

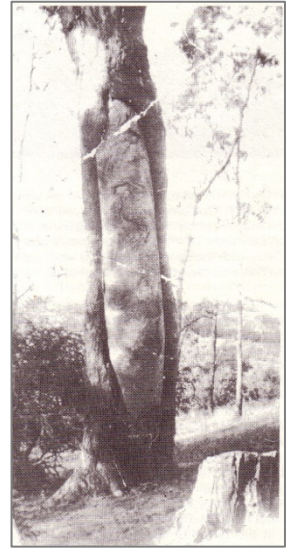
MANNINGHAM'S INVISIBLE ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

When British settlers began arriving in the Manningham area from the late 1830s, the land clearing they undertook often turned up Aboriginal artefacts. This included implements such as spear heads, axe heads, grinding stones and wooden tools. Most pioneer families proudly placed such artefacts on their lounge room mantelpiece for visitors to admire, and they usually also retained and protected any scarred trees or stone arrangements on the property they had acquired.

However, very few of these artefact sites were ever formally recorded. The same goes for local Aboriginal camp sites or gathering places, which were most often located near the junction of a creek with the Yarra. These river and creek junctions were also often areas where rapids were located, and where Aboriginal fish traps had accordingly been built. After the annual October floods, a lot of maintenance work and rebuilding of these fish traps were required over the summer months, prior to the annual eel harvest season. However, this annual maintenance work ended as dispossession proceeded, so these traditional fish trap areas soon became invisible to European eyes.

There are at least twenty such rapids areas along the Yarra River at Manningham, all of which were traditional Aboriginal aquaculture sites. However, none of these are formally identified, signposted or interpreted as such. One such traditional site is behind Finns Reserve in Templestowe, where Ruffey Creek meets the river. A few years ago, this area was confirmed by Woiwurrung Elders, Dave Wandin and Bill Nicholson, as indeed the location of a traditional Aboriginal aquaculture area.

A wonderful viewing of this rapids area, up and down the river, is available from the suspension bridge which spans the river at that point. Looking east up the river from the bridge, you will see the geological structure crossing the river, over which the water is falling. These are the foundations on which a four-foot-high wall was originally built to dam back the river water. At a couple of convenient points, sluice gates would have led to the shallow rock runways that can still be identified. This is where the eel traps and fish traps would have been placed.



Scarred Tree



Finns Rapids

Looking west down the river from the bridge, there would also have been slow-flowing areas beside the shady river banks, that were in fact freshwater mussel farms. These were often in complementary company with yabby farms. Further downriver, opposite the Wombat Bend kindergarten, is a deepwater area prior to more rapids and fish traps. This deepwater area was in fact, a blackfish breeding area as well as an eel shelter.

So next time you view a rapids area along the Yarra like the one at Finns, think about how the geological structures there would have readily lent themselves to the building of weir walls, sluice gates and water races. You might also be able to identify the likely location of shady mussel farm and yabby farm areas, as well as the deepwater fish nursery pools.

It will be like you have had your eyes peeled open.