

Cooks' Cottage marks 70 years as a Melbourne favourite



Cooks' Cottage just before it was dismantled and moved to Melbourne in 1934.

The historical significance of the two-storey brick house may outweigh its Cook connection, reports **Sasha Shtargot.**

Hidden among the majestic trees of Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens, a humble but much-visited Yorkshire cottage will be a centre of attention in 2004.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of Cooks' Cottage, the home of Captain James Cook's parents, being shipped from England and rebuilt in Melbourne.

The two-storey brick house and its adjoining stable, built in 1755, was taken apart piece by piece and greeted with much fanfare and controversy when brought to Australia and publicly opened on October 15, 1934.

It was bought by prominent Melbourne businessman Russell Grimwade for £800 for Victoria's centenary celebrations after being advertised for sale in the village of Great Ayton, Yorkshire.

Packed in 253 cases and 40 barrels on the liner Port Dunedin, the cottage left England in February 1934 and arrived two months later to a storm of controversy sparked by its proposed location.

Grimwade and Victorian

Premier Sir Stanley Argyle wanted to set up Cooks' Cottage in front of the State Library, then also housing the National Gallery and State Museum.

"The cottage might look very romantic in Yorkshire, but a whole pile of rubbish cluttering up the lawn would be anything but sentimental," said then National Gallery trustee John Shirlow.

Its location in the Fitzroy Gardens was eventually agreed after a number of suggestions, including the Botanic Gardens and St Kilda foreshore.

Despite initial claims of a close link to Captain Cook himself, it is not certain whether the pioneer navigator ever stayed in the cottage.

Architecture historian Miles Lewis believes the house was also rebuilt a number of times over the years and there are few original features left.

The stone inscription "JCG 1755" for Captain Cook's parents James and Grace above the main doorway is perhaps all that links it with its original occupants.

"What's most interesting



A recent photograph of Cooks' Cottage, in Fitzroy Gardens, which attracts up to 200,000 visitors a year.

PICTURE: JAMES BODDINGTON

about the cottage is what it reveals of the attitudes to preservation in the 1930s, rather than what it is as an actual artefact," Professor Lewis said.

"It was moved with such care and in a way that was pretty revolutionary for those times."

Professor Lewis said the links between Captain Cook and Victoria were "slightly tenuous" because he never set foot in what

is now the state. "The building's importance is in its representation of a Yorkshire cottage and what it shows of the nationalism of the 1930s."

Cooks' Cottage programs coordinator Joan O'Grady said the house, with its small rooms and re-created period furniture, continued to attract up to 200,000 visitors a year.

"I don't think there's any-

thing authentic like this in Melbourne that represents life in the 18th century, especially so close to the city," she said.

Ms O'Grady points out that although Cook never landed in Victoria, his first sight of Australia during his historic Endeavour voyage in 1770 was Point Hicks in Gippsland.

National Trust conservation manager Jim Gardner said the

cottage was one of Victoria's historical treasures.

"It has strong iconographic value for what it speaks about Australia's and Victoria's links to its colonial British past as much as for its relationship to Captain Cook," he said. "After 70 years, it's still an important place for both locals and tourists to visit and gain a sense of the history out of which Victoria came."