SANDSTONE DREAMS

Luke Keogh

St. Lucia is not just the site of The University of Queensland; it is a carefully-created landscape. Beginning in the 1920s when the early proposals for the St. Lucia site began, and concluding in the 1950s when the sandstone buildings were being occupied, the essay traces the roots behind two dominant landscape features: the trees and the sandstone. How might a walk through the St. Lucia landscape locate collective impulses in Queensland’s history?

Walk

Walk out of the sandstone clad Social Sciences and Humanities library at The University of Queensland and towards the Michie building. Ignore the shelter of the Great Court and take the outside western path past the main ceremonial entrance to the university. It is a walk that I have taken hundreds of times. Today the sun is high and bright. The white of the page of the book I just borrowed and am now reading reflects back and white dots coat my eyelids. The words become too hard to read. Looking up, there is also another book open before my eyes. Landscape as text and history: a rich and beautiful book.¹ A story of St. Lucia told through the land.

Looking down through the length of the path there is the Biological Sciences library in the distance, on the right is the Art Museum and on the left is the Michie building. The Duhig building from where I came and the Michie building that is my destination were late additions to the university in the 1960s and 1970s—like book ends added to the Forgan Smith building.² Along the way the path is wedged between the bitumen of University Drive and the imposing sandstone of the Forgan Smith building. Up until the 1950s it was envisaged that University Drive would trail down past the running track and across a bridge that would link the university to West End and the city. And the freestone, commonly called sandstone, of the buildings that are now the dominant feature of the St. Lucia landscape were not always intended to be so. In the 1930s it was hoped St. Lucia would be a ‘museum of trees.’ Only last year this path was sidled by construction fences warning ‘keep out’ and landscape gardeners had redesigned the areas adjacent to the buildings. They added greener grass and planted frangipanis, not the least because the large conifers, that to some were displeasing features of the landscape, were dying in the drought.

¹. I am paraphrasing J. B. Jackson’s classic quote: ‘A rich and beautiful book is always open before us. We have only to learn to read it’ in J. B. Jackson, “The Need to be Versed in Country Things” Landscape 1 (1951): 1–5.

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Directly on my left is the Schonell Memorial Fountain. A copper sculpture standing about three meters at its highest with sideways-held petal-like features that blend with earthen stones at its base. There has been no water running in the fountain since the drought. Casting an eye much higher than the highest petal and looking to the top of the sandstone building, there are friezes on the buildings that depict important themes in Queensland’s history. Industry and agriculture dominate the depictions: timber, bananas, wool, cattle and sugar cane. Sugar also runs to the heart of the naming of the landscape itself: in the 1890s St. Lucia housed a sugar mill, the owners of the mill named the peninsula after the island of Saint Lucia in the West Indies, famous in the history of the sugar industry. The public artworks on the Forgan Smith building are also pages in the landscape. The friezes and the industry they depict bore down on me. They make me wonder whether the ways the land in Queensland has been used were also impelled in the construction of the landscape and buildings at St. Lucia.

The intention of public art at universities is often ‘permanency.’ Lisanne Gibson and Joanna Besley have observed that the works of art on the sandstone buildings at The University of Queensland are ‘the greatest extent of architectural sculpture in Queensland.’ Designed by Hennessy, Hennessy and Co., the buildings were to be ‘original in conception, monumental in design and embody the Australian spirit of art with English culture’ and to reflect ‘the social, economic and cultural progress that had been made in Queensland.’ The cultural geographer J. B. Jackson explains that the value of monuments or public art is not simply to remind us of origins but ‘are much more valuable as reminders of long-range collective purpose, of goals and objectives and principles’ as such they give a landscape ‘beauty and dignity and keeps the collective memory alive.’ Such a persistence of collective memory requires a turn to the history of the land at St. Lucia to see how it was created in response to themes in Queensland’s environmental history.

