

THE PRESERVATION OF SAMFORD BORA GROUNDS

[By ELIZABETH N. MARKS]

An Order in Council dated 21 May 1964 and published in the Queensland "Government Gazette" of 23 May 1964, p. 405, set apart a number of reserves including the following:

THE BRISBANE LAND AGENT'S DISTRICT RESERVE FOR SCENIC (BORA GROUND) PURPOSES, SAMFORD (R.2048)

(Under the control of the University of Queensland,
as trustee)

County of Stanley, parish of Samford

Area, 4 acres 3 roods 24.8 perches

Portion 193 as shown on plan SI.4360 deposited in the
Survey Office.

64-18327 S.G.

A record of the events that culminated in this announcement may serve as a guide and perhaps an inspiration for projects of a similar nature. The Queensland Naturalists' Club played an important part in them and it is therefore appropriate to record them in its Journal.

Preservation of Samford Bora Grounds depended primarily on those who have owned or used the land since they were formed. Gazettal of the Reserve stemmed also from the interest of societies, the practical and financial support of a large number of people, intense activity by a small committee, and the sympathetic interest of the Minister for Lands and the University Senate.

The Bora Grounds comprise a grassed circle¹ 40ft. across surrounded by an earth bank 2ft. high and connected by a sunken path (the Sacred Way) 600 yards long to a smaller similar circle 15ft. across (figures are approximate). The Sacred Way runs N.N.E.-S.S.W. parallel to Wight's Mountain Road along a ridge, and the Reserve is a long, narrow grassy strip with scattered trees, bounded on its western side by the road, and widening around the large ring at its northern end and the small ring at its southern end. A graded track (originally a timber snigging track of the early settlers)

1. Incorrectly sited in map of Samford-Camp Mountain, *Qd. Nat.* 14 (2): 26, 1950.

crosses the Reserve near its southern end and has obliterated part of the Sacred Way, the rest of which and the large ring are particularly well preserved; the small ring, damaged some years ago by a tractor, is not (and perhaps never was) so well defined.

THE ABORIGINAL OWNERS

Samford Bora Grounds were used for Kippa-making ceremonies by the Brisbane (Toorbal) tribe. We owe our information about them to Tom Petrie² who came to Brisbane as a child in 1837 and from childhood spent much time with the blacks, becoming very familiar with this tribe. It is quite likely therefore that he saw the ceremonies he describes at Samford, but there is no certainty as each tribe had its own rings and whichever of the neighbouring tribes had the most boys ready for initiation would invite the others to its Bora Grounds.

The tribes camped about 200 yards from the big ring for up to two or three weeks preparing for the ceremonies in which boys aged 12-15 were transformed into Kippas or young men. For the first couple of days the women took part in proceedings at the big ring though never, under pain of death, allowed beyond it; after this they were sent to camp elsewhere. For the ceremonies, images in clay and grass and bark carvings were placed alongside the Sacred Way, and in the small ring a wattle tree platform was erected on which the great men of the tribe stood. Initiation of the boys at the Bora Grounds might take two or three weeks. After a Kippa-making at Samford the tribes would remove to the present site of Roma Street Railway Station in Brisbane for the Great Fight, a series of fights continuing for about a week, at which the Kippas learned to be fighting men.

Tom Petrie's very full account of the ceremonies, when read at the Bora Ground site, conjures up a vivid picture.

In the 1870s, when the Wights lived on the next ridge, they often heard the corroborees of the blacks, who frequently came to their house. The blacks would not eat anything from the "Ring Hill" as this was sacred ground and it was a sin to take anything from it. The hill where the homestead "Auchen Eden" stands at Camp Mountain, probably less than a mile from the Ring Hill, was, according to the late Mr. Thomas Richards whose childhood in the '70s was spent there, a favourite camping ground of the blacks.

