

Heritage Citation



Northgate Road Commemorative Fig Trees

Key details

Addresses	Road Reserve Northgate Road, Northgate, Queensland
Type of place	Tree/s
Period	Interwar 1919-1939

Geolocation -27.393319 153.061029

Key dates Significant Development — 1937
Local Heritage Place Since — 28 February 2020
Date of Citation — July 2017

People/associations Girl Guides

Criterion for listing (A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (E) Aesthetic

The avenue of Weeping Fig trees which span the length of Northgate Road, between Sandgate Road and Gympie Street, were planted by the Northgate –Nundah Girl Guide troop. The Guide troop was established in 1933. The plantings were part of a Queensland-wide movement by the Guides to plant over 4000 trees as a major gesture in commemorating the coronation of King George VI in 1937. On the 15 May 1937 forty Weeping Fig trees were planted alongside the road by the guides. Although not all of the forty fig trees remain, and several have been replaced over the years, the trees make a very strong aesthetic contribution along Northgate Road and are a reflection of the enthusiasm felt by the Northgate community for the Royal Coronation.

History

In the 1880s, the Sandgate railway line was constructed through the suburb we know today as Northgate. The original station was called Toombul but renamed Northgate Junction in 1893. It was not until the turn of the century, however, that the area became predominantly residential. The interwar period heralded further suburban intensification in Northgate. With this, many community facilities were established such as a School of Arts, and Scout and Girl Guide troops were also founded in the Northgate/Nundah area.

The Girl Guide movement began in Britain prior to the outbreak of World War One, and not long after the Boy Scout's movement was established by Robert Baden-Powell in 1907. Baden-Powell was concerned with the degrading of society through increased industrialisation and believed that instilling values such as discipline and patriotism, as well as an emphasis on outdoor activities in children would strengthen society. It was after World War One, however, that the Scout and Guide movements gained a much greater following throughout the British Empire. Loyalty to the British Crown was an important philosophy with patriotism and imperialism at the forefront of much of the movements' rituals and activities.

The Girl Guide movement in Queensland was initiated in 1919 by Lady Goold-Adams, the wife of the then Governor. Over the next ten years, many troops had been established throughout the state and by 1931 Queensland had seventy-five guide companies (for girls aged between eleven and sixteen), forty brownie packs (for the youngest) and three ranger companies (for girls aged over sixteen). The total number of members in 1931 had reached 2767 girls.

The first troop of Guides in the Northgate-Nundah area was established in 1933 and shared the 1932 Scout Hall in Buckland Park with the Nundah Scout troop. By 1935, however, a new Guide's hut had been constructed on

Cameron Street, Nundah and was described at the time of its opening ceremony as “a substantially erected hall of timber and fibro cement with galvanised iron roof. It has been erected absolutely free of debt” (Sunday Mail, Sunday 17 March, 1935, p21).

In late 1936 King Edward VIII abdicated from the British throne causing a major scandal throughout the British Empire. His brother, Albert, was to take over the throne and on 12 May, 1937 was crowned the new King George VI. Celebrations were held all over the realm, including Australia. In Brisbane there were many activities organised to mark the important occasion. The main celebration took place on the day of the Coronation and began with a large procession that included sixty elaborately decorated floats. It began at Parliament House and travelled through the city streets to the Exhibition Grounds where the Governor of Queensland attended. For the rest of the afternoon and into the night the crowd of 40,000 people were entertained by musical and cultural acts. In a spectacular show of imperial fervour, a chain of forty-two impressive beacons were lit along the state’s coast from Coolangatta to Thursday Island.

Prior to the Coronation, in April 1937, senior representatives of the Girl Guides Association met with the, then, Lord Mayor, Alderman Jones, to put forward a proposal to plant thousands of trees throughout Brisbane and across the state as a tangible and lasting commemoration of the Coronation. “The Girl Guides’ Association had sought the Council’s co-operation in a plan by which selected streets would be planted with trees suitable for the locality, and a girl guide undertaking to look after each tree” (Courier Mail, Friday 16 April 1937, p14).

