Figure 22  Reed and Barnes 1879 garden design completed for the first Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-1881.  
The southern section of the Carlton Gardens was in the course of being laid out by William Sangster contracted to execute Reed’s design. As the ground sloped markedly from east to west, a large terrace was constructed in front of the Exhibition Building to provide a platform for the promenade and flower beds, although the present form suggests that this was incompletely executed.

Source: Reproduced from Civilising the City: A History Of Melbourne’s Public Gardens.

The sixty acres of the gardens were divided into three: the central twenty acres the Commissioners had chosen for the building; the twenty acres required for machinery annexes fronting Carlton Street; and the twenty acres fronting Victoria Street for ornamental grounds. The focus of the gardens, for the time of the exhibition, became a setting for the grand, Baroque inspired building and outdoor exhibits, rather than as a reserve for public recreation.

The provision of ornamental flowering beds (parterres) to the southern façade of the Exhibition Building was an integral feature of the Reed and Barnes plan for the Carlton Gardens. The perspective drawing (Figure 22) of the proposed works differs from what was actually constructed. A raised terrace along the front of the exhibition building was to deal with the lateral slope across the façade, and this was constructed. The beds shown at the same level as the terrace on the perspective drawing were never implemented in this configuration.

The Gardens were viewed to best advantage from the viewing area (promenade deck) on the outside of the dome. The scheme was one of sunken rectangles and triangles delineated by patterns of brightly coloured flowering and foliage plants. This was a typical Gardenesque extravaganza, perfect as the landscape adjunct to the Exhibition Building. The plantings consisted of typical late nineteenth century schemes with sub-tropical red foliage of Iresine lindenii, the blue of lobelias and scarlet of geraniums. A Maltese cross of alma geranium, blue and scarlet verbenas, golden feathers and iresine formed a major feature. Shrubs were
planted around the Hochgürtel Fountain (see below) and include *Cantua buxifolia*, *deutzias*, coral tree, tecomas and *Hibiscus splendens*.

The scheme was not symmetrical, the geometric planting patterns extended north and south of the east-west path to the west (but only to the north of the path) and to the east, because of the presence of the ornamental lake.

In addition to these beds, extensive fenced shrubberies were established throughout the South Garden as part of the works for the 1880 International Exhibition. Historic images (including those in Appendix F) provide evidence of the plantings with a heavy emphasis on foliage texture, which is consistent with the style implemented by Sangster. These displays were located primarily at path junctions. Floral beds were also established on either side of the main plane tree avenue.

Whilst avenue plantings were to dominate the development of the North Garden in the 1890s, some garden beds were established in the vicinity of the Curator's Lodge. Like those in the South Garden, they were also enclosed by iron railing or picket fences. The whole grounds were also bordered by a substantial iron fence in this period.

Moves in the latter half of the twentieth century to open up the gardens, particularly for surveillance purposes, led to the removal of most of the garden beds throughout the site, with the exception of those in the vicinity of the Curator's Lodge surrounded by iron fencing. The floral display beds on the south façade of the Exhibition Building were developed as garden beds, presumably to reduce maintenance costs, and to adapt to new machinery, the configuration today varies from that visible from the late nineteenth century.

The scroll beds below the Exhibition Building terrace were reconfigured in 1972 into a series of diagonal beds. This appears to have been a restoration of an earlier scheme visible on aerial photographs from the 1920s. The garden bed to the south of this area (the chain walk) is also visible on these photographs, and was most likely added in the early twentieth century.

The ornamental flowering beds (four *parterres*) that remain in the South Garden echo the original design by Reed and Barnes. Beds to the north of the east-west path have been replaced by lawns and mixed shrub borders with only some of the floral and foliage diversity reflecting the late nineteenth century layout.

