



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.11 Altering the environment

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 404 Community services & utilities
- 409 Environmental awareness

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara exhibit a large enclosing canopy which together with the deeply furrowed form of the tree trunks creates a visually impressive avenue. (Criterion 1.1)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara enhance the visual quality of the small scale buildings in Dongara by providing an appropriate setting including vegetation backdrops and view enframements. (Criterion 1.3)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara are a distinctive landmark providing a central focus for the townscape. (Criterion 1.3)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara form a significant element in the historic streetscape and townscape character of Dongara. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara were planted in the main street of Dongara in 1906 and are a rare, extant example of the 'City Beautiful' philosophy, that was current at the time, and a desire by the Roads Board to enhance the status and amenity of the town. (Criterion 2.1 & 2.2)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara were established during a period of wealth generated by the gold boom of the 1890s and early 1900s, which financed the establishment of parks and the greening of towns and cities in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara exhibit a dramatic form and are planted in a formal arrangement illustrating the influence of the horticultural movement on early twentieth-century landscaping. (Criterion 2.2)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara have been a feature of Dongara for 97 years, and demonstrate the development of Dongara as a town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Criterion 2.2)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara are associated with the Irwin Roads Board who had the trees planted in 1906. (Criterion 2.2)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara have importance for information contributing to a wider understanding of natural history by virtue of its use as a research or reference site for plantings of this type.

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara are valued by the community as shown by the five recently planted Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*) which replaced the original trees that were removed from Moreton Terrace. (Criterion 5.1)

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara create an impressive avenue and central focus for the town, engendering a distinctive sense of place. (Criterion 5.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara are an uncommon landscape arrangement in Western Australia, where mature *Ficus* trees rarely form the principal and continuous street planting. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara are a representative example of the influence of the 'City Beautiful' philosophy, which started in the late 1890s and held that the health and happiness of a city's residents were greatly enhanced by the beauty of their environment. (Criterion 6.1 & Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara are in good condition. In the past a number of trees that were planted in 1906 have been removed without reference to the overall impact on the designed streetscape, although the recent planting and protection of new trees suggests that the local government authority is now actively managing the street planting.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara have high integrity. The original intention of the planting, to form a distinctive street tree canopy, is intact. The majority of the original 1906 planting is intact, and steps have been taken to infill gaps in the characteristic street canopy that have been

caused by removal of trees in the past. The values are sustainable with careful management.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara have high authenticity, although some branches have been removed to avoid contact with power lines and for other reasons in the past. This factor has been partially addressed by the relocation of power lines underground. The majority of the original 1906 Ficus planting has grown as intended, although it is possible that as many as a dozen trees may have been removed, on the assumption that the trees were planted at roughly uniform spacings to the length of Moreton Terrace between Waldeck Street and Point Leander Drive.

13. SUPPOINTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Taylor Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara comprises some twenty-three mature Ficus trees, both Moreton Bay Fig trees (*ficus macrophylla*) and Port Jackson Fig trees (*ficus rubiginosa*) planted in Dongara by the Irwin Roads Board in 1906.¹

The district along the lower Irwin River was initially taken up as pastoral leases. In 1852, 100-acre agricultural blocks were surveyed, the first taken up in 1859, when there was no more land available in the settled Greenough district, twenty miles away. Within a decade, seventy-one surveyed blocks had been occupied. The Greenough and Irwin districts grew rapidly, having the highest rate of population growth in the colony in the 1860s, with the 1870 census showing 1,557 inhabitants.² The town of Dongara developed beside the river, with a store established at one of the five river fords. A flourmill was built in 1865, and a hotel shortly after.³ The district was serviced by shipping at nearby Point Denison. Dongara acquired a school, police station and courthouse and a post office in 1870-71.⁴

The Irwin Roads Board District was established on 25 January 1871 and was headquartered at Dongara.⁵ With its limited budget and responsibilities, the Board initially concentrated on the provision of roads and public wells. Dongara and the surrounding district continued to develop steadily in the 1870s and 1880s, with increasing acreages under tillage and new construction, including the Mechanic's Institute Hall (1881), the Anglican and Methodist churches (1884), and the bridge over the Lower Irwin between Dongara and Point Denison (1889). In 1891, the Walkaway-Mingenew section of the Midland Railway line, which skirted the Dongara townsite, was opened, and the rest of the line between Perth and Geraldton was completed in 1894. A second flourmill, the Steam Roller Flour Mill was opened that year.⁶

In 1906, the Roads Board planted Moreton Bay Fig trees (*ficus macrophylla*) and Port Jackson Fig trees (*ficus rubiginosa*) along both sides of Irwin Street, Dongara's main street, and along sections of other streets including the central portion of Point Leander Drive. *Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara* were planted some 20 metres apart, in a straight line on both sides of the street. Early photographs show the small Ficus trees inside protective timber tree guards.⁷ *Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara* cost a total of sixteen shillings and four pence, and were

¹ Physical evidence; The Register of the National Estate entry refers to 17 trees, all as Moreton Bay Figs and using the botanical name of Point Jackson Figs.