It is worth noting that an apparently older and long disused ring, of lesser size than the big ring in the Reserve, exists about half a mile to the north of it, likewise on a ridge

2. PETRIE, C. C. (1904). *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, 319 pp., Brisbane: Watson Ferguson.

to the west of Samford Creek. It is likely soon to disappear with altered land use.

THE EUROPEAN SETTLERS

A lease to the Samford cattle run appears to have been first taken up on 1 February 1855 (when the area was almost 4 sq. miles), possibly by Archibald Young who held the lease in 1859 and paid £4/16/4 annual rent. On 23 July 1861 the lease was transferred to Clarence H. Ball and in 1864 to Williams and Townley. In 1862 the lease was for 20 sq. miles, annual rent £56, but as selection took place the area was reduced. It was down to 3,512 acres in 1873 and the run was forfeited in 1877.

On 8 March 1865 a large number of small portions (average area about 40 acres) were put up for auction. There was no bid but persons were allowed to offer at upset price, £1 per acre, for the freehold. The Bora Grounds were in Pors. 25-28, the large ring in Por. 25 and the small in Por. 28.

Henry Thomas Payne purchased Por. 25 on 16 November 1865 and Pors. 24, 26, 27 and 28 on 7 August 1866. He also took up larger selections in close proximity, and the property was called Samford Creek Station. H. T. Payne was a young man, the only son of Henry Howard Payne who himself took up a selection of 1,064 acres nearby.

Henry Howard Payne (b. 1822, Sleaford, Lincolnshire) arrived in Brisbane in January 1851 and for ten years was in business as a plumber. He took up land at Milton (corner of Milton and Baroona Roads) and tried growing cotton. He is said to have been the first to break soil with plough on the north side of the river, but as the north side was first settled in 1824 this statement seems to need some qualification. Subsequently he settled at the Gap and went in for farming, including grape-growing, and cattle breeding. He was the first to cross Samford Range by bullock dray and was acknowledged as largely responsible for formation of about 15 miles of road in that area. His daughter Jane, aged about 16, was housekeeping for her brother at Samford when the latter was thrown from a horse and broke his back. Transported in to Brisbane by bullock dray, H. T. Payne died there on 12 January 1869. H. H. Payne went back to Milton to live, but Jane in November 1870 married James Scott Wight and they returned to Samford Creek Station which was then worked under the name of Wight, though remaining part of the Payne estates. J. S. Wight was a son of George Wight, first Congregational minister in Brisbane (b. Portobello, Scotland, arrived Brisbane 1858) and a founder of the Queensland Philosophical Society.

Jane Wight in 1915 had the five portions, 24-28, surveyed into six subdivisions, each of about 28 acres, and gave one to each of her six children. The large ring in Sub. 3 went to Gladys Wight, parts of the Sacred Way in Subs. 4 and 5 to Annie Isobel Wight and Howard Scott Wight, and the small ring in Sub. 6 to John Wight.

The original homestead was on the ridge to the west of the Bora Grounds, and the original surveyed road ran along that ridge. However the later homestead was in another site and it became convenient to the Wights and other farmers to use a track along the same ridge as the Bora Grounds, care being taken to avoid damage to them. In 1932 the Shire Council wished to have the road relocated along this track. The Wight family agreed to this provided the surveyed road did not encroach on the Bora Grounds and the transfer took place early in 1933.

In November 1956 Howard Scott Wight purchased Subs. 6, 4 and 3, from his brother and sisters and the whole of the Bora Grounds thus came into his sole ownership. He assured those who at various times expressed concern for their preservation that as long as he owned the land they would be preserved.

THE SAMFORD BORA GROUNDS PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Early in 1963 an approach was made to Mr. H. S. Wight through the Pine Rivers Shire Council, and he promised that if he decided to put up his property for sale he would first provide an opportunity for preservation of the Bora Grounds. On 17 June 1963 he informed Mr. J. N. Scott, the local Shire Councillor, that he would like to discuss this as he intended to sell.

