

## Identification and location

**Name of place:** **Moreton Bay fig & Canary Island date palms in south Cuming Reserve**

**Other Name** `Ficus macrophylla', `Phoenix canariensis'

**Address** off Hyde Street  
Seddon

**Place Identifier** 22596

**Heritage Significance** City

**Creation date(s)** 1900s, 1934- **Map (Melway)** 42C7

**Boundary description** The trees and sufficient land around each to allow for root zone and canopy protection, nominally 1m beyond the drip line, root zone or canopy perimeter which ever is the greatest.

**Local Government Area** City of Maribyrnong

**Ownership Type** Public

## Description

**Site Type:** Trees, street

### Physical Description

A large mature Moreton Bay fig and two Canary Island date palms are located in the southern part of a triangular grassed reserve (Cuming Reserve) on Hyde Street south of Princess Street. There is a stone monument (bust on a granite obelisk) erected by the citizens of Footscray in memory of the life of the late James Cuming JP.

The Moreton bay fig (`Ficus macrophylla') is described as a `large, spreading evergreen tree, this species occurs naturally in coastal rainforests of eastern Australia. It grows to about 130 ft (39 m) with a spread nearly as great and a buttressed trunk. It bears large, leathery, dark green leaves with rust-toned undersides, and abundant fruit that turn reddish brown when ripe {Botanica}.'

Canary Island date palms (`Phoenix canariensis') come from the Canary Islands and `grows to 50 ft (15 m) tall with a spread of 30 ft (9 m), and has a sturdy trunk up to 3 ft (1 m) across and arching, deep green fronds up to 12 ft (3.5 m) long. Small yellow flowers in drooping clusters in summer are succeeded by inedible, orange-yellow, acorn-like fruit. This palm needs plenty of room to show off its dramatic symmetrical shape. In areas prone to frosts, plant an advanced

specimen when the danger of frost has passed {Botanica}'.

### Condition

good (partially disturbed, well preserved)

### Integrity

substantially intact/some intrusions

### Context

Part of total reserve with notable Cumings statue. In a notable inter-war public landscape precinct, with the Yarraville Gardens, and adjoins proposed HA10 which has a dominance of Edwardian-era housing.

### Threats:

Pruning for added and existing service lines, removal with maturity, new crossovers, carparking, root compaction, adjoining development.

### History

The Cumings Reserve is shown on the MMBW Detail Plan of 1895 (DPs 211, 229) as partly fenced, with gardens, and partly occupied by a large quarry and offices at the north end. The 1909 'Footscray's First Fifty Years' showed two images of the 'Cumings Gardens' with detailed rockeries and shrubberies: these no longer survive { FFFY: 30}. By the time of the 1945 aerial view the reserve as we see it today was well established but with no break in the grassed triangle at Princess Street. The fig and the palm planting along Hyde Street (8 mature palms) are well advanced with the other perimeter planting in a less mature form. The Cumings memorial is shown with what appears to be a planted margin.

James Cumings snr died in 1911. In January 1912 Footscray Council committee minutes record that the Mayor had been requested to call a public meeting as early as possible to consider the matter of taking steps to perpetuate the memory of the late Mr James Cumings, JP. In June of that year, the James Cumings Memorial Committee had sought permission to erect the proposed memorial drinking fountain at the intersection of Napier and Nicholson Street but the Council decision on the request was deferred. A month later the Committee informed Council that it favoured the site at the corner of Napier Street and Railway Parade for the erection of the memorial. Apparently, J Irving, of the MMBW, had objected to the Cumings Memorial being placed at the former site. More developments were to come { VPRO}. John Lack has written that the memorial was installed in Napier St, as resolved above, but was later moved to the Cumings Reserve location, minus its original base which included a carved figure group { Lack, 1987: 134}. The sculptor Margaret Baskerville created the James Cumings snr marble memorial in 1915-16, among other busts of prominent Victorian men carried out during her career. The memorial is said to have been moved to this site because of a road widening { Lee, 2000}.

In 1930 the Footscray Council Curator, David Matthews, reported on expenditure of some £40 from the Unemployed Fund on the Hyde Street plots in front of the (Yarraville) gardens . The development of the Cuming Reserve was advancing in 1934 with the creation of kerbing to form an appropriate approach to the new Yarraville Gardens. Council Minutes state that a plan was accepted for the reserve in March 1934. A July 1934 city plan shows the reserve as a triangle below Princess St, with the northern section of the reserve still occupied by a quarry. The southern section had two circle-shaped probable rockery groups with others set at the reserve's fringe.

