

## Centenary Square:

### **Norfolk Island Hibiscus** (*Lagunaria patersonia*)

Also known as white oak (on Norfolk Is.) and cow itch tree (in Qld.)

In the foreground of St Johns Cathedral, the Norfolk Island hibiscus was named for Lt.Col.William Paterson, one-time superintendent of Norfolk Island, acting NSW Governor and amateur botanist. In summer these have pink or lavender hibiscus-like flowers and later very bristly seed pods, hence the 'itch' name. There's another one on the south-east of Old Government House.

Also in the square is a fine old 'English' (actually European) oak, surrounded by raised circular bed and studded with plaques to Councillors who presided over the Church Street pedestrian mall going in.

Watch out for the jacarandas flowering south of the Cathedral and around Lennox Bridge in November!

## Parramatta Park:

### **Cook's pine** (*Araucaria columnaris*)

**Parramatta Park** is full of great trees, both locally native (some 3-700 year old forest red gums and narrow-leaved ironbarks, some with Aboriginal carved trunks (for making coolibahs, shields etc) providing landscape framing and identity. A couple of introduced conifers worthy of a gaze are the Cook's pine that lines up directly with George Street and its Tudor Revival gate house, between that and Old Government House. Native to New Caledonia, this tree commemorates James Cook the navigator and always grows 'off straight' - spiralling one way in the southern hemisphere, the other in the north! You might recognise it in tourist posters for New Caledonia - it's "Ile des Pins" is covered in these pencil-like trees. Many beach front plantings of Norfolk Island pines (think Manly, Bondi...) have replanted with the Cook's pine - perhaps mistakenly - that's why their forms vary. This species is a better choice for tighter spots, smaller areas and some 'marker' status.

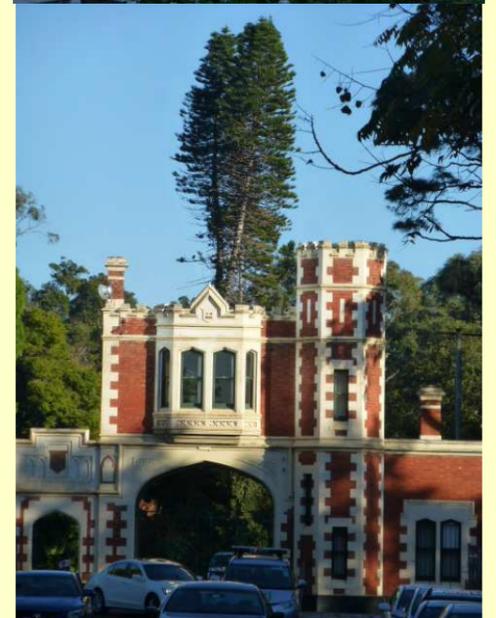
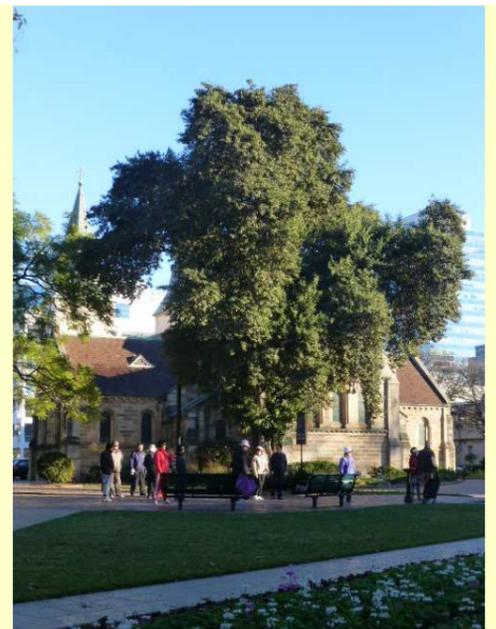
### **Stone pine** (*Pinus pinea*)

Off **Parramatta Park's** main drive (River Road) to the right past Old Government House and near the Parramatta River bank is a fine old stone pine, the source of Mediterranean pine nuts (should our cockatoos allow it). Such 'Italian' trees frame Rome's Colosseum and hills and were favoured by the Governors and colonial gentry such as the Macarthurs, showing off their 'Grand Tour' experience and memories. Elizabeth Farm had plans for a grove of such pines and Mediterranean cypresses to the west of the house - it never eventuated. Stone pines however turn up regularly in old colonial gardens, in town and country. Over (north of) the river the King's Oval is ringed by the same pine, and an avenue of them once lined the top of the Crescent hill west of Old Government House, sadly removed and replaced in the 1920s. Pleasingly the Parramatta Park Trust has replanted new stone pines here in recent years, some marching through the car park and swimming centre lining old drives that led out to O'Connell Street in earlier decades.

### **Paperbark or snow-in-summer** (*Melaleuca linariifolia*)

Along the river banks of the Parramatta River through the park are clumps of paperbarks, often found in naturally swampy, low-lying and water-rich environs. This particular one changes its colour to creamy white in summer when covered in tiny flowers. Being rich in honey they attract birds and bats.

Many paperbarks develop thick, peeling bark that feels exactly like paper: tissue-soft, stiffer or in some cases, corky cardboard. This bark was used by Aboriginal people to clad shelters, make fire, as an all-purpose 'bush gladwrap' (not my words) and an oven bag to cook food in earth-fires. The flowers would be soaked in water (as are Banksia flowers) to make a sweet drink. Tea tree oil is a product Europeans have long distilled from paperbarks, this being one of the three local species used. North Coast NSW species *M.alternifolia* is the main source of commercial tea tree oil today.