From then on the project moved amazingly fast, due to the sympathetic interest of a great number of people.

Mr. Scott straight away advised me (as a part-time local resident and a member of several interested societies) and the first opportunity to report to a society occurred the same evening, 17 June, when the Council of the Queensland Naturalists' Club³ appointed a Samford Bora Grounds Subcommittee (Mr. F. S. Colliver, Mr. L. S. Smith, and myself

3. The Club appears to have first visited Samford Bora Grounds during excursions to the Samford basin in May and June 1924 under the leadership of Dr. E. O. Marks. Ann. Rept. 1925: "During the year your Council was instrumental (through the Strathpine Shire Council) in getting the owner of a well-defined bora ring at Samford interested enough to promise to have the ring preserved by fencing round." Ann. Rept. 1926: "Through the interest of the President (Dr. E. O. Marks), the owners of the ground in which the Bora Ring at Samford is situated have erected a fence around the ring, protecting it from straying cattle, etc." During World War II and since, the Club held a number of camps at Camp Mountain and on these and on day excursions to the district has maintained its interest in the Bora Grounds. Other societies and individuals have of course also taken an interest in them and sought their preservation.

as convener) to investigate the matter and to take action to enlist the help of others.

Having found out what the necessary procedure would be, on 20 June Mr. Scott and I called on Mr. Wight who told us that, while he was not in a position to make a gift of the freehold of the area containing the Bora Grounds, he was willing to surrender it for a reserve, provided he was compensated for its value and was not required to meet any of the costs involved. He agreed also that an independent valuation should be obtained from a licensed valuer, Mr. Morris Harland. Mr. Harland, himself a former resident of the district, responded promptly by inspecting the area on 22 June and on 5 July notified his valuation of £25 per acre, which was acceptable to Mr. Wight.

Meantime, by 25 June the Sub-committee had made sufficient progress to write to the Presidents of nine other societies suggesting that a committee representative of interested societies be formed to raise a sum of money to cover legal and survey costs and compensation to Mr. Wight for surrender of the Bora Grounds area to the Crown for gazettal as a reserve under the trusteeship of the University of Queensland. The Sub-committee reported that the Lands Department, the Shire Council and the University had indicated their willingness to co-operate, and the Titles Office raised no objection to the proposed resubdivision.

All societies approached signified their interest. Some had time to appoint a representative when a meeting was convened by the Sub-committee on 9 July, others sent observers. Besides the Queensland Naturalists' Club, the societies concerned and their nominees were: Royal Society of Queensland (Mr. J. T. Woods), Royal Historical Society of Queensland (Sir Raphael Cilento), Queensland Women's Historical Association (Mrs. E. M. Jackson), Anthropological Society of Queensland (Mr. F. S. Colliver), National Parks Association of Queensland (Mr. E. F. Kemp, Mr. J. K. Jarrott), National Trust Association of Queensland (Sir R. Cilento, Mr. W. R. Moon), Brisbane Bush Walkers' Club (Mr. W. Haddock), Brisbane Catholic Bush Walking Club (Mr. R. McLellan), and University of Queensland Bush Walking Club (Mr. D. Potts). Dr. D. J. Tugby, Senior Lecturer, Anthropology and Sociology Section, University of Queensland, was also invited.

All but Messrs. Moon and McLellan attended this meeting on 9 July and the eleven persons present unanimously resolved to constitute themselves a society with power to add further members, the name of the society to be "The Samford Bora Grounds Preservation Committee." Office-bearers

elected were: Chairman, Sir R. Cilento; Vice-Chairman, Dr. D. J. Tugby; Hon. Secretary-Treasurer, Dr. E. N. Marks; Hon. Auditor, Mr. W. Haddock; Committee, Mrs. E. M. Jackson, Messrs. F. S. Colliver, J. K. Jarrott, E. F. Kemp, R. McLellan, W. R. Moon, D. Potts, L. S. Smith, J. T. Woods. The Committee listed as its objectives (1) to advise the Minister for Lands concerning proposed surrender, gazettal, and trusteeship of the Bora Grounds; (2) to obtain a survey of the area; (3) to raise a sum of money sufficient to compensate Mr. Wight and cover survey and other necessary costs.

