

Australian Garden

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HISTORY

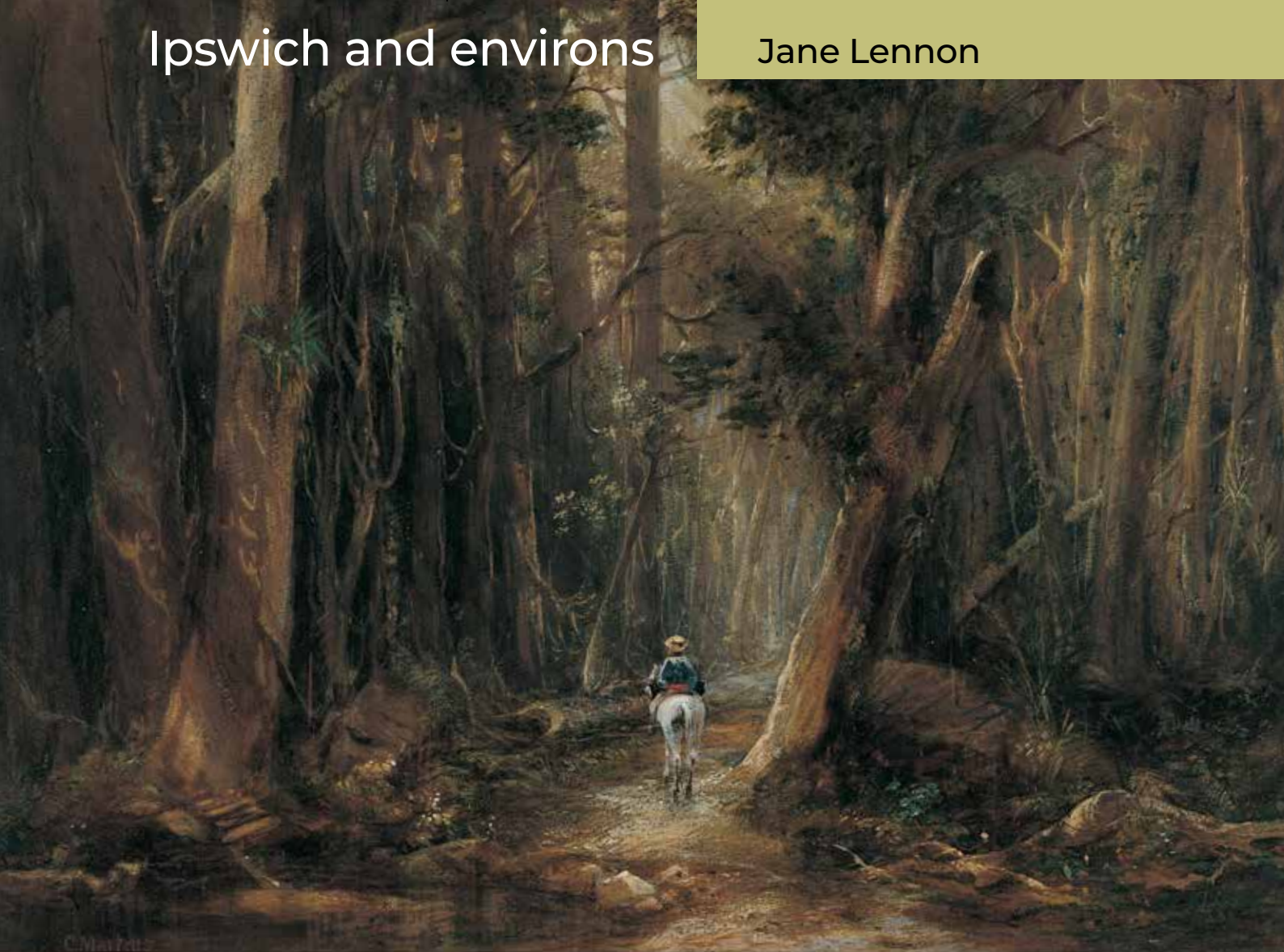
A Noah's Ark Project
The 1960s garden
Remarkable trees



