

# Redcliffe in 1824

by

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## INTRODUCTION

An attempt is made in this article to determine the location of the buildings of the penal settlement established at Redcliffe in September 1824 and abandoned about May 1825. The sources of information are: (1) Oxley's Field Book, giving details of his survey of the settlement on 14 September 1824 when the building sites were staked out, (2) Cunningham's Journal, mentioning the progress that had been made in erecting buildings by 29 September 1824, (3) recollections of a former convict, and (4) relics found on the site.

It will be argued that the Commandant's house and the Commissariat Store were built on the sites chosen by Oxley but the jail and the prisoners' barracks were erected on other sites than those originally intended. In addition, it will be shown that the landing place at Redcliffe was not at the present Redcliffe Point but at the beach near the present pier.

## HISTORY UNTIL 1824

Redcliffe had been a gathering place for Aborigines prior to the arrival of the explorers. A bora ring (kippa ring) existed at the present suburb of Kipparing and could be seen until about ten years ago. It was about a hundred yards north of Klingner Road West and about halfway between Susan Avenue and Boardman Road.

The first explorer to visit Redcliffe was Matthew Flinders who

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sighted the cliffs near Woody Point and called them Red Cliff Point. He landed at Clontarf Point on 17 July 1799<sup>2</sup>.

The castaways, Pamphlet, Finnegan and Parsons, during their wanderings in Moreton Bay, arrived at Clontarf Point on 30 June 1823 and were cared for by the Aborigines. They may have stayed three months on the Redcliffe Peninsula before moving on to Bribie Island. In November 1823 Finnegan witnessed a fight between Aboriginal tribes at the Redcliffe bora ring<sup>3</sup>.

After his first expedition up the Brisbane River, John Oxley landed on the Redcliffe Peninsula on 5 December 1823. In his report to Governor Brisbane he recommended that a temporary settlement be established at Redcliffe until a permanent settlement could be begun up the river. He suggested that, in that event, Redcliffe should be maintained as a military post and depot for stores<sup>4</sup>.

Governor Brisbane instructed Oxley to select a site for the settlement at Moreton Bay, somewhere on the direct route from the entrance of the Bay to the mouth of the Brisbane River<sup>5</sup>. He suggested that this settlement might be best located on one of the islands in the Bay<sup>6</sup>. He further instructed Oxley to select a site for a possible settlement on the banks of the Brisbane River.

On 12 September 1824 the brig *Amity*, carrying the first contingent of soldiers and convicts for the new settlement, anchored off Osbourne Point, Redcliffe. On 13 September Oxley and Lieutenant Henry Miller (the Commandant) failed to find water on the Redcliffe Peninsula<sup>7</sup>, so, with Allan Cunningham, they

visited St. Helena Island but found it to be unsuitable for a settlement<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, another party was searching the Peninsula more thoroughly. Fresh water was found in a chain of water holes (now known as Humpybong Creek) about a quarter of a mile from the beach<sup>9</sup>.

On 14 September Oxley and Miller inspected the water holes and decided to locate the settlement in the space between these holes and the beach<sup>10</sup>. Tents were erected, and the sites of the buildings were staked off, "having reference to contiguity to water and the convenience of landing stores and provisions"<sup>11</sup>.

### THE SURVEY

A survey of the coastline, Humpybong Creek and the intended building sites was carried out on 14 September. In this article it is referred to as Oxley's survey, as it was done under his direction, but it is possible that the actual work was carried out by Robert Hoddle, an assistant surveyor, who was later to become famous for laying out the City of Melbourne. The field notes of Oxley and Hoddle which relate to Moreton Bay are contained in a collection of field books in the Archives Office of New South Wales<sup>12</sup>, and in the Mitchell Library<sup>13</sup>. Oxley's account of his activities on 14 September is in the latter location, whereas the data concerned with the survey is in the former.