It was also agreed that the trees that were to be planted would be given to the guides by the Brisbane City Council and would be chosen by Council’s specialised arborists to assure they would be appropriate for each area. In the 1936-37 Brisbane City Council Annual Report it was stated that:

The Greater Brisbane Area was put in charge of the Brisbane City Council which undertook the planning of the scheme, such as suitable streets for planting trees and the right type to plant. They also had the holes prepared and provided the trees, guards and stakes

The trees chosen for planting, “would be chosen according to the character of the soil and the conditions of the locality of each of the streets” (Courier Mail, Monday 19 April, 1937, p12). Other considerations were taken including the types of plants already existing in the chosen areas, traffic conditions and whether there were overhead wires. Varieties chosen for the occasion included Poinciana, Jacaranda, Bauhinia, Silky Oak and Weeping Fig as well as flowering shrubs such as Hibiscus. “In the streets selected, there would be a continuous line of trees on either side, to give an avenue effect”.

For Northgate, it was decided that the guides would plant their trees along Northgate Road, which at the time was devoid of plantings as is evident in the 1936 aerial photograph. Northgate Road was only a small walk from the guide hut. Weeping Figs (*Ficus benjamina*) were chosen for the avenue and forty were supplied by the Council.

Prior to the planting ceremony, Brisbane City Council supplied relief workers to dig the holes and to erect the surrounding guards that were to protect the young trees. This was an era of economic hardship for many as the Great Depression caused widespread unemployment. The government at the time established relief work schemes to reduce unemployment and to provide a source of income for unemployed men and their families. Brisbane City Council also created relief work for the unemployed throughout the Depression.

On the afternoon of 15 May 1937, 1400 girl guides throughout the city took part in the historic tree planting ceremony. It was reported, “when approximately 1400 units, representing every Ranger, Guide and Brownie in Brisbane, planted a tree as a Coronation gesture on Saturday afternoon, a simple but lasting expression of

loyalty to the King and Queen was made by the Brisbane Girl Guides' movement".

The Northgate-Nundah Girl Guide troop carried out the tree planting ceremony amid a gathering of community members. To help with correctly planting the trees there were also several Council representatives assisting the girls.

Other streets in Brisbane that had avenues planted included Windsor, Enoggera, Ashgrove, Kelvin Grove, Bardon, Toowong, Indooroopilly and Fortitude Valley. There were more than thirty avenues of trees or shrubs planted by the guides on this day. Northgate Road was the only street to have Weeping Figs planted along it.

Once the stakes and guards had been put into place for each tree, it then became the responsibility of the Guides to look after the trees to ensure their longevity. Later in 1937, it was reported in the Courier Mail that many of the recently planted tree avenues had been destroyed by vandals, "the trees, designed to commemorate a great and historic occasion, had been destroyed by unthinking people".

The Northgate trees were not affected by this wanton destruction.

The avenue of Weeping Figs along Northgate Road are aesthetically significant to the Northgate area as the entrance road from Sandgate and Toombul roads into the residential area of the suburb. Historically, the trees represent the local Girl Guide troop's contribution to the state-wide tree-planting gesture commemorating the Coronation in 1937.

Description

The avenue of Weeping Figs (*Ficus benjamina*) is located along both sides of Northgate Road, from Sandgate Road through to Gympie Street, Northgate. Many of the trees are large and mature, with generous, shady canopies and are the original plantings. The avenue includes some less mature fig trees where original fig trees have been replaced with new plantings due to attrition. All Weeping Fig trees along the avenue are significant.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as an avenue of Weeping Figs planted along Northgate Road by the newly formed Northgate and Nundah Girl Guide troop as part of the 1937 Coronation celebrations at a time of residential growth in Northgate.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as the only avenue of Weeping Figs planted in Brisbane as part of the Girl Guide's tree-planting ceremony in 1937 to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as the avenue of mature Weeping Fig trees create a visual impact along Northgate Road, the entrance to residential Northgate.

References

1. Brisbane City Council Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Detail Plans
2. Brisbane City Council Surveyors Notebooks
3. Brisbane City Council, 1946 aerial photographs.
4. Queensland. Qimagery. 1936 aerial photos
5. Alexander, Kristine, "The Girl Guide Movement and Imperial Internationalism During the 1920s and 1930s", *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, Winter 2009, p37-63
6. Sunday Mail, Sunday 17 March, 1935, p21
7. Courier Mail, Friday 16 April 1937, p14

8. Brisbane City Council, *Annual Report 1936-37*, p6
 9. Courier Mail, Monday 19 April, 1937, p12
 10. Courier Mail, Monday 17 May, 1937, p4
 11. Courier Mail, Thursday 21 October 1937, p16
 12. Brisbane Courier, Tuesday 24 March 1931, p13
 13. Courier Mail, Tuesday 4 May 1937, p13
 14. Courier Mail, Friday 14 May 1937, p14
 15. Courier Mail, Saturday 15 May 1937, p10
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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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