This essay is about the histories of St. Lucia held in the land and the physical fabric of place. It is an environmental history inspired by walking and explicating the strata of history that layers a landscape. In four historical episodes that follow, by focussing on the years between 1926 and 1956, I want to show that the agricultural and industrial impulses that were dominant ideas in Queensland, and are still displayed in the sandstone artwork, were also ideas at the foundation of the university and central in understanding the history of the land at the university campus. Following the four historical episodes, the walk will conclude by showing the influence of this history when you are wandering the St. Lucia landscape. Such a notion also challenges how we understand St. Lucia and its university as not just a ready-made place to come and learn, as J. J. C. Bradfield noted in 1936 before the first soil was turned: ‘St. Lucia will be no Pandora’s Box where students lift the lid and each takes what he or she wants to show that the agricultural and industrial impulses that were dominant ideas in Queensland, and are still displayed in the sandstone artwork, were also ideas at the foundation of the university and central in understanding the history of the land at the university campus. Following the four historical episodes, the walk will conclude by showing the influence of this history when you are wandering the St. Lucia landscape. Such a notion also challenges how we understand St. Lucia and its university as not just a ready-made place to come and learn, as J. J. C. Bradfield noted in 1936 before the first soil was turned: ‘St. Lucia will be no Pandora’s Box where students lift the lid and each takes what he or
A different way of seeing St. Lucia is through an animated landscape: a place also rooted to the geography, but one that engages the past and is material, fantastic and born from the politics of history. This is a land alive to the influence of history: how has it been imagined and materialised?

Figure 1: Co-Ordinator General’s Layout Plan of The University of Queensland site, 1950. Notice the ‘Front Drive’ on the map (Fryer Library Collection, MS UQFL458).

THE UNDESIRABLES

Since the university’s creation the University Buildings and Grounds Committee has been an important decision making body that defined how the site would be designed and developed. They decided what trees to plant, what building materials to use, how the public art at the university should be displayed. The products of their decisions can be seen when walking the paths of the St. Lucia today. But St. Lucia was not always the designated location for The University of Queensland’s main campus.

The year 1926 was defining in deciding where the new site of the University would be situated in Brisbane. With the anticipated expansion of the university from its George Street campus an area just behind the city at Victoria Park was set aside by the Brisbane City Council. On 29 July 1926 the Grounds Committee held a meeting to discuss the new site at Victoria Park. In the senate room the members of the committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the new site. The main advantage was the central location. Nestled just behind the Brisbane CBD, it was accessible by foot and was close to the

hospitals. J. Lockhart Gibson, the chairman of the Grounds Committee, was quite taken with Victoria Park particularly its vicinity to the hospitals. He described the potential of it to be a ‘lung’ to the city which would be used by hundreds of young people. Gibson said to the committee: ‘I firmly believe that to relinquish Victoria Park would be to abandon a site which taking all things into consideration is better for a University in Brisbane than the site of any University in Australia is for its city. To go to St. Lucia would limit the usefulness of the University for all time to the people of Queensland.’ Clearly Gibson preferred the Victoria Park site, but what is also noticeable is that the choice of a site for the university had to benefit ‘the people of Queensland.’

The overwhelming majority of senators, however, were in favour of the St. Lucia site. The committee listed the disadvantages of the Victoria Park site, including ‘the rugged nature of the ground’ which prohibited extension of buildings. They go on to note that the ground is ‘useless’ for agricultural purposes. R. M. Wilson, who was present at the meeting, firmed up this point by saying: ‘Victoria Park is not suitable for an agricultural school which in a State like Queensland should be one of the most important.’ And again ‘the people of Queensland’ sit behind the decision making—the location of the university needed to have the landscape features to provide the educational needs of the state, things like agriculture and mining. The committee also noted that Victoria Park ‘is inhabited by many undesirable characters and as the reserve is to remain open to the public it would be impossible because of the rugged nature of the ground, ever to keep them out.’ Would these ‘undesirables’ make their way to a riverside site at St. Lucia?

Following the minutes of the Grounds Committee meeting in July 1926 there are a number of pages attached that are marked ‘confidential.’ These pages show that after the meeting the Victoria Park site was all but abandoned and the St. Lucia site was favoured. The main problem was how to resume the land at St. Lucia.