In the book containing the survey data, page 9 gives compass bearings taken from St. Helena Island on 13 September, and pages 10 and 11 give the data of the Redcliffe survey on 14 September. Page 9 also contains bearings taken from the ship on 16 September, the day on which Oxley began his second journey up the Brisbane River.

The survey began on the hill overlooking the present Redcliffe Point, near the present monument to Flinders and Oxley. Bearings were taken towards successive "stations", and the distances between the stations were measured, usually in chains. The first station was on the rocks below the starting point, level with the beach, and others were along the beach as far as the mouth of Humpybong Creek. This creek was then followed as far as the water holes, and then the survey passed among the intended sites of the buildings, returning eventually to a spot near the mouth of the creek.

### PLOTTING THE SURVEY

I plotted the survey stations on a piece of tracing paper to a scale (4 chains = 1 inch) equal to that of the Lands Department map, "City of Redcliffe", dated February 1965; this was done to facilitate subsequent comparison between the survey and the modern map. The main problem arose from the lack of a definite compass bearing for the stage of the survey from the barracks<sup>14</sup> to the prisoners' barracks. The field notes read "then east two chains to corner of prisoners' barracks; length of ditto east sixty-six feet". The site of the prisoners' barracks was therefore plotted by working back from the end of the survey near the mouth of Humpybong Creek; it was then found that the actual bearing from the soldiers' barracks to the prisoners' barracks was slightly north of east, but the distance along this bearing fortunately agreed with that given in the field notes.

### MATCHING THE SURVEY TO THE MAP

The tracing was placed over the Lands Department map so that the route of the survey along Humpybong Creek was lined up with the creek. It should be noted that the creek was practically dry at the time of the survey, whereas the recent map shows a small lake resulting from a dam near the mouth of the creek.

The correct orientation of the tracing, with respect to the map, was then determined. The direction of magnetic north in 1824 is known to have been about ten degrees east of true north<sup>15</sup>. In the map, the "adopted meridian" for the major road directions<sup>16</sup> is close to nine degrees east of north. The tracing was therefore oriented so that magnetic north was one degree clockwise from the adopted meridian of the map<sup>17</sup>.

### RESULTS OF MATCHING (FIG. 2)

When the matching procedures had been carried out it was found that stations 1 to 4 of the survey fitted the coastline fairly well,

although it is probable that the beach has changed since 1824 through erosion and the building of a sea wall.

The landing place referred to in the survey turned out to be just south of the mouth of Humpybong Creek, near the present pier. In view of a widely-held belief that the landing place was at the reefs below the present Redcliffe Point (an unlikely spot from the boatman's point of view), the above matching now makes it obvious that it was actually at the beach, where a landing could be accomplished more safely and conveniently<sup>18</sup>.

The "pond of fresh water" in the survey turned out to be one chain south of the present Anzac Avenue but west of the present course of the creek at that locality. The Commandant's house was intended to be seven chains from the pond, and other buildings were evidently intended to lie on the same contour of the land<sup>19</sup>, probably to enable a water pipe to be connected to them all in due course. The stores were to be situated near the landing place, to facilitate the handling of a large quantity of goods; this was to be of considerable importance as the *Amity* had brought far more stores than would be required by the initial small population<sup>20</sup>.