² Bain, Mary Albertus, op cit.

³ Bain, Mary Albertus, 'The Irwin Story', *Early Days*, Vol. 6 Part 5, pp. 7-21.

⁴ Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, *History of Dongara and the Shire of Irwin: 1839-1971*, Shire of Irwin, 1971, pp. 6-8 & 16.

⁵ *West Australian Government Gazette*, 1871, p. 11.

⁶ Gunzberg, Adrian & Austin, Jeff *Rails Through the Bush*, Light Railway Research Society of Australia, Melbourne, 1997, p. 206.

⁷ Information and photographs, 1907, provided courtesy of Irwin District Historical Society.

planted by Robert Russ, an employee of the Roads Board.⁸ The plantings reinforced the identity of the main street, which consisted of scattered buildings at that time. Some tuart trees were planted between the Ficus at an early date. This may have been done to 'fill in' until the Ficus trees had grown sufficiently, as the tuart trees would have grown more quickly. The tuart trees were later removed.⁹ Irwin Street, east of Waldeck Street, was renamed Moreton Terrace.

In the late 1890s and into the first decades of the twentieth century, the concept of 'City Beautiful' was put forward by various people, the most well-known and influential being W. E. Bold, who was Perth Town Clerk for many years from 1901. The 'City Beautiful' philosophy held that the health and happiness of a city's residents were greatly enhanced by the beauty of their environment.¹⁰ While Bold's area of control did not extend outside the boundaries of the City of Perth, his well-advertised views would have spread throughout Western Australia. The other important factor in the establishment of parks and the greening of towns and cities was wealth. Prior to the gold rush period of the 1890s, Western Australia did not have the public wealth that allowed for such endeavours.¹¹

The choice of street tree species 'represented a combination of tradition and the influence of the horticultural societies', and varied throughout Australia.¹² In Western Australia, the exotic species used as street trees included palms, false acacia, pepper, plane, white mulberry and Cape lilac, while the most favoured indigenous species were sugar gum, red flowering gum, blue gum, peppermint and silky oak.¹³ Ficus trees were not among the list of most favoured street tree in the State, although they were popular choices for parks and reserves.

In Moreton Terrace, some of the Ficus trees have been removed, most notably at the corner of Point Leander Drive, in front of the service station, and in front of the Hotel and Supervalu store. These removals occurred prior to 1990.¹⁴

Over the past decade, the Irwin Shire administration has employed Dave Parry of Aussie Tree Services to maintain *Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara*. Maintenance generally involves trimming low branches that encroach into the roadway and hinder the passage of large vehicles, such as trucks, and trimming branches that encroach onto the roofs

⁸ Ellery, Kit & Bunney, Ron, *History of Dongara and the Shire of Irwin: 1839-1971*, Shire of Irwin, 1971, pp. 8 & 26; Bain, Mary Albertus, 'The Irwin Story', op cit. The 1901-1907 volume of Irwin Roads Board minutes could not be located at SROWA and this information could not be referenced from a primary source.

⁹ Telephone conversation with Dave Parry of Aussie Tree Services, 21 March 2003.

¹⁰ Bold, W. E. *Planning RePoint*, City of Perth, 1911 & 'Perth - the First Hundred Years', *Early Days*, October 1939, Vol. 3 pp. 29-41; Stannage, C. T. *The People of Perth: A social history of Western Australia's capital city*, Perth City Council, 1979, pp. 294-300.

¹¹ Ramsay, Juliet, *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A classification and assessment method for the register of the National Estate*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1991, pp. 6-7; Richards, Oline, 'A fairer Athens & a freer Rome: Historic public gardens in Perth, WA' *Heritage Australia*, Winter, 1982, pp. 66-69.

¹² Ramsay, Juliet, op cit, p. 8.

¹³ Richards, Oline, op cit.

¹⁴ Two Ficus remaining on Point Leander Drive in association with Memorial Park and the Roads Board Office have been included in the heritage assessment of *Roads Board Office (fmr)*, Place 01227; photographs with captions, 1907-1970s, courtesy Irwin District Historical Society.

of buildings. The Ficus trees on the north side of Moreton Terrace have had some of the central structure removed to avoid the power lines. In the mid 1990s, these power lines were replaced with insulated lines so that the trees would need less pruning. In 2001, the overhead lines were removed the power supply placed underground, removing the necessity for pruning. New Ficus trees have been planted on Moreton Terrace in the 1990s.¹⁵

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara were classified by the National Trust in 1983 and entered on the Register of the National Estate in 1991. The place was entered on the Shire of Irwin Municipal Heritage Inventory in 1998, with a management category 1, which recommends the highest level of protection and possible inclusion on the State Register of Heritage Places.¹⁶

In 2003, *Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara* are well maintained and healthy.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara consists of 23 mature fig trees on Moreton Terrace and Point Leander Drive, Dongara 18 of which are Moreton Bay fig trees (*ficus macrophylla*) and 5 of which are Port Jackson fig trees (*fiscus rubiginosa*). The majority of the trees are located on either side of Moreton Terrace between Waldeck Street and Martin Street. One tree on Moreton Terrace is east of Martin Street, and another three are located on reserve land bordering Point Leander Drive. The trees are mature with large trunks and spreading canopies, which in many cases spread out over the street.