In 1926, St. Lucia was divided into 976 land parcels which were owned by 284 individuals. With St. Lucia firmly the choice of the university the Brisbane City Council had to decide on how to resume the land and how to pay for it. In October 1926 James O’Neil Mayne of ‘Moorlands’ Toowong, went to see the Brisbane mayor W. A. Jolly. Mayne and his sister Emelia donated over £60,000 to resume the land at St. Lucia for the university. (It is important to note that Mayne donated the money to resume the site, he did not originally own land). The land was resumed by the Brisbane City Council and the cottages of the people that were living at St. Lucia were sold off to raise further money. The site was handed to the university on 19 June 1930.

**The Problem of Youth**

With a site at St. Lucia the university now had to raise funds for the building project. The availability of land close to Brisbane city and high levels of unemployment in the Great Depression led to a short, but distinct phase of land use at St. Lucia. In 1932 it was proposed that Queensland must actively engage in a ‘young man’s land movement.’ Unemployed young men from the city who had no ‘rural experience’...
would be trained for ‘life on the land’.19 With fertile river flats and a history of agriculture, St. Lucia provided an obvious choice.

The university and the Department of Agriculture made the necessary arrangements and by January 1933 the St. Lucia Farm School had accepted its first intake. Soon after this a reporter for the Queensland Agricultural Journal went to the farm school and noticed its importance in the developmental thinking that was spreading across Queensland at the time: ‘Looking around this country, we see extraordinarily valuable latent national assets calling loudly for development—illimitable coal measures, rivers calling for locking for water conservation, soils calling for scientific study of their potential productivity, and so on to the end of an impressive and very lengthy list.’20 The reporter goes on: ‘In the blood of every capable and enterprising Australian youngster is a spirit of progress that should not be thwarted by any mistake in national policy.’21 The farm school was a country image located on the urban fringe, and it was also an image that suggested harnessing natural wealth would overcome severe economic problems.

St. Lucia has undulating land with fertile sandy loam soil and some heavy alluvial patches which made it suitable for both dairying and cropping. When a J. F. F. Reid surveyed the farm for the Queensland Agricultural Journal in 1934, there were English potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, cabbage and arrowroot growing. Irrigation systems were used to harvest water from the creeks and lake. Queensland nuts were planted and it was thought that ‘within a few years these beautiful and striking native trees should form a striking feature of the St. Lucia landscape.’22 Young men between fourteen and twenty-one were allowed to attend the farm school. The pictures that accompany Reid’s article show farm houses, fence posts being driven in to divide up the land, and horses dragging ploughs with young men behind them.

Years later, in 1975, the farm school at St. Lucia was the key image for John Francis, Professor of History, to argue for a ‘St. Lucia rural tradition.’ Francis describes how the old wooden buildings from the farm school were used as the main refectory for students into the late 1950s.23 He also argues that ‘the rural tradition’ permeated into the plans for the university buildings:

> When the University buildings at St. Lucia were being planned there was a hope that the campus would give some feeling of the great distances and spaciousness of Queensland and there are those who think this has been grandly achieved with the Great Court: others feel that its proportions are wrong and it is rather like a ‘fence round a paddock’… if indeed it is like a ‘fence round a paddock’ nothing could be more appropriate because the state of Queensland was largely created by putting fences round paddocks.24

The farm school offers a different way of seeing the land at St. Lucia. More intense agriculture was envisaged as an important way to pull through the Depression of the 1930s. Farming and timber cutting were also important ways that young men could engage in rural pursuits. As the farm school was training youth in ways of the land, St. Lucia was also being carved out in the minds of academics.

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21. Ibid.
23. J. Francis, “The St. Lucia Rural Tradition and the Development of Moggill Farm,” lecture delivered in 1975, Fryer Library (MS F1887). Bradfield also makes this point on the back of one of the photographs he took of St. Lucia before the building began.
Frederick Walter Robinson, Professor of English and a member of the Grounds Committee, delivered a lecture to the staff on the new site at St. Lucia in 1933.25 No ground had yet been turned at St. Lucia. To Robinson, two things of ‘enduring value and beauty’ were possible at St. Lucia. First, it could become ‘a living museum’ of the trees and plants of Queensland, indeed of Australia. Second, with wise planting of trees, shrubs and vines, ‘St. Lucia can provide Brisbane with a thing of beauty for every month of the year.’ This ‘museum of trees’ was a significant point that was discussed at length after Robinson’s lecture.

