The work of the Territory’s first horticulturist John Richardson has been commemorated by a tree-planting ceremony at the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens today.

Representing Parks and Wildlife Minister Kon Vatskalis who is in Central Australia, Deputy Chief Minister Syd Stirling planted a kauri pine tree at the Gardens in the presence of Mr Richardson’s descendants to recognise the hard work and dedication of Mr Richardson in the early 1800s.

Mr Stirling said Mr Richardson was a convict exiled to Australia in 1817 who, after a period working on government gardens in Sydney, was transferred to Fort Dundas on Melville Island with plants and herbs to take charge of gardens at the settlement.

"During his time on Melville Island, he created 15 botanical collections that made an enormous contribution to the early historical and botanical knowledge of the Territory," Mr Stirling said.

"These early attempts at horticulture were important building blocks for the Territory. Life was harsh, equipment was basic; and yet the record-keeping of these early pioneers was remarkable.

"Indeed, the Territory’s horticultural history shows the innovative and diverse thinking of pioneers like Mr Richardson.

"For example, I understand an amazing variety of plants and crops were experimented with at the George Brown Botanic Gardens, including tobacco, cotton and even pineapples.

"As can be all too easily seen today, there has been significant growth in the Territory’s horticultural industry, especially in the last 20 years, and this success is a reflection of the efforts of people like Mr Richardson."

Mr Stirling said Mr Richardson’s descendants recently approached the Parks and Wildlife Commission to suggest a memorial for his contributions to the Territory.