Landscape evolution

Ipswich and environs

Jane Lennon



Conrad Martens, *Forest, Cunningham's Gap*, 1856, watercolour on paper/ 30.5 x 42cm, purchased 1998 with funds raised through the Conrad Martens Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Appeal and with the assistance of the Queensland Government's special Centenary Fund, courtesy Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art

Ipswich (Tulmur in the Yagara language) is located near the junction of the Bremer and Brisbane Rivers, 50 km from Moreton Bay, in a wide fertile valley between the forested mountains of the D'Aguiar Range to the north and rounded hills to the south and west. This landscape has been moulded by the river, by its railway network, by mineral extraction. Now it is in a post-industrial phase with service industries and increasing residential development. Ipswich is proud of its heritage.

A massive volcanic event about 22 million years ago poured out thick layers of basalt and rhyolite, the erosion of which created high, steep mountains known as the Main Range, visible from the higher points in Ipswich. Running north from the Main Range towards Ipswich are a series of rocky rhyolite plugs, the largest of which is Flinders Peak, surrounded by low forested hills.

The Traditional Owners of the Ipswich region are the clans of the Yagara/Yugara Language Group (the Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul People). Camira bora grounds and White Rock-Spring Mountain reserve are sacred sites. the latter reserve extending across 2,500 ha of forested ridges.

Colonial exploration

In 1824 a convict settlement was established at Moreton Bay, initially at Redcliffe and then at Brisbane Town. That same year, while exploring the Brisbane River, Lt John Oxley and Allan Cunningham came across the Bremer River (calling it Bremer's Creek).

In 1827 the Ipswich area was explored by Captain Patrick Logan, commandant of the Moreton Bay penal settlement. He discovered a ridge of limestone in what is now Queens Park, the premier park in Ipswich city, and dispatched an overseer and five convicts to establish a quarry and kiln to produce burnt lime mortar for use in constructing Brisbane's stone buildings. The locality, then called Limestone Hills, was considered the head of navigation for vessels of 30 or 40 tons.

In 1828 the King's botanist, Allan Cunningham, described 'the stupendous range of mountains whose broad dome-like and conical summits...presented a bold and rugged scenery not to be found in any explored part of the country'. Cunningham found a pass through the mountains. He suggested a road be built from the Limestone Hills to the interior and a wharf constructed on the right bank of the Bremer River for conveying produce. Today the Cunningham Highway runs from Brisbane and Ipswich through Cunningham's Gap to the Darling Downs and Warwick, a town famous for its roses.

The hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*), the 'monarch of the woods', and Moreton Bay chestnut (*Castanospermum australe*) attracted the explorers. They wrote about the diverse nature of the country – thickly wooded ranges with grassy vales bounded by ridges, the bases of which were clothed in dense forests of *Araucaria*, the 'stately pine...varying from sixty to eighty feet in height'. The stringybark woodlands and the impenetrable viney scrubs or brush along waterways tangled them up and often blocked their passage. Logan was astonished by the lofty grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) proliferating on the open flats, low hills and forest ground of the Limestone Hills; he compared them to 'bee-hives elevated on stools'. Some of these remain in the garden of *Karragaroo* (1884) in Ipswich.



Ipswich's industrial past

Clearing the scrubs and forests was a major industry in the 19th century. Only a few patches remain, one being the Rosewood Scrub reserve. Timber harvesting in more open forests continued until recently. One of the few extant steam powered sawmills in Queensland, Gillam's at Grandchester east of Ipswich, still produces hardwood timber.

Cattle and sheep increased throughout the 1830s on the 'luxuriant pasturage'. By 1839 they were scattered across the countryside. Agricultural produce, especially wool, flowed from the Darling Downs to Ipswich, the rail head established in 1865 to service Queensland's first railway. Its now heritage-listed workshops were an extensive complex that included modest gardens planted by workmen and used as lunch areas.