The larger trees are approximately 12 to 15 metres high, with an average trunk diameter of between one and two metres when measured at one metre above ground level. This location for measurement of trunk diameter is used as the fig trees (Moreton Bay in particular) have characteristic spreading bases of buttressing root systems around and above ground level. Typically the Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*) have a trunk diameter, which is larger in the east-west direction, with one example opposite Hosken Street being two metres east-west, and one metre north-south. The *Moreton Bay Fig Tree (ficus macrophylla)* canopies are very large, and often approximately equal in dimension to the height of the trees. To distinguish between the two types of fig tree, in addition to the differing base, the leaves on Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*) are a lighter green color and the trunks and branches are of a lighter grey colour than those of the Point Jackson variety.

The trees may have been planted approximately 20 metres apart when first planted, if the consistency of the spacing of the majority remaining is taken as a guide. It is likely that the trees were planted in a formal arrangement that has been diminished over time by the loss of a number of trees. They exhibit an enclosing canopy which, along with the deeply furrowed form of the tree trunks, creates a visually impressive avenue and provide a central focus for the townscape.

¹⁵ Telephone conversation with Dave Parry of Aussie Tree Services, op cit; Suba (Henkel), Tanya & Grundy, Graham, *Shire of Irwin Municipal Inventory of Heritage Places*, Shire of Irwin, 1997-98, Place no. 35; information provided courtesy Irwin District Historical Society.

¹⁶ Suba (Henkel), Tanya & Grundy, Graham, op cit; Heritage Council database; Register of the National Estate online.

Moreton Bay Fig Tree (*ficus macrophylla*) leaves are oval shaped, up to 250 millimetres long, and are leathery and glossy. In summer the trees bear a globular, edible, purplish fruit. They can reach a height of 30 metres, with a canopy spread of 25 metres.¹⁷

Port Jackson Fig Trees (*ficus rubiginosa*) leaves are broad and oval shaped, up to 620 mm long. The trees reach up to 12 m high, with aerial roots clasping the lower parts of the trunk.¹⁸

While *Moreton Terrace & Point Leander Drive Fig Trees, Dongara* are currently healthy, development of the street verge area, in particular the laying down of hard surfaces such as paving within the drip-line of the trees, seriously effects their ability to get sufficient water.¹⁹

There are five recently planted Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*) on Moreton Terrace varying in height from around one to three metres with green painted protective metal screens surrounding them.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Because of the size to which Ficus grow in maturity and the invasiveness of their root system, many of the Ficus that were planted elsewhere on street verges would have been removed over the years as they encroached on development, or development encroached on them. There are several Moreton Bay Fig Trees on the foreshore of Point Denison, which adjoins Dongara, that are believed to have been planted in the 1930s²⁰.

Existing Ficus planting in developed areas include: Roberts Road, Subiaco (Port Jackson Figs, HCWA Place 10823); Progress Drive, Bibra Lake (Moreton Bay Figs, HCWA Place 10186); and Fremantle Road, Gosnells (Moreton Bay Figs, HCWA Place, 13838). There are two Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*) at Mt Nasura, Armadale, but these are associated with the site of the Derry Nasura vineyard and are in a rural situation. There are a number of places in Perth with a row of mature Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*), such as those at Beatty Park on Vincent Street in North Perth and on Barrack Street in association with the Esplanade Reserve. Rottnest Island has a number of mature Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*ficus macrophylla*) located in the settlement area. These all appear to be in good condition.

None of the 95 places listed from a search for 'trees' on the HCWA database have been assessed, except for the previously mentioned two Ficus trees associated with *Roads Board Office (fmr)* at Dongara and which are also part of this assessment. Of the places on the HCWA database, only those mentioned above are known to be Ficus trees in developed areas.

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

No key references.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

¹⁷ *The Reader's Digest Gardeners' Encyclopedia of Plants & Flowers*, Reader's Digest (Australia) Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1992, p.41.

¹⁸ <http://www.hear.org/pier/index.html> Pacific Island Ecosystems at Risk (PIER) website, 20/6/03

¹⁹ Telephone conversation with Dave Parry of Aussie Tree Services, op cit.

²⁰ Irwin Heritage Committee meeting, April 2003

There is a fig tree at the rear of Pearse House (fmr) in Hunts Road, Dongara, of similar size and thus apparent age as the trees in Moreton Terrace.