Robinson was obsessed with trees. With the notes of the 1933 lecture he compiled a three page list of trees and their appropriate dates for planting. He was not just interested in planting trees, but also the trees that were already at St. Lucia. He demanded that an ‘effective tree policy’ be enacted before building on the site. He tells the staff:

The first essential in an effective tree policy is not a single Australian tree at present standing on St. Lucia should be cut down! To the common cant that it is ‘necessary’ to cut down trees, the appropriate reply is that homicide is also a necessary activity at times, and may even be a fine art; nevertheless the law interferes very promptly if one puts the art into practice. Cutting down Australian trees is one of the commonest unrealised Australian crimes; at St. Lucia it should only be allowed after special application (in triplicate) and grave inquiry by the ‘St. Lucia Lay-out and Building Advisory Board’ which has yet to be established.26

25. F. W. Robinson, “A New University at St. Lucia,” paper read before ‘shop talk’ association of members of staff of the University of Queensland, 13 Oct. 1933, UQ History Collection (UQFL458.12.11, 6).
To propose an 'effective tree policy' there must have been a substantial number of trees at St. Lucia in the first place. Indeed, from reading Robinson’s lecture, trees were the dominant feature of the landscape as he observed it in 1933. But the trees were in fact an inspired part of Robinson’s imagination. As a companion to his lecture, he compiled a hand drawn map of what St. Lucia might look like. The buildings would be positioned at the highest points and trees would dominate. In amongst these trees there would be a 'philosopher’s way,' a pathway that would trail through the campus—an inspirational and transformative experience for the black-gowned scholars.

John Job Crew Bradfield, who oversaw the construction of both the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Story Bridge, was also a member of the Grounds Committee. In June 1936 he delivered a lecture on the new site at St. Lucia, which he envisaged should become aesthetically beautiful.27 There was an ‘open glade’ and a lagoon that could be made into an ornamental lake. Carmody Creek had been cleared of trees by past owners but could be planted out to become ‘another picturesque feature.’ And there was a ‘glen,’ which would need some native trees and fern-grown rocks, but would also ‘form a sylvan beauty spot, offsetting, while connecting, the University buildings with the ornamental lake and river flats below.’ And the River Drive was envisaged by Bradfield as ‘one of the most attractive drives in Brisbane.’ The trees remained an important feature. Bradfield says: ‘In any country the creative power of nature herself is the model to be imitated, and what more beautiful than Queensland’s trees. Architecture must create the beauty it produces and surely our trees have a local and characteristic beauty which can be symbolised in the architecture of the University.’ The grand trees would provide the inspiration for the buildings to be modelled on; a landscape created in response to the power of nature. And yet, looking at the pictures of the small model that accompanied Bradfield’s lecture, the new university looks similar to an English country estate.28 For Bradfield the university would contribute to the mighty ‘wealth’ of Queensland. He concludes the lecture by noting that Queensland has been endowed with a natural wealth and now the construction of a grand site for its university would help Queensland contribute to the world’s ‘general store of knowledge.’

In the mid 1930s, when Bradfield was preparing for his lecture, he walked the land at St. Lucia and took photographs.29 The photos show a farm on the edge of the river. The land appears to have been heavily worked for agriculture: from the sugar mill to the St. Lucia farm school. The riparian zones of both the Brisbane River and Carmody Creek have been heavily cleared. What is most compelling in these photos is that nearly all the 240 acres of the site, apart from a small remnant forest in the south-west corner, were destitute of trees. There were cow paddocks and fences but rarely a tree. In the lectures by both Robinson and Bradfield ‘nature’ and the beauty of the St. Lucia site would ensure that The University of Queensland would be able to contribute a world’s store of knowledge. Furthermore, both Robinson and Bradfield were quite clear that the land, despite its agricultural past, could be carved back into something that was beautiful and picturesque, a productive setting for knowledge to flourish.