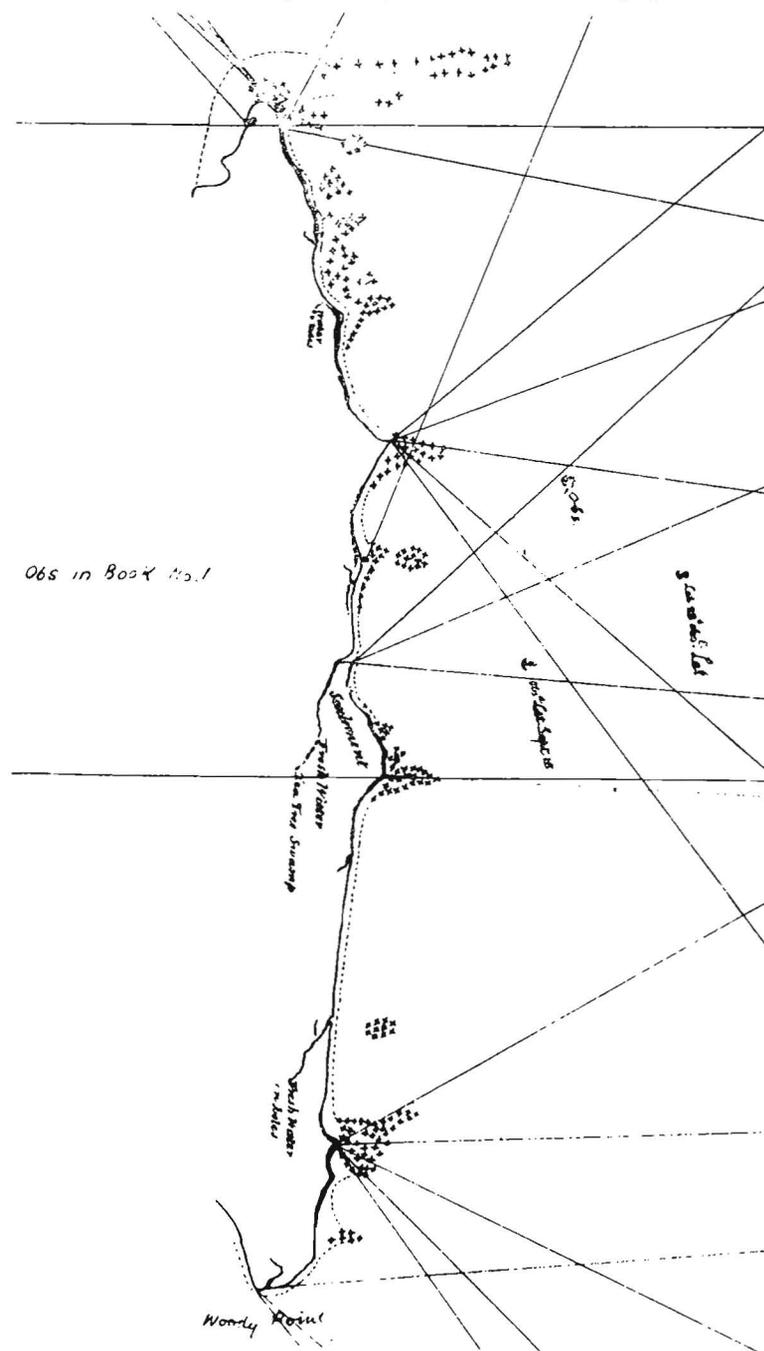


Fig. 1: Hoddle's chart of the Redcliffe coastline, showing the position of the settlement in 1824. The settlement was near the middle of the chart, indicated by the words "Settlement", "Fresh Water", and "Tea Tree Swamp". The anchor symbols on the right show where the *Amity* anchored on 12, 15 and 27 September, respectively (in anti-clockwise order from the top). The words "Obs in Book No. 1" and "Woody Point" may have been added at a later date. From MT 59 in the Brisbane Survey Office, by courtesy of the Surveyor-General of Queensland.