## Prince Alfred Park:

### Canary Island date palms (*Phoenix canariensis*)

**Prince Alfred Park** just out our front door and across Marist Place, commemorates the Royal visit of Queen Victoria's son in 1868 - just as its mirror park does south of Central Station (before he was shot at by some crazed Irishman in Clontarf!). Before 1868 Parramatta's was known as 'Gaul Green', site of two early prisons and a fair bit of rioting due to conditions. Six magnificent Moreton Bay fig trees grace this park, along with towering **Tasmanian blue gum** (*Eucalyptus globulus*), **lemon-scented gum** (*Corymbia citriodora*) from Qld. and avenues of **Canary Island palms** (*Phoenix canariensis*) and **brush boxes** (*Lophostemon confertus*) from Northern NSW rainforests.

The **Canary Island date palms** were popularised by then-Director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens Joseph Maiden (seeking a more 'tropical' looking Sydney (think Macquarie Street's c1910 triple avenue) and in Victoria by his equivalent William Guilfoyle. They also grace war memorials and town halls state-wide, valued for their formality and lush green colour.

Each avenue is worth strolling down and the figs give fine shade in steamy summer days. In their way each tree species speaks volumes about fashions in park embellishment - rainforest trees; palms (to make Sydney more 'tropical'), formality and strolling...

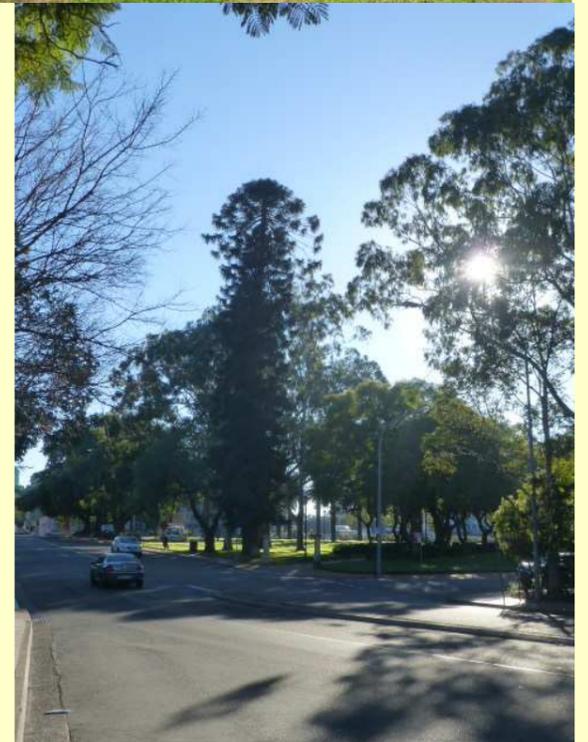


### Bunya Bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) (cnr. Market St. and Marist Place)

This magnificent sentinel is visible from blocks away, rising like a vegetable rocket from a prominent corner site. Native to the Northern NSW and SE and C Queensland rainforest 'scrubs', it remains important to Aboriginal people who would come from miles around to gather annually for feasts and 'governments' - long discourses, in seasons when the huge 'cannonball' cones were ripe and the nuts roasted. 'Discovered' in 1838 by Andrew Petrie, collected from 1841 by John Carne Bidwill, propagated chiefly by William Macarthur at Camden Park south of Sydney and exported from 1850 around the colony and to the world (thanks to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, it was named after Bidwill).

Many a Bunya silhouette continues to grace parks, homestead gardens in Western Sydney and indeed, around the world, such as Italian palazzo, Californian mansions etc. It resembles the monkey puzzle tree (*A. araucana*) from Chile to which it is related.

A boom in Bunya pine exports proceeded for a time. As did a parallel boom in Norfolk Island pines propagated in Tasmania. The Bunya pine remains today one of our great trees and great exports.



## Parramatta Justice Precinct: (cnr. George and Marsden Streets)

### Port Jackson or rusty fig (*Ficus rubiginosa*)

On the south-east corner as the Parramatta Justice Precinct's 'city face' is *Brislington*, an 1819-21 house built from the betting money of a card game (have a look at its back (north) wall for some card-motifs!) with a fine Port Jackson fig in the front yard leaning over the busy intersection. Port Jackson or rusty fig (check out the undersides of its leaves) is one of the two most-favoured local species (sandpaper figs are an acquired taste!) and much promoted from the 1850s onwards. They tend to have smaller leaves than Moreton Bay figs, crinklier, more craggy/crumplly trunk bark and less buttressing of roots.



## Old King's School:

### Moreton Bay fig (*Ficus rubiginosa*) Camphor Laurels (*Cinnamomum camphora*)

The *Old King's School* site has some marvellous old trees from its days as a boys' school worthy of attention. The huge **Moreton Bay fig** near the weir/Marsden Street bridge looks to be a bird-dropped seedling that took off, cannibalising the rock retaining wall leading to the old weir/road crossing (pre-1960s bridge) and provides one of the best frame views to the old school building.

The two massive **camphor laurels** straddling the pedestrian path to Marist Place/Market Street date at least from the 1880s and tell of a time when this tree was revered and promoted - not reviled and chain sawed as is so often the case today - yes it does spread into bushland! But many a camphor wood chest packed goods to and from Australia on ships for decades and since 1823 this tree has been planted in Australian parks, streets and larger gardens and welcomed for its shade and perfume. Native to south-east Asia, their giant camphors are revered as 'spirit trees' with shrines, ribbons and much more.

