

HISTORIC TIKALARA PARK

Tikalara Park is probably the most historic area in Manningham and is located at the junction of Mullum-Mullum Creek and the Yarra River. It is historic on two fronts, from both our Aboriginal and our pioneer perspectives.

Access to Tikalara Park is gained either by walking west from Beasley's Nursery on Warrandyte Road, north from Aumann's Nursery on Websters Road, or east along the Yarra Trail from Petty's Orchard on Monckton Road. On reaching the junction of Mullum-Mullum Creek and the Yarra River, you will find a small viewing platform that faces north up the river.

If you stand on the viewing platform, you will see a deep-water area immediately in front of you. This is typically a breeding place for fish and a protected resting area for eels. In tribal times, it would therefore have been a busy fishing and swimming place.

Looking upriver from the platform, you will see a rapids area two hundred metres to the north. This was not only a crossing point, but was also where fish and eel traps would have been typically located. Along the shady banks of the river, would have been where freshwater mussel farms were located.

Aboriginal Village

On the land to the right of these rapids, is a rise that is above the Spring flood level, so this would have been the typical location for a small village. These river junction locations typically contained half a dozen or more bee-hive shaped permanent houses that were two metres high and three metres across.

The construction of these turf-block houses was recorded by Jimmy Dawson, a local settler who arrived in Warrandyte in 1840. The frame is made by a circle of three-metre wattle saplings being driven into the ground. The saplings were then bent into an igloo shape and secured. The structure was then sheeted in bark and blocks of turf stacked against the frame, with the grass facing outward.

As the grass continued to grow after construction, the houses ended up looking like shaggy igloos, but were amazingly strong and durable. A little chimney hole was always left at the apex of the structure.

The artefact scatters, found in this raised area adjacent to the river crossing, suggest that a village was in fact located here. The subsequent farming and grazing activity from 1838 onwards, alone, might have been enough to erase evidence of such prior Aboriginal housing but it is more than likely that more deliberate action took place.

Pontville Homestead

The first colonist in this area, and in fact the first in present day Manningham, was Major Charles Newman, who arrived in 1837. If you look to the right from the viewing platform, you will see 'Pontville' the permanent house he built in 1844. It was an Indian-style three-room bungalow with surrounding verandas, and is the oldest pioneer building still standing in the mid-Yarra region.

However, and rather ironically, the first dwelling Major Newman built in 1838 was a turf-block hut. This was done with contracted convict labour, and it stood in the bracken-covered area right behind the present-day viewing platform. Although it is not recorded, we can very safely assume that the brief of the convict labourers was not just to build the Major's turf-block hut and construct his fences. It would also have included clear instructions to obliterate any nearby Aboriginal houses.

The turf-block hut they built for the Major was a single room dwelling. It had a large chimney taking up the wall on the eastern side next to the creek, with a doorway and window facing north, up the river. The south side of the hut was windowless and faced a bluff, so the west was the only direction from which Aboriginal people could approach the hut.

To cater for this eventuality, the Major had narrow slit windows constructed on the west side, and he kept an array of muskets propped beside each window. This was so that he could fire at any native who dared to try and cross 'his' land. Local oral history records that he in fact did this regularly and with lethal intent.

In response to the Major's open hostility, Aboriginal people regularly broke down his fences, burnt his paddocks and drove off his stock. Such events are not only recounted in local oral history, they are also directly evidenced in letters of complaint the Major wrote to the government in New South Wales, about his paddocks being burnt and stock being driven off by the natives.

There is one other feature in this area worth a look and it is reached by heading east from the viewing platform along the wooden walkway. Fifty metres or so to the south, you will find a pond, probably with some ducks in it.

This is not a dam. It is the remains of a slurry-pit made by the Major, to produce the bricks with which Pontville was built. The kiln that accompanied the slurry-pit is long since gone, as are the saw-pits for cutting timber and the original wooden roof shingles.