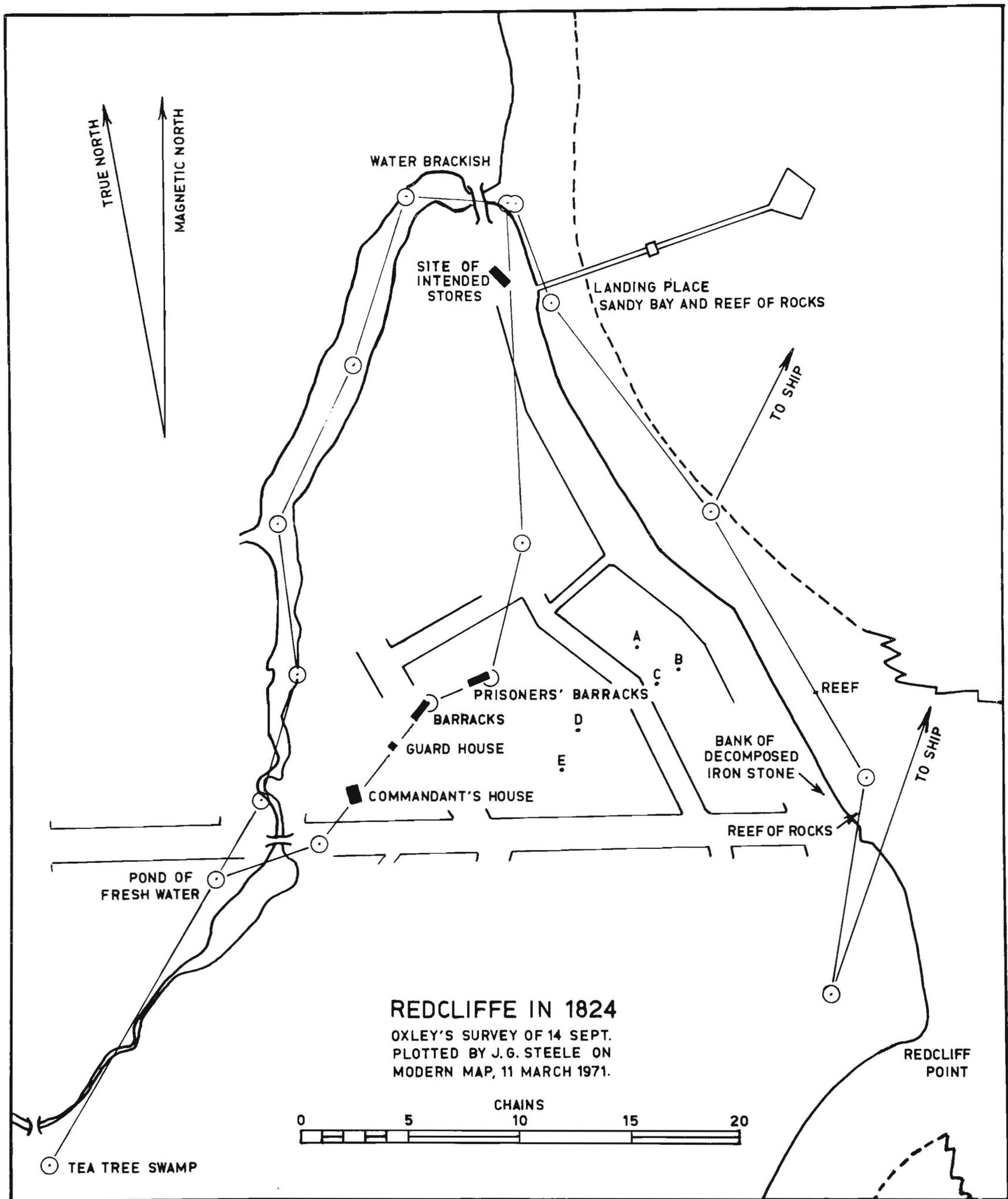


Fig. 2 : Oxley's survey of 1824, with some features of a modern map. The roads shown include Anzac Avenue (east-west), Redcliffe Parade (along the coastline) and Sutton Street (parallel to Redcliffe Parade). Sites of relics are:

- A. Leg iron found in 1970, and foundations seen in 1881.
- B. Brick pavement of barracks kitchen seen about 1881.
- C. Well seen about 1881 and in 1970.
- D. Leg irons and grave found by Cutts family, approximate position.
- E. Whipping tree cut down in 1916.