This is probably the era in which the major development of the reserve occurred, particularly after the Curator reported late in 1934 that the Animal Welfare League had allowed Council to remove 300 palms from their property at South Preston. Matthews noted that it was `...a very fine donation which should considerably assist the beautification of the City { VPRO}'. A 1945 city publication listed it as `Ornamental Gardens' covering 2 roods in area. In fact, these were the only `ornamental gardens', so named, among the 29 reserves described there.

#### Cuming Smith

`The Victorian Bone Mills, first operated by Macmeikan and Reid, ground bones into dust or meal for use as fertiliser. The firm had operated in Flemington for 25 years before they erected a new bluestone building and chimney on 11 acres at Yarraville, on what is now the site of Pivot Fertilisers. This firm attracted Robert Smith and Co.'s acid works to relocate from South Melbourne and lease part of Macmeikan and Co's land, supplying the later with essential acid via a pipeline . By 1872 Smith's works had been purchased by Charles Campbell and James Cuming to form Cuming Smith and Co.. By 1875 Cuming Smith, which had rebuilt a larger factory after the first was destroyed by fire, was leasing Macmeikan's bone mills. Cuming Smith not only became a large, benevolent and long-lived employer of local men in Yarraville, but it also attracted other chemical and superphosphate firms to locate alongside it, so that reciprocal arrangements could be made. Wischer and Co. came to Yarraville in 1895, followed by the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Co. in 1907, consolidating a chemical and fertiliser industry that continues on the Yarraville site today { Barnard, 2000}'.

#### Matthews

David Matthews joined the Footscray Council as a `working landscape gardener' in 1916. Within 6 years he had gained the confidence of the Council and local interest groups, working with them to beautify many public reserves { Lack, 1987, 209}. Aided by sustenance labour he was able to achieve many ambitious schemes in the inter-war period. He retired in 1964 with an MBE in 1965. Footscray park is considered to be his showpiece { Lack, 1987}.

### Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme	Developing cultural institutions and ways of life
PAHT Subtheme	Creating public landscape
Local Theme(s)	Reserves and parks

## Cultural Significance

The Moreton bay fig and two Canary Island date palms at the Cuming Reserve, are significant to the City of Maribyrnong:

- as mature trees which are uncommon within the general planted context of the City, judged by their maturity and type (Criterion B2) ;
- for their contribution to this distinctive inter-war public landscape created within the City under the Footscray municipal parks and gardens Curator David Matthews (Criterion A4, H1); and
- their association, with the rest of the reserve, with the memorial to James Cuming who was a major and benevolent employer in the City's history (Criterion H1).

## Comparative Examples:

Other mature figs in the City include the very large specimen at the Hopkins St Footscray Hotel

## Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register

Register of the National Estate:

National Trust Register:

Other Heritage Listings

Planning Scheme Protection

External Paint Controls Apply?:

Internal Alteration Controls Apply?:

Tree Controls Apply?:

Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act:

Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?:

Prohibited Uses may be Permitted

## Recommendations:

The following management objectives have been drawn from the Statement of Significance:

- to conserve and enhance the listed trees, the monument, and the planting pattern at the place where enhancement includes replacement of missing original components in the planting scheme;
- to conserve and enhance the visual relationship between trees at the place;
- to conserve and enhance the public view of these trees;
- to ensure that new plantings or elements near or within the place are visually recessive and related to the trees; and
- to further research the detailed origins of the trees and maintain the link with the reserve's history, via promotion and publication of the findings.

## Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

*A4 Importance for their association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, state, region or community.*

for their contribution to a distinctive inter-war public landscape phase in the City

*B2 Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practiced, in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest.*

as distinctive and mature trees which are uncommon within the general planted context of the City, judged by their maturity and type

*H1 Importance for their close associations with individuals whose activities have been significant within the history of the nation, state or region.*

association, with the rest of the reserve, with Cuming who was a major and benevolent employer in the City's history; association with noted Footscray municipal parks and gardens curator Matthews

historical significance  architectural significance  social significance  scientific significance

## Documentation

### References

`Botanica' CD Rom 1997 (Beaver Multimedia P/L, Random House Australia)  
Butler 1989  
Barnard, 2000, Historic Places Review Environmental History, City of Maribyrnong  
Lack (ed) 1987 `James Cuming An Autobiography';  
Footscray Council committee minutes (VPRO) VPRS 005337;  
City of Footscray, 1945. `Facts about Footscray City', n.p.  
Lee, J 2000 comments on draft Oct 2000

## Data recording

Assessed By:

Assessed Date:

Historic Places - Significant Trees in the City of Maribyrnong

