

NOTABLE TREES OF PERTH

by Barney White



New settlers in strange lands bring with them new influences, be they ideas, skills, animals, plants, etc. The Swan River Colony, later to become the metropolitan area of Perth, the capital of Western Australia, was no exception. The harsh feel and smoky blue colour of the native vegetation, so well adapted to the rigours of an ancient, sun scorched, nutrient drained landscape must have made the new settlers yearn for the softer greens of their homelands. The planting of many exotic tree species, for amenity as well as commercial purposes, was predictable. Surprising, however, is the fact that even the early introductions were not confined to species of European origin.

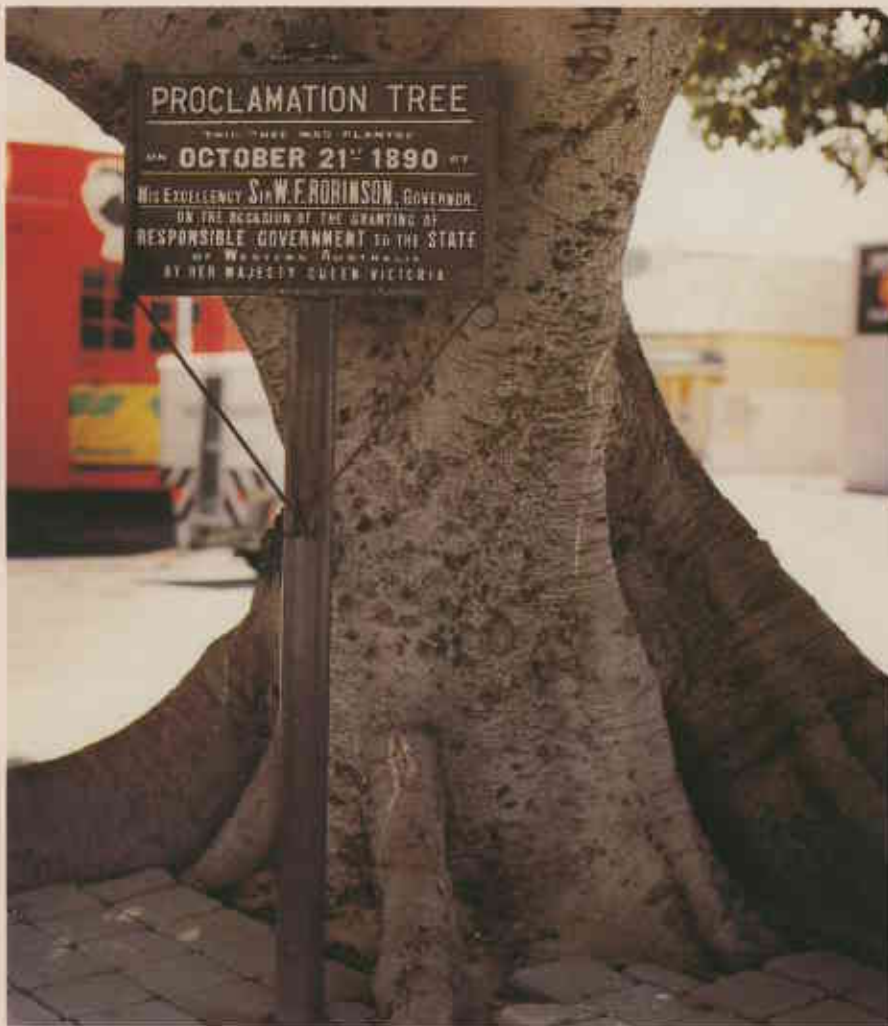
Of the earlier introductions two species stand out - Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*) and Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria excelsa*). Neither of these species comes from Europe. The fig is native to the tropical and sub-tropical seaboard of Queensland and New South Wales, and the pine is endemic to Norfolk Island, some 1400 kilometres off the Australian

◀ The Moreton Bay Fig arching over Murray Street forms part of this historical locale in the city.



◀ The largest and one of the oldest trees in Perth is this Moreton Bay Fig growing near the Swan River in Bassendean. It was probably planted in the 1830s.

east coast. Presumably the first seeds or seedlings were brought west from the parent colony of New South Wales, where both species probably had been successfully propagated. Both came from areas of summer rainfall to endure the summer drought of the typical mediterranean type climate of Perth. The opulent green of the leaves and the density of the shade cast by the figs would appeal to anyone seeking shelter from a hot sun. The unbelievable symmetry of the crown and its equally incredible ability to grow arrow straight in the teeth of winter gales make the Norfolk Island Pine a landmark tree of distinction, and would have enjoyed special favour in the days of multi-masted sailing ships.



It is surprising how many notable trees of historical and ornamental significance in Western Australia are in fact Moreton Bay Figs. The best known example is the one growing in Murray Street near the centre of the city outside the nurses quarters of the Royal Perth Hospital. The National Trust of W.A. sees this tree as being an essential component of the historical Murray Street East Precinct, a locale containing many fine examples of early West Australian architecture. The date of planting of this tree is not known. The largest and probably the oldest known individual Moreton Bay Fig is the tree growing in the yard of 2 Thompson Road, Bassendean, near where Captain Stirling, the founder of the Swan River Colony, is reputed to have landed. This area is some of the very first land to be taken up by the new settlers. The

◀ Trees are part of our heritage and are often planted to mark important occasions.