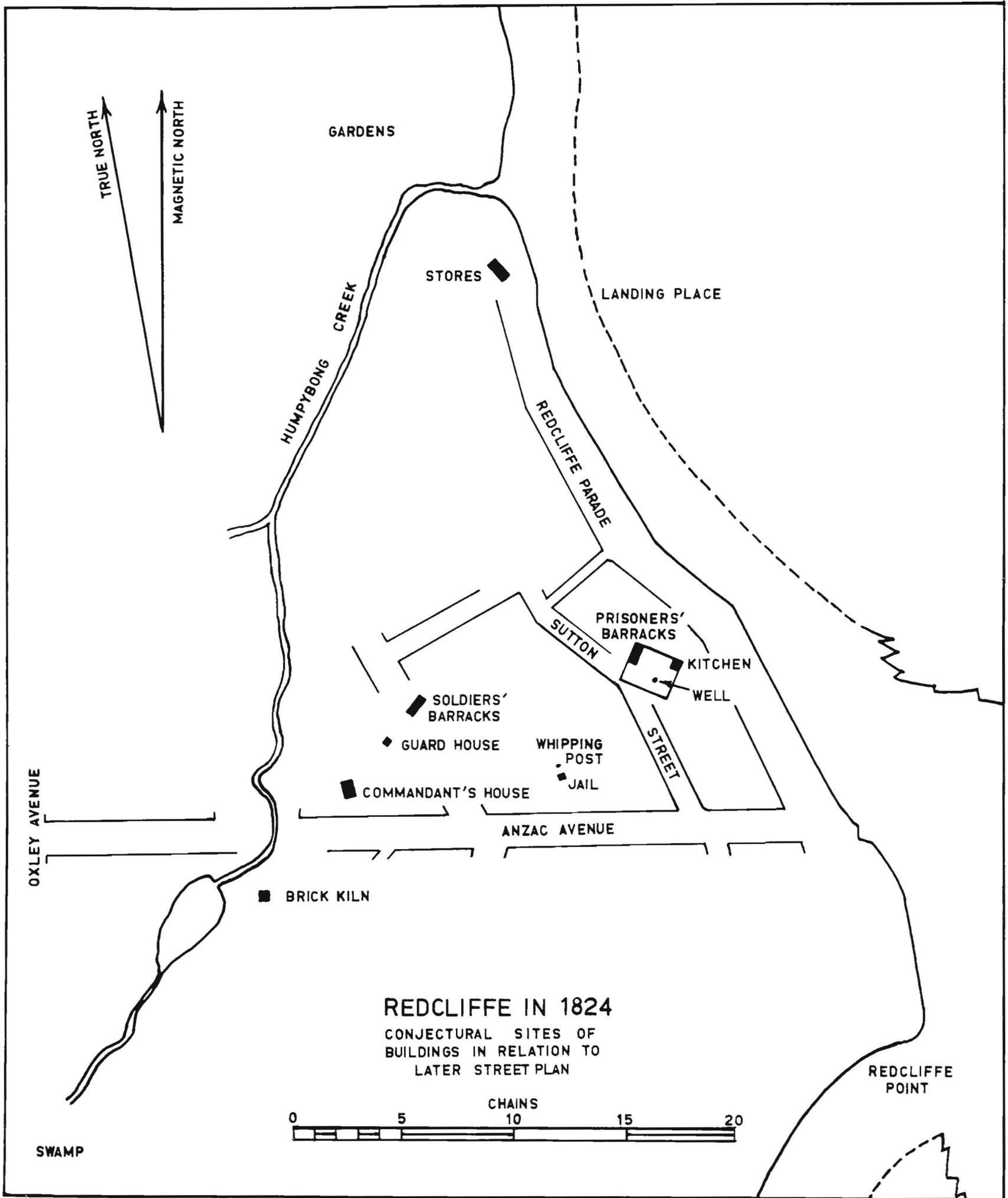


Fig. 3.



Robert Hoddle.

