

SIGNIFICANT SITES ON THE MIDDLE YARRA

In traditional tribal life in Australia, every tribe had a permanent water source as the centre of its tribal territory. Their very identity as a people was centred on the river system of their land. Manningham is therefore an extremely lucky municipality. The Yarra River forms our northern boundary and much of traditional tribal life was centred along and adjacent to the river.

In this article I therefore want to take readers on a tour of some of the significant sites in our municipality. And by significant I do not mean just the sites that have been archeologically identified and are therefore legally capital S 'Significant'. I mean the sites that were historically and functionally significant, but have usually not been formally identified.

The tour therefore starts at the junction of Koonung Creek and the Yarra, in the southwest corner of Manningham. This was a traditional gathering place, especially during eel harvest season from mid-February to mid-March each year.

This area at Bulleen is now occupied by picturesque football ovals. It actually doesn't look that much different now to what it did 200 years ago when the landscape was often described by settlers as being '*Like an English Gentleman's Estate*'.

The present day pristine mowed vista that you see is therefore very similar to the original scene. Annual targeted burning of these valley floor areas produced designed habitat areas for animals and plants. These habitat areas were in reality kangaroo, emu, possum, grass seed and myrnong farms, but were best described as '*Farms without Fences*'. There was no such thing as undergrowth or understory in any of these areas and in the broader area kangaroo farms, solitary trees stood every 25 to 50 metres.

Just north of this area near the present day Veneto Club was the Bolin-Bolin Billabong, a traditional site for duck hunting. There is a circuit around it that has some interpretive signs and is well worth taking the stroll. Further north again at the Caltex Service Station on the corner of Bridge Street and Manningham Road, there is a 500 year old Red River Gum. You will see some large holes higher on the tree trunk. These were originally outgrowths called 'borls' and each is harvested to make a large wooden bowl called a 'Tarnuk'.

In the Heide Museum of Modern Art car park is another 500 year old River Gum from which a canoe was cut. This tree is now named 'Yingabeal' in recognition of the fact that it is a Songline Marker Tree. Both this and the tree at the Caltex Station appear to have been struck by lightning a couple of hundred years ago, probably at the same time.

Following the Templestowe Road Songline to Finns Reserve, you can view a 200 metre long rapids area that was in reality a series of fish, eel, yabbie, and freshwater mussel farms. I estimate there are about twenty similar sites along Manningham's stretch of the Yarra, with only the one at Laughing Waters, near the end of Alexander Road in Warrandyte, having been formally identified.

Back at Finns Reserve, this is also where Ruffey Creek meets the Yarra. Further up the creek near Foote Street there was an Aboriginal camp. Middens were observed along this stretch and an oven pit was carved into the mudstone. However when Foote Street was put through over the creek in 1963 the oven was buried.

Where Williamsons Road crosses Ruffey Creek was a burial ground, which was disturbed when the road was constructed in the 1880's. The camp site at Foote Street was abandoned in 1848 because a local settler, John Hughes was in the habit of taking pot shots at them from the window of his hut up the hill. The first settler in the Manningham area, Major Charles Newman, was also in the habit of shooting at Aboriginal 'trespassers' from the narrow windows of his hut at the Mullum-Mullum Creek junction.

Like Bolin-Bolin, Pound Bend was also an important gathering place and there are now interpretive signs there so you can take a very rewarding self guided walk. This is the site where Simon Wonga organised the last great Kulin Nation corroboree in March 1852, which was also the first Warrandyte Festival.

Along the riverfront at Warrandyte Township there was an extensive aquaculture area. Four foot high weir walls were built on the rapids area with sluice gates and races, and the middens observed along the banks were testament to the freshwater mussel and yabby farms there.

Near the Brushy Creek junction in Wonga Park was a Birthing Place. This was indicated by a Ring Marker Tree that has since fallen, so the exact site is not known, but it would have been on higher ground. Brushy Creek was in fact the birthplace of the most famous of Wurundjeri Elders, William Barak.