



Bishopscourt garden contains many plants listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

# History being remade

BISHOPSCOURT IS ONE OF MELBOURNE'S MOST SIGNIFICANT GARDENS, WRITES SANDRA PULLMAN.

There is a fantastic hidden treasure opposite the Fitzroy Gardens in Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, called Bishopscourt. This wonderful old garden behind the paling fence hasn't been seen by the public for years, not since the last garden parties of the late 1960s.

Bishop Perry, the first Bishop of Melbourne, selected the site in 1848 and, since 1853, it has been the home of the Anglican Archbishop. At that time, the site had views of the Yarra River to the south and the Dandenong Ranges to the east.

To help raise funds for the restoration of the garden, Bishopscourt is participating in this year's Open Garden Scheme. It is not to be missed.

In 1998, the garden was under threat of subdivision. The Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) objected to Heritage Victoria and the appeal was upheld. The AGHS came forward with a generous offer to develop a work program and help maintain the garden. Over the past year, the members of the AGHS have worked tirelessly, with amazing results.

A history of the garden, written by Wendy Dwyer, says it is one of the oldest surviving properties in East Melbourne and the last remaining intact urban estate within the city boundaries. The one-hectare site has hardly been altered and many original plants remain. Heritage Victoria has listed the house and garden. The National Trust has listed the original rub-

bled bluestone building and garden while the Australian Heritage Commission lists both the bluestone and the 1903 Federation Queen Anne Domestic-style, red-brick addition, but not the garden.

One of the first descriptions of the garden was in 1853, by Reverend George Goodman, who mentioned the lawn was one like he had seen in Birmingham, that there was a kitchen garden with potatoes growing, and the entrance to the property was through a gate of the "rudest majestic proportions", while a very respectable mulberry tree was a part of the shrubbery.

In 1854, the architect Charles Dwyer was employed to design the gardens, but it seems he was involved only in the hard landscaping. According to a Heritage Victoria Statement of Significance, architects Blackburn and Newson, who initially worked on the design of the house, determined the siting of the house and garden. The house is asymmetrical and positioned in the eastern corner of the block, allowing for a gracious driveway and sweeping views. Unfortunately, what is missing today is the grand old Corroboree Tree (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), which was thought to be more than 500 years old. It died and was removed in the late 1990s. This year, a redgum has been planted in its place.

Dwyer states that in the 1850s the picturesque garden style was popular in England — the creation of idealistic gardens, like

pictures. This was beginning to be replaced by the gardenesque concept, the aim of which was to show off the individual beauty of the plants and the creative ability of the gardener. Gardens were becoming more informal and natural. By the end of the 19th century, Bishopscourt reflected the gardenesque style and you can still see this today.

There is some mystery as to whether William Guilfoyle, curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens from 1873 to 1909, did some design work at Bishopscourt. In his annual report of 1875, he mentions that he removed 1093 plants and planted them in the Royal Botanic Gardens. It is unlikely he worked for Bishopscourt as he had just started his new position as director and was a Roman Catholic to boot.

Part of the garden's charm is the sweeping buffalo lawn that greets you as you enter the front gates. This gives a feeling of spaciousness and cleverly continues the grand dimensions of the Fitzroy Gardens. In the western bed, running along Clarendon Street, is a rare Italian yellow jasmine (*Jasminum humile*) and a beautiful remnant redgum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). Nearby, an island bed contains a large English elm (*Ulmus procera*) and, just recently, the headstone of Dear Old Tim, Bishop James Moorehouse's faithful old dog, was found here. He was buried under what was apparently his favourite spot, the old Corroboree Tree.

The shrubbery is being renovated and volunteers have discovered the clay-pipe gutting, removed a mountain of weeds and had the fun of replanting the

shrubbery with species that would have been popular in the 19th century such as sweet osmanthus (*Osmanthus fragrans*) and Indian hawthorn (*Raphiolepis indica*).

The path here leads into the orchard and vegetable garden. Plants are afoot to reinstate this productive garden, but now it contains only a few fruit trees. If you turn left, when the path ends, there is a lovely vista though the impressive new pergola built from a Heritage Victoria grant. At the end of the pergola is the sundial and, because the path system was disrupted when the driveway was widened, it looks a bit odd, but look further ahead and you get a grand view of the house.

Bishopscourt is of considerable social significance as it hosted many garden parties, fetes, official functions and carnivals over the past 149 years. It is also scientifically important because it contains many mature plants listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. Look out for the peppercorn tree (*Schinus molle*), the Port Jackson fig (*Ficus rubiginosa*) and the English elm (*Ulmus procera*).

To the south of the house is the original formal garden containing a fantastic Japanese cherry with the most beautiful silver bark. The space is enclosed by a hedge of Escallonia rubra. The rose garden there has orange English marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*) popping up all over the place. You can also ponder why the quirky old garden shed is in this particular spot.

Bishopscourt, 120 Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, is open 10am to 4.30pm, today and tomorrow, \$4.50.