(By courtesy of the author and the Government  
Printer of New South Wales)

#### THE COMMANDANT'S HOUSE AND THE COMMISSARIAT STORE

After their expedition up the Brisbane River Oxley and Cunningham returned to the *Amity* on 28 September<sup>21</sup>, and on the afternoon of 29 September they went ashore at Redcliffe to examine the new settlement. Cunningham recorded that the Commissariat Store was being erected<sup>22</sup>; it was made of logs, and would be roofed within a week. The Commandant's house had been prefabricated in Sydney and was now partially erected, although some parts were found to be missing. Temporary huts had been built for the soldiers, the convicts and some of the stores.

The question that now arises is, were the buildings actually erected at the sites decided upon by Oxley? It seems probable that the Commissariat Store and the Commandant's house were built on the sites originally proposed. If this had not been so the fact would probably have been recorded by Oxley or Cunningham.

#### THE SOLDIERS' BARRACKS AND THE PRISONERS' BARRACKS

Evidence from a much later period suggests that some of the barracks were not erected at the place chosen by Oxley. J. J. Knight records a conversation between Mr O'Leary and a stranger during the building of O'Leary's hotel<sup>23</sup>. The stranger implied that he had been at Redcliffe during the building of the settlement, and from his reluctance to reveal his identity, as well as from other details he gave<sup>24</sup>, it was thought that he must have been a convict. The stranger pointed out a brick pavement which, he claimed, was the floor of the kitchen of the old barracks, about twenty or thirty

paces from the hotel. He also located a well and the boundaries of a stockade that had surrounded the barracks.

Another writer of a still later period claimed that the foundations of the old convict buildings were to be seen as late as 1881, "about 80 to 100 yards due west, or a little to the north of west, of the Ambassador's Hotel"<sup>25</sup>. A convict's leg iron was found near this spot in 1970 and it is now in the Redcliffe Historical Society Museum<sup>26</sup>. The well was unearthed in 1970 during the construction of a car park at the rear of the hotel<sup>27</sup>.

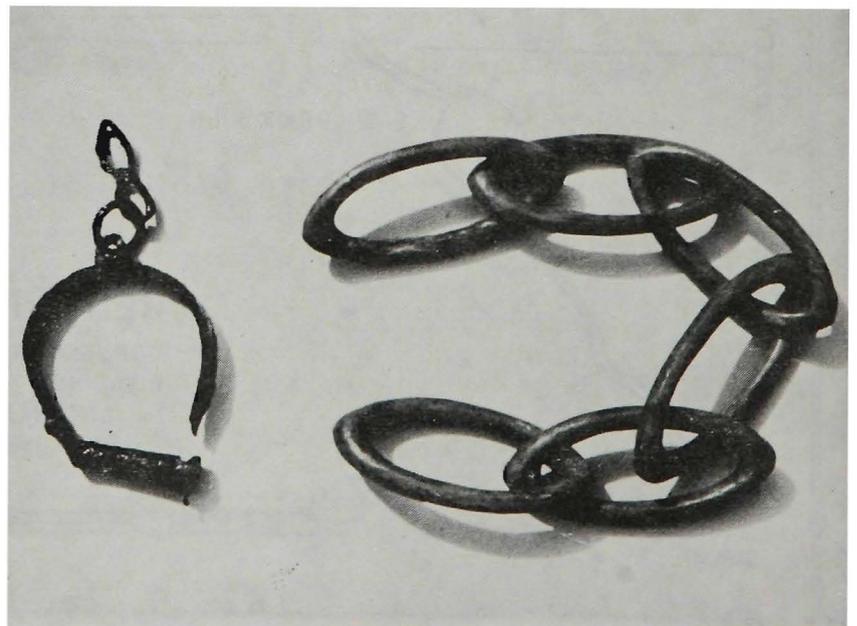
It is clear that either the soldiers' barracks or the prisoners' barracks were near O'Leary's Hotel. The removal of one of these from Oxley's site can probably be explained by referring to Governor Brisbane's instructions to Lieutenant Miller<sup>28</sup>. The instructions stated that the prisoners' barracks and the soldiers' barracks should be 300 yards apart. If, for example, the soldiers' barracks were built on the site chosen by Oxley, and the prisoners' barracks were near O'Leary's Hotel, they would have been about 250 yards apart. When Governor Brisbane visited the settlement in November 1824 he expressed his satisfaction with what had been done<sup>29</sup>. This suggests that the soldiers' barracks and the prisoners' barracks were far enough apart to satisfy the Governor.