Tree Society of W.A. believes this tree was planted in the first few years of the colony, making it now about 150 years old. "Proclamation Tree" growing at the junction of Queen Victoria Street, Adelaide Street and Parry Street in the port of Fremantle is a Moreton Bay Fig. Other fine examples of the Moreton Bay Fig can be seen in the Supreme Court Gardens, along the Esplanade, and in parks and the grounds of older homes and establishments throughout the metropolitan area.

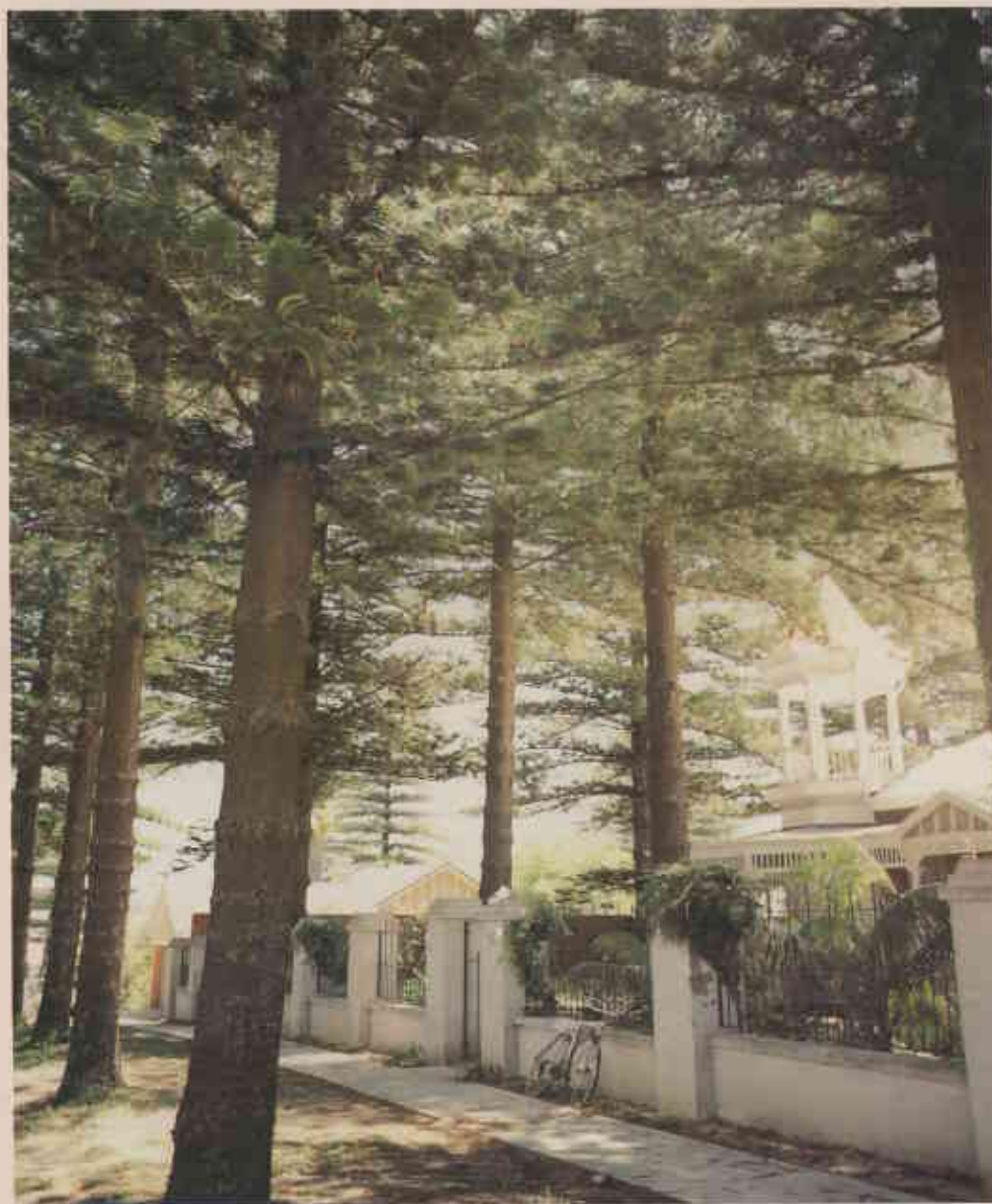
Perhaps the best known Norfolk Island Pines in Perth are those comprising the "Cottesloe Skyline". The oldest known examples are two trees growing in the yard of the pioneering Roe family in West Swan. Like the Figs, other fine examples of the Norfolk Island Pine exist in Hyde Park and in other parks and private gardens throughout the metropolitan area.



The tall, straight forms of the Norfolk Island Pines are a familiar part of Perth's coastal environment, particularly at Cottesloe.



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