SEEING SANDSTONE

From the earliest proposals for the site at St. Lucia it was designed to be linked to Brisbane city by the quickest route, which was a bridge from St. Lucia to West End and link in with the Victoria Bridge. Even though it was maintained in the plans up until 1953 the bridge linking St. Lucia to West End was never built.30

27. Bradfield, “University of St. Lucia Lay-out.”
28. See also the picture of the ‘pre-Hennesy concept’ for St. Lucia, in Thomis, A Place of Light and Learning, 163.
29. Bradfield, “Photos of the site of the University of Queensland before development.”
30. Looking over the early maps of St. Lucia many of them include this proposed bridge, and what can be observed is that the bridge is literally orientated towards the city. In one map from 1950 there was a parcel of land set aside adjacent to the bridge thoroughfare on University Drive, approximately where the athletics track is today, which was labelled: ‘Area made available by Brisbane City Council to Queensland Government for military training of university students.’ The maps are available in
The proposed bridge also determined the direction that the first buildings faced. In 1936, before building commenced, the Commonwealth Meteorologist took the wind directions at St. Lucia. In the winter months the wind came from the south and south-west. But for most of the year, the warmer nine months, the wind came from the north-east, the east and the south-east. In Brisbane, the classic orientation for homes and buildings was to face the cool north-east breeze. But if the buildings at St. Lucia were to face north-east they would look away from the city and towards the river cliffs and Dutton Park. As Bradfield noted in his 1936 lecture, ‘because of the bearing of the sun and the placement of the bridge at Boundary Street, the committee decides to place the university buildings on an axis bearing 28°35’ west of magnetic north and this axis coincides with the centre line of the bridge.’

The foundation stone of what is now the Forgan Smith building was laid on 6 March 1937. Construction commenced soon after this but was suspended during the war. Between August 1942 and December 1944 the main building was used as an Australian Army headquarters. In the late 1940s the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (later CSIRO) were allowed a laboratory and testing station for agricultural and pastoral research at St. Lucia, and they occupied about half of the main building.

By the 1940s the huge sandstone buildings were standing tall at St. Lucia. Only Queensland materials were used in the construction of the buildings (with the notable exception of the steel work because Queensland had no steelworks): the sandstone was obtained from Helidon, about 60 miles west of Brisbane; the marble in the Library came from Ulam, near Rockhampton; and the woodwork in the buildings came from Queensland hardwoods and silky oaks. An image taken in the late 1940s shows the path along the main entrance to the University as an open clearing of dirt abutting the sandstone buildings. In April 1949, a ‘small area’ of forest near Upland Drive was recommended to be preserved in perpetuity as ‘a measure of utility, beauty and distinction in an Australian University.’

The landscaping plans that Robinson and Bradfield had envisaged were now limited to trees that would complement the sandstone buildings. Between the western path and the Forgan Smith building there are four ‘compartments’ that run along the front of the main university building. In 1949 the Grounds Committee made a design for these areas. The plan was for one jacaranda tree planted in the centre with two silky oaks to be planted on either side: ‘This would produce the effect in October of a blue altar centre flanked by two golden candles,’ with the huge sandstone building imposing in the background. No longer were the trees the inspirational centrepiece of the campus, but merely set the scene for the huge sandstone buildings that had now risen out of the ground to dominate the landscape.

Buildings were rapidly littering the St. Lucia landscape. In June 1950 the University Suggestions Committee recommended that precautions needed to be taken in developing the St. Lucia site too rapidly: ‘That every care be taken to prevent destruction of the distinctive landscape of St. Lucia by an overburdening of the site with buildings or by any other means.’ The 1930s vision of a productive university on an aesthetically-pleasing landscape succumbed to the pressure of growing enrolments and diversification in Queensland’s only university.
In the early 1950s, a student reporting for the architectural magazine *Aspect* walked around the developing St. Lucia, and they did not like what they saw. The university buildings were not only unnecessarily expensive but ‘pretentious.’ Environmental factors had been completely ignored by the architects, including the cool north-east breeze. The design was said to be ‘awkward’: the presence of the sun and wind were ignored, façades were the same no matter what direction they faced, and inside the buildings ‘the long hospital like corridors don’t seem capable of comfortably accommodating the throngs of students who will, one day, be all on the move every hour, to and from lecture rooms.’ The most critical comments were reserved for the general feel that the buildings created in the land:

The whole design is socially repressive. It is reminiscent of the huge Pentagon block in Washington, the huge Palace of the Soviets in Moscow, or a Mussolini stadium. It is inhuman, out of scale with human figure. It belies the climate, it belies the structure, it belies its purpose. It is designed to impress people, in a pompous manner, with the importance of the University, the Architecture and the Government. It is popularly known among the students as ‘the Mausoleum.’