Which barracks were near O'Leary's? The following evidence, though slight, suggests that they were the prisoners' barracks:— (1) A leg iron was found there in 1970, (2) the stranger was probably a convict, (3) the soldiers' barracks would probably have been closer to the Commandant's house than were the prisoners' barracks<sup>30</sup>.

The mention of a stockade may suggest that it was the soldiers' barracks, for Governor Brisbane's instructions required a palisade to be built around them; but in view of the trouble caused by the Aborigines at Redcliffe, it is possible that a stockade was built around the prisoners' barracks as well<sup>31</sup>.

#### THE JAIL

Evidence for the site of the jail is also late but seems to be conclusive<sup>32</sup>. The jail was on property owned by the Cutts family and now partly occupied by the Congregational Church in Anzac Avenue. Early in the present century the last remnant of the jail building fell down. It had contained posts with iron rings attached to them for the convicts' chains. Until 1916 a triangle or whipping tree existed behind the church. Leg irons and chains have been dug up on a property adjoining the church. A grave, thought to be that of two convicts, was once discovered on the adjoining property<sup>33</sup>.



Leg iron found at site A (Fig. 2), and wooden chain thought to be of convict origin, both in the Redcliffe Historical Society Museum.  
(By courtesy of the author)

## EVACUATION OF THE SETTLEMENT

When the settlement was evacuated in May 1825 the Commandant's house was probably dismantled and rebuilt at Brisbane Town<sup>34</sup>. Of the other buildings, some were burnt down by the Aborigines but others remained, giving rise to the name "Humpybong", meaning dead huts<sup>35</sup>. These huts were occupied by the German missionaries for a time<sup>36</sup>. The jail appears to have been the longest-surviving building.

## CONJECTURAL SITES OF BUILDINGS (FIG. 3)

In the light of the above reasoning it has been possible to construct a plan showing the probable sites of buildings that were actually erected; this is given in Fig. 3. The positions and orientations of the prisoners' barracks and the jail are necessarily approximate.

Two features, hitherto not mentioned, have been included in this plan: the brick kiln and the garden. The brick kiln is reported to have been seen by Tom Petrie<sup>37</sup>, and another report states that it was located "in the creek (now practically dried up) behind the Catholic Church, and near the bridge that is crossed on the road just before entering the town proper of Redcliffe"<sup>38</sup>. The site recommended for agriculture was on the north side of the creek<sup>39</sup>; gardening work was progressing well by 29 September 1824<sup>40</sup>, but the site of this work is not known.

## CONCLUSION

Oxley's survey probably indicates the places where the Commissariat Store and the Commandant's house stood. Later evidence shows that a barracks existed near O'Leary's Hotel, and it is suggested that this was the prisoners' barracks. The site of the soldiers' barracks is left in doubt. Relics of the jail show that it was near the present Congregational Church.

## REFERENCES

Abbreviations : A.O.N.S.W. — Archives Office of New South Wales

M.B.L.B. — Moreton Bay Letter Book in A.O.N.S.W.

