF YERONGA PART 2 A VERITABLE GARDEN OF EDEN

by Dr. Michael Macklin

In 1824, Yeronga was bordered on three sides by the Brisbane River and covered by a large number of small creeks. This made it a prime hunting area by the local indigenous people. In addition to being a major breeding ground for rakali, there were kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, bandicoots, echidnas, possums, parrots, brush turkeys, monitors, dragons and skinks, a wide range of fresh water fish, plentiful supplies of edible wattle, eucalypts and ferns, fruiting trees, shrubs and herbs, flowers and buds, roots, tubers, bulbs, seeds, croziers, fruiting vines, scramblers, grasses and reeds.

With well over 150 different seasonal food sources that simply required harvesting and cooking, the local population were extremely well fed prior to the arrival of the colonists.¹ It is little wonder that the southern part of the Brisbane colony area including Yeronga was described by the Europeans in 1825 as a '*veritable Garden of Eden*'.

Interestingly, some years later the Land Commissioner Stephen Simpson, while engaging in the usual European lamentations concerning the lack of enthusiasm for work on the part of what he called the "*local natives*", nevertheless did point out that they seem to "*prefer the joyous life of the bush...whose abundance provided a day's food in only two hours' labour.*"²

Oxley left a description of this general area from his river voyages at that time. "*(The area was) clothed with large timber, among which was an unknown species of pine in considerable abundance, which from its size and the apparently excellent quality of the wood, will probably prove a valuable acquisition to the colony, it being well calculated for ships' spars. The soil on both banks was a rich black loam, and in every part the wild indigo was growing in abundance.*"³

Indeed, Edmund Lockyer thought these pine trees to be the "*most valuable article in the Colony*"⁴, Charles Fraser, a botanist who sailed on 11 July 1828 from Brisbane to Ipswich, noted in his journal that the area which is now Annerley, Fairfield and Yeronga was covered with pine forest.⁵ So it was that Yeronga contributed to the very first overseas exports from Queensland when hoop pine logs were shipped to Sydney aboard the "*Amity*" and loaded on a number of ships returning to England in 1825 – unfortunately the British declared them unfit for use on ships. Fine examples of this tree species can still be seen scattered throughout Yeronga today.

¹ J. Ball and Peter Hiscock. *The Moreton Regional Archaeological Project (MRAP) State 11: An Outline of Objectives and Methods*. Anthropology & Sociology, University of Queensland. pp.4-24 *Queensland Archaeological Research* Vol. 5, 1988.

² Quoted in a report commissioned by the Diamantina Health Care Museum Association Inc entitled "*Aboriginal History of the Princess Alexandra Hospital Site*" by Dr. Ros Kidd, 2000.

³ Field, B. (ed.) 1825, '*Narrative of Mr. Oxley's Expedition to Survey Port Curtis and Moreton Bay*' *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales*. John Murray, London, pp. 32.

⁴ "Edmund Lockyer Journal". Reproduced in Steele, J G, *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay district 1770-1830*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1972: p. 204

⁵ 'Cunningham's Report'. Reproduced in Steele, J G, *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay district 1770-1830*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1972: p.223.