On 10 July the Committee wrote asking the Senate of the University of Queensland⁴ to accept nomination as trustee of the Bora Grounds, both as an incorporated body and because its Anthropology Section (which has since become a Department) would have an active, continuing, and informed interest in the area. It also asked the Senate to undertake responsibility for all legal matters concerned with transfer of the area. The Senate met on 11 July and approved both requests. In the event, no legal assistance was needed.

On 11 July the Committee wrote to a number of newspapers asking their co-operation in giving its project little or no publicity, and informing them that Dr. Tugby had been appointed its spokesman to the press. This request seemed to astonish the press, but the Committee was confident it could raise the money needed without a public appeal and felt that too many sightseers could affect its negotiations.

On 12 July the ten societies were sent a circular appealing to their members for donations, the target set being £300. The societies were able to help in different ways with this appeal; some sent out the Committee's circular with their own notices; others copied part or all of it into their own bulletins; others again tabled the circulars at meetings. The response was immediate and exciting. By 26 July receipts totalled £113, by 16 August £218; the target of £300 was reached by 4 September, and the final figures were 162 donations totalling £327/13/9. Some were from residents of the Samford district, two from societies not represented on the Committee, and others came from as far away as New Guinea, Western Australia, and U.S.A.

This response enabled the Committee to proceed with confidence. Through the good offices of Mr. J. N. Scott, the Speaker, Hon. D. E. Nicholson, whose electorate of Murumba includes Samford, received Mr. Scott and myself on 25 July. He expressed great interest in the Committee's activities and arranged for us an interview the same day with

4. Another body now eligible for consideration as an appropriate trustee for reserves of this type is the National Trust of Queensland; it did not then exist.

Hon. A. R. Fletcher, Minister for Lands, who gave a most encouraging hearing. A letter was delivered to the Minister from Mr. Wight in which he expressed his willingness to surrender the freehold of the area occupied by the Bora Grounds provided that it was gazetted a reserve, that the Samford Bora Grounds Preservation Committee compensated him for the value of the area at £25 per acre, and that he incurred no liability for any costs involved in the transaction.

(Mr. Wight had written to the Committee on 14 July in the same terms, adding "I should like the area of the reserve not to be fenced off from the adjoining paddock while the land use continues as at present." The Committee had already promised to observe this and had informed the University of Mr. Wight's wish. The paddock was at that time lightly stocked with cattle.)

As an outcome of the interview with him, the Committee on 26 July wrote to the Minister for Lands asking that his Department undertake the survey of the area to be reserved (if possible at minimum or no charge to the Committee) and nominating the University of Queensland as trustee of the proposed reserve. On 5 September the Minister advised that instructions for survey of the area agreed upon between the Committee and Mr. Wight had been issued to Mr. Authorised Surveyor Gardiner, that the survey would be effected at no expense to the Committee, and that when the surveyed area had been surrendered by Mr. Wight, Executive Authority would be sought to set the area apart as a Reserve under the control of the University of Queensland as trustee.

In the meantime, on 28 July Professor A. P. Elkin, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology in the University of Sydney, had helped Committee members mark the approximate boundaries of the proposed reserve with a series of steel posts loaned for the purpose.

On 16 September Mr. Gardiner was taken to inspect the site and to meet Mr. Wight, and he completed the survey early in October. On 22 November the Department of Lands forwarded to the Committee documents for signature by Mr. Wight and on 28 November these were signed and returned together with Mr. Wight's Deeds of Grant and the Committee's cheque to cover fees in connection with the surrender. On the same day the Committee paid to Mr. Wight £125 in compensation for the area of almost five acres which he was about to surrender.