M.L. — Mitchell Library

Q.S.A. — Queensland State Archives

1. J. T. Houghton, of the Redcliffe Historical Society, reports that the bora ring was offered to the Redcliffe City Council, but the offer was declined and the bora ring was ploughed over. Stone axes and grinding stones found in this vicinity are in the Redcliffe Historical Society Museum.
2. J. G. Steele. — *Explorers of the Moreton Bay District*. Brisbane, Univ. of Queensland Press, in press. Ch. 2.
3. *Ibid.*, Ch. 5.
4. *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.
5. Brisbane to Oxley, 28 Aug 1824 [M.B.L.B.].
6. *Ibid.*, 30 Aug 1824.
7. Steele, *op. cit.* Ch. 7.
8. The island has been identified from compass bearings and a sketch in the same field book as the Redcliffe survey, [A.O.N.S.W. Ref. 2/8093].
9. Cunningham's Journal [A.O.N.S.W. Ref. SZ9] states that the water holes were "about a quarter of a mile from the immediate beach". This may suggest that the landing place was on the beach.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Oxley, Field Book [M.L. Ref. C246]; in Steele, *op. cit.* Ch. 7.
12. [A.O.N.S.W. Ref. 2/8093].
13. [M.L. Ref. C246.]
14. Presumably the soldiers' barracks.
15. Steele, *op. cit.* Introduction to Ch. 7.
16. For example, Oxley Avenue. Anzac Avenue is at right angles to this.
17. Fig. 2 shows Oxley's survey and some features of the modern map, matched in the manner described.
18. See reference 9 above, which is now corroborated.
19. This was ascertained from the military map of Redcliffe, no. 176, zone 8, correct up to Aug 1926.
20. Cunningham's Journal [A.O.N.S.W. Ref. SZ9]. Compare Oxley's statement quoted at reference 11 above, regarding water and stores.
21. Steele, *op. cit.* Ch. 7.
22. [A.O.N.S.W. Ref. SZ9], where the date is given incorrectly as 28 September.
23. J. J. Knight. — *In the Early Days*. Brisbane, Sapsford and Co., 1895. pp. 16-18. O'Leary's, now known as Ambassador's, is on Redcliffe Parade, 8½ chains from the Anzac Avenue corner, in a northerly direction. It was built between 1881 and 1883, according to an article in *The Brisbane Courier*, 30 Dec 1930.
24. For example, he described the manner in which the convicts were marched onto a ship for the journey to Brisbane.
25. *The Brisbane Courier*, 30 Dec 1930.
26. J. T. Houghton reports that the leg iron was found by Mr L. Jones on his property in Sutton Street, about one chain from Sutton Street, and one chain north of the land occupied by Ambassador's Hotel.
27. J. T. Houghton reports that the well was about 15 or so yards from Sutton Street, at the rear of the hotel. It was found to be 35 feet deep and lined with wooden beams. It was probably the well pointed out by the stranger around 1881 although the bricks that formed the shaft in 1881 were not visible in 1970.
28. Brisbane to Miller, 27 Aug 1824 [M.B.L.B.].
29. Miller to Balfour, 25 Apr 1826 [Tasmanian Archives].
30. This was the case at Brisbane Town.
31. At Brisbane Town a wall was built around the prisoners' barracks.
32. *The Brisbane Courier*, 30 Dec 1930.
33. J. T. Houghton reports that the Cutts's home was moved from its original site after it was discovered that the steps were subsiding into a grave containing two skeletons. But no convicts died at Redcliffe; the first death was that of Robert Humphries on 4 Nov 1825 at Brisbane Town [Brisbane General Hospital Register, Q.S.A. Chronological Register of Convicts at Moreton Bay, Oxley Memorial Library].
34. Steele, "Brisbane Town in 1829". *Queensland Heritage*, vol. 2, no. 5 (Nov 1971). pp. 15-23.
35. Knight, *op. cit.*
36. According to W. H. Traill. — *A Queenly Colony*. Brisbane, 1901. p. 126. If this is so, it must have been in 1838.
37. C. C. Petrie. — *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences*. Brisbane, Watson, Ferguson & Co., 1904. p. 213.
38. *The Brisbane Courier*, 30 Dec 1930.
39. Oxley, Field Book [M.L. Ref. C246]; in Steele, *Explorers of the Moreton Bay District*. *op. cit.* Ch. 7.
40. Cunningham's Journal, 28 [actually 29] Sep 1824 [A.O.N.S.W. Ref. SZ9].