The article concludes by contrasting the ‘grand’ designs in Queensland with the more subtle buildings at the newly built Australian National University in Canberra and even the Graduate Centre at Harvard. No matter how ‘pompous’ and arrogant the buildings appeared to be for students, the Grounds Committee pushed on in its vision for a ‘Queensland University.’ With construction of the Forgan Smith building and courtyard buildings completed, the committee began decorating the sandstone buildings with depictions of history and nature.

In 1955 and 1956 Frederick Robinson sat down and compiled an extensive history of the university site at St. Lucia. Although a Professor of English, working with the Grounds Committee had given him a profound knowledge of the history of the land at St. Lucia. A lot had changed since he imagined not a single tree would be removed. By 1956 he had begun to notice that it was not the trees but the sandstone at St. Lucia that ‘gives the prevailing character to the whole university fabric.’ This comment still seems to ring through the landscapes, from student perceptions to marketing images on the university’s website.

In the 1950s, just as The University of Queensland was getting settled at the St. Lucia site, a bishop from overseas also took the walk along the front of the main University building. He asked Robinson, ‘Wherever did you get that remarkable stone?’ Robinson replied: ‘Oh! Just up the railway line, west of Brisbane.’ The sandstone symbolises a commodity that was taken from the ground well away from St. Lucia. Helidon sandstone was used on City Hall, on St. John’s Anglican Cathedral, and on government buildings in Brisbane, but the St. Lucia sandstone is distinct, as Robinson describes:

At St. Lucia stones of all shades of colour are found with every variety of grain, figure and pattern, dispersed not in uniform courses of one type, but in ‘most admired disorder.’ Stones that are mottled or even-grained; brown, tawny and rusty; violet, mauve, purple, pink; white and cream; patterns of clouds, piled or driven; landscapes, seascapes, sand shores; the ring-structure of trees, ovals and curves, flames billowing or rising in tongues—all reveal themselves with pleasure to the eye and the imagination. Some observers find the general effect patchy; in part it is, and more so at certain times of day or at intermediate distances; standing closer one can isolate and enjoy the individual stone and its pattern, particularly when it is wet with rain.

There is something deeply elemental in Robinson’s description that sends us spilling beyond St. Lucia to landscapes and seascapes hidden within the sandstone itself. A sandstone dream: sediments of stories and rocks from the land.

42. Ibid.
43. F. W. Robinson, “The University at St. Lucia and Other Centres,” c. 1956, UQ History Collection (UQFL458.13.1, 24).
44. Ibid., 24.
45. Ibid., 24–5. Interestingly, almost forty years later Brian Pascoe makes the same point about how attractive the sandstone is, especially when it is wet: Pascoe, ed., *A Guide to the Great Court*, 4.
Day Dreams

What does all this history mean when you are hurrying past the Forgan Smith building from the library to another building on campus? Walking along the path in front of the main university entrance, I once again look up to the depictions of timber, bananas, wool, cattle and sugar cane. I arrive at the main university entrance, outside the Forgan Smith building, where the two most important sandstone artworks were placed.

Looking toward the building, the panels depict telling conflations of Australian history. The panel on the left combines Captain Cook’s August 1770 landing on Possession Island, off Cape York when he ‘takes possession of the east coast of Australia,’ with John Oxley establishing the ‘first’ Queensland settlement at Redcliffe in 1824, and finally the first discovery of coal at Ipswich by Captain Patrick Logan in 1827. Logan’s was not, however, the first discovery of coal in Queensland—it another layer to the landscape. The panel on the right depicts another conflation of historical moments: Patrick Leslie taking pastoral settlement on the Darling Downs in 1840; the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt leaving Jimbour station in 1844 on his way to Port Essington; and the Canoona gold rush near Rockhampton in 1858. Discovery, agriculture and industry dominate these artistic projections and now I begin to understand how these visions played out in the carving out of the university site.