Beds of coal in the banks of the Bremer River were noted by Major Lockyer in 1825, and Logan in 1827, but exploitation was neglected until free settlement in 1842. In 1843 the first-recorded coal mine opened beside the river at Redbank, followed by mines at Woodend, Tivoli and Goodna. The Blackstone coal mine opened in the mid-1860s. Its owner, Lewis Thomas, employed experienced miners from Wales. Coal mining underground continued until 1997. Over 40 species of fossil plants have been described from the coal measures, predominantly seed ferns but also ginkgo and cycads. Later mines at Bundamba and Dinmore supplied the growing railway network until the 1950s and produced over 50 per cent of Queensland's coal. Open-cut mining commenced at Dinmore in 1966 to supply power stations.

Ipswich city from Queen's Park lookout, photo Jane Lennon



The United Welsh Church in Thomas Street is the only Welsh church in Queensland, image Creative Commons (CC0 1.0)

View from Ipswich city centre, north past St Mary's (built 1904) to Pine Mountain in the far distance, photo Jane Lennon

Hills of overburden along the Cunningham Highway are evidence of this activity, although, astonishingly, there are only a few remnants of the city's mining past. Only two of about 300 coke ovens are extant and decaying timber coal loaders can be seen along the river. On Denmark Hill just behind the city centre, the park circuit follows the tramway along which coal mining skips were hauled.

The former Chuwar Coal Mine 5 km from Ipswich was Queensland's first fully rehabilitated open-cut coal mine in 2018. Mine site rehabilitation has been a vexed issue in Ipswich, especially their use for waste disposal. In 2017 almost one million tonnes of construction and demolition waste and contaminated soil were trucked from New South Wales to landfill sites in former coalmine voids around Ipswich. Following resident protests, the Queensland government introduced a levy on such waste. However, the sites are privately owned and resource recovery authorised by the state government for waste management firms is not always supported by locals, who dislike their town being regarded as 'Tipswich'.

Ipswich today

The sprawling city of Ipswich (population 240,000) is composed of former mining communities. Before coal mining began, the eastern suburbs along the Brisbane River, like Redbank, were farming and grazing areas. Later, Redbank had a boiling down works, fellmongery (tannery), meat preserving factory, abattoirs and woollen mills. The historic pastoral estates that form distinctive cultural landscapes such as *Cressbrook* in the Brisbane Valley or *Coochin Coochin* in the Logan Valley are located up the valleys away from Ipswich.

Drier and warmer than Brisbane, Ipswich still has about 900 mm of rain annually, mostly in the summer months. The 19th-century grand houses have some impressive gardens but the Welsh miners were not gardeners and this is reflected in gardens dominated by local trees, especially hoop pines. Ipswich and its suburbs have many intact beautifully crafted timber houses in the Queensland style, often obvious from hoop pines dominating the site. The formal areas of Queens Park reflect the local geology with its distinctive rock walls, and many small parks are built on rehabilitated mine sites.

The flood plain and adjacent areas are now built up but Ipswich itself is surrounded by forested hills, and there are fine views north to the D'Aguiar Range and south to the Main Range along the Scenic Rim. It retains an air of a country town with houses on large blocks on slopes and ridges with gardens of palms, flowering trees such as jacaranda, bauhinia, poinciana, frangipani, and foliage plants like acalypha, philodendron, croton, bromeliad, canna and ferns. The new suburbs including Ripley and Springfield have housing on small lots with no garden except for the ubiquitous gravel and a few stripey plants. Garden traditions are lost in this outer suburban development but the older suburbs retain their charm, although this historic landscape could be destroyed by subdivision of the gardens for new housing.

Dr Jane Lennon, AM grew up in rural Victoria and spent her working life delving into the history of places whose heritage should be conserved. She is the author of numerous books on pastoral history, cultural landscapes and heritage.