As noted at the beginning of this article, the area was declared a Reserve on 21 May 1964. Howard Wight, who was in such large part responsible for it, did not long survive this achievement; he died on 25 July 1964.

The Committee held its second meeting at the Bora Grounds on 24 November 1963. It decided that the boundary of the reserve should be marked by cement posts at corners and spaced at intervals, and that tidying of the reserve could in the first instance be undertaken by working bees from the interested societies who could deal with light materials.

Rocla Pipes Ltd., when approached, offered to make available reject concrete pipes of 6in. internal diameter for use by the Committee, and Mr. J. N. Scott in February 1964 transported 36 pipes from the Grovely factory to the reserve.

Between February and July 1964 the National Parks Association and the Brisbane Bushwalkers' Club each held a working bee at the site, and the Naturalists' Club and the Anthropological Society jointly held two; a few members of other societies also took part. Lantana, smaller logs, and a few stumps were cleared and burned from the vicinity of the large ring and much of the Sacred Way; a tree was removed from the small ring; and the steel posts which had formerly marked an approximate boundary were placed on the exact boundary of the reserve.

There was still a tangle of very large logs across the Sacred Way, and the Committee arranged with a local resident, Mr. J. Domrow, to clear these which he did on 16 January 1965 largely as a donation to the project, making a nominal charge for use of his tractor and saw.

The concrete pipes then remained to be erected as boundary markers and negotiations for their erection were several times, after long delays, unsuccessful. The positions for the posts were marked with pegs on 7 November 1965. In August 1966 Mr. Nicol Scott took a tractor to the site and dug the postholes, and the pipes were placed beside them, but it was not until March 1967 that the Committee was able to have them erected, filled with gravel and capped with cement.

This completed the tasks the Committee had set itself and the members agreed that the balance of its funds should be given to the University of Queensland, as trustee of the Bora Grounds, to be used to further their preservation. An appropriate opportunity for making the presentation was provided, at the suggestion of Mr. J. T. Woods, Director of the Queensland Museum, at the ceremony at which the Museum's diorama of an aboriginal ceremonial at the Samford Ring was unveiled on 30 May 1967, when the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Dr. D. J. Tugby, handed to Professor L. J. H. Teakle, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, the Committee's cheque for \$256.86.

Immediately following this function, the Committee held its third and final meeting at which it resolved that, having achieved its objectives, it would disband. Its records have been handed to the University.⁵

CONCLUSION

The successful achievement of this preservation project leads to the following conclusions which may be useful in comparable circumstances:

1. Where there is on private property some feature whose preservation is of local or wider importance, it is essential that the property owner be made aware of its importance to the community, and be kept informed of the bodies that have a particular interest in its preservation, and of persons, preferably local, who will be readily available to help him if he wishes to ensure its permanent preservation.

2. There is in the community a great amount of interest and willingness to help in conservation and this can be quite quickly focused, through collaboration among the appropriate societies, on a project with an unarguably worthwhile, specific, and achievable goal.

3. The conservation societies, which so often call on Governments to take action, are themselves willing and able to take action on a project which lies within their capacity to complete.

4. A project of the nature, and with the backing, indicated in (2) and (3) recommends itself to administrators for sympathetic consideration.

5. An ad hoc committee formed for one specific object with the approval of the interested societies, but not directly answerable to them, can act quickly on an urgent matter, whereas a committee with a multiplicity of tasks, or one composed of delegates who had to refer questions back to their societies for decision, might move too slowly to achieve this object.

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5. The University of Queensland in July 1967 established an Aboriginal Ceremonial Areas Committee to supervise such areas vested in the University (it includes four former members of the Samford Bora Grounds Preservation Committee) and in November 1967 appointed Mrs. A. M. Scheldt, a niece of Howard Wight, to be Honorary Ranger of the Samford Bora Grounds.