46. These are described in: Robinson, “The University at St. Lucia and Other Centres,” 34.
47. In the most extensive survey of coal in Queensland, the late Ray Whitmore notes that Logan did not discover coal in Queensland; Coal in Queensland: The First Fifty Years (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1981). Lockyer’s find of coal came much earlier; he comments in his journal reproduced in the Sydney Gazette of 20 October 1825 that ‘A vein of coal is also to be seen about forty miles above the settlement.’ Logan did not arrive in Queensland until 1826, and in what remains of Logan’s journal in the Sydney Gazette of 17 August 1827 he remarks, ‘in the bed of the river I found several specimens of coal and crystal.’
As I continue walking, there are also animals and plants and depictions of ‘nature.’ Robinson specifically described these as ‘Australian Flora and Fauna’ which added to the ‘atmosphere and pleasure to the building fabric.’\(^{48}\) He goes on to say: ‘Some motifs are repeated, but with pleasing variety of arrangement or expression, e.g. the poinsettia, cockatoo, flying-fox, Aboriginal. There is no need to attempt a complete catalogue of subjects—the game is to seek, at any odd moment to identify a few more Australian things which the average Australian does not recognise.’\(^{49}\) To modern eyes, it might seem outrageous that the ‘Aboriginal’ was not only catalogued as part of ‘flora and fauna’ but also as a little-recognised ‘Australian thing.’\(^{49}\) What the motifs leave in the landscape is a reminder of how easily we can lack humanity when we make grand constructions.

Today, although sandstone buildings dominate the landscape, from the city side the St. Lucia campus has hundreds more trees than it did in the 1930s. Recycled water is used to irrigate lush vegetation on what was once flood plain, and the carefully designed ‘lakes’ encourage birdlife. To be able to read a landscape one must walk in it. Walter Benjamin walked the country road in \textit{One Way Street}: ‘The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airplane … The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain.’\(^{50}\) The institutional feeling of universities often leaves us flying high above the landscape on the way to the destination of our research. This place tolls with a thud of the foot landing on the pavement; this landscape holds stories that tell of past impulses across Queensland.

When walking the paths at St. Lucia now I think of the imagination and desire in the layers of the land: of the trees that inspired visions of a ‘philosopher’s way,’ and of the commodities that came from all over Queensland to construct the buildings that now dominate the landscape, not least the sandstone from Helidon. And how this place at St. Lucia bears a materiality: it was a site productive for agriculture and was then created in the minds of men when they chose the site to benefit ‘the people of Queensland.’ Indeed, after the site was set aside for the university it was initially worked over to give young Queenslanders agricultural training, not to mention the ‘fence round a paddock’ that the Great Court was claimed to be. These show how the materiality of landscapes are influenced by historical change—for St. Lucia and the site of the university defining themes in Queensland had an impact on the way the land was constructed. In this way, the histories held in the land are critical to how we understand the landscapes we are walking through today. As I walk south-west on my way to the Michie building I can feel the cool north-east breeze blowing at my back, and I think how walking this landscape has also helped my education in Queensland history.\(^{51}\)

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48. Robinson, “The University at St. Lucia and Other Centres.” 36.
49. This point is also confirmed on the inside of the Forgan Smith building, when it was decided that the mural of the Molonga ceremony, that appears over one of the stairwells was not replicated further down the building over another stairwell in the Law Faculty because, as the Grounds Committee stated, ‘a motif more specifically associated with the work of the Faculties of Arts and Law, e.g. a procession of great figures, as of literature, statesmanship, philosophy, and law, carried out in bright colours, be considered.’ J. D. Cramb, “Letter to the Secretary Department of Coordinator General of Public Works, 9 Sept. 1952,” UQ History Collection (UQFL458.12.9); F. W. Robinson, “Letter to Officer in charge of Administration, UQ, St. Lucia, 10 Jul. 1953,” UQ History Collection (UQFL458.12.9). Today the space above the stairway in the Law Faculty remains a blank canvas.
51. Thanks to Peter Spearritt for comments on a draft of this essay.