2.6.3 The South Garden

Reed and Barnes' plan was based on a *patte d’oie* (‘goose’s foot’) radial configuration, designed with three avenues radiating from the main south entrance of the Exhibition Building leading to Victoria Street on the gardens’ southern boundary; and via a 'necking structure', to the Spring Street axis, through the city and thence to Treasury and Parliament House. At the apex of the *patte d’oie* sat a new massive central fountain. The original Dolphin Fountain was demolished to make way for the construction of the Royal Exhibition Building in 1879-80 (refer Appendix F). The broad processional avenue extending to the front of the Exhibition was essentially two paths separated by a central sward of lawn— an interpretation of the *Tapis Vert* (green carpet) at Versailles. A second promenade was created along the terrace in front of the building, and incorporated large, formal *parterres*. Large circular forecourts were created on the east and west sides of the main building. The forecourt to the east featured French bronzes, busts and statuary, with a central fountain in
the principle garden bed. The layout on the west side of the building was similar, but with a kiosk in the place of the fountain.

In June 1879, a competition was held for the design and erection of a large fountain to be placed in front of the building’s grand southern entrance. The Exhibition Fountain competition was won by Josef Hochgürtel, a German artist who claimed training with the designer of the Cologne Cathedral and who had recently arrived in Melbourne. Hochgürtel was associated with August Saupe, who claimed credit for similar works at Berlin, Dresden and Copenhagen.

Its structure incorporates a series of basins (Appendix F includes images of the fountain). The lowest was supported by three figures expressed as powerful Tritons (mythological figures, represented as mermen, possessing the upper body of a human and the tail of a fish), whose strong scaly fins curled beneath them forming the stylised curves of the fountain’s pedestal. The fountain’s sculptural imagery was intended to represent trade between nations; carried through via the linked figures of four boys encircling the second tier, representing commerce, industry, science and art. Ships and cargo, as well as birds and flowers native to Victoria, embellished the structure. Although criticised in the Melbourne and Sydney press, both in its craftsmanship and symbolism, others, such as the Ovens and Murray Advertiser were more impressed. The paper wrote that ‘no work of nature appeals more to the senses than that of splashing falling water’. Similarly, the Australasian Sketcher boasted that the fountain ‘ought to throw water to an elevation of 70ft’.

The following description, quoted by Dunstan in Victorian Icon, offers a complete explanation of the physical form of the fountain:

The base consists of an irregularly shaped mass of rock fountain with three colossal figures, half-human and half-fish, two male, one female, would support the first ledge or basin. In the bays framed by their tails would be three boys – one deeply intent on fishing, another stooping down to dip up some water in a shell, with a third startled by the appearance of a turtle crawling out of the water towards him. Above the first basin four boys would dance hand in hand around the central column, contained in the form of a hemisphere. These represented commerce, industry science and art, with ‘symbolic devices’- of the emerging industrial and scientific age- overhead. The second basin would support a boy bearing on his head a basket of four fishes, ‘from the mouths of which streams will flow’, and from the basket itself ‘strong stream will rise’. In addition to all these, twelve crocodiles would be shown crawling upwards from the water below, invading the first basin. The upper basin would be imperceptively filled with water, which would fall downwards in sheets, and in addition to the crocodiles it was planned that some twenty heads of marine animals would spout water.

Despite the grandeur of the fountain, and the planting undertaken, by the time the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition opened, the site generally still suffered from a lack of mature vegetation. The lush, subtropical plantings around the southern lakes were contrasted with the lack of plantings at the French (east) and German (west) forecourts, where the garden beds in the former were ‘simply sown with grass’.

The integrated design for the building and the landscape produced a powerful effect for the duration of the Exhibition. However, the Carlton Gardens was also intended to operate as a public park after the Exhibition. This was reflected in the serpentine pathway system which
linked the perimeter of the whole site with the more open northern gardens, the east and west treed flanks, the circular features at the East and West Forecourts, the ornamental south promenade and the formal gardens to the south. Shrub beds and floral plantings added to the public pleasure-garden flavour of the site; and the formality of the avenues and the clumped plantings of ornamental trees set in lawns all contributed to an overall effect of rich and complex plantings in a powerfully structured framework of paths and avenues.

2.6.4 The North Garden

The original 1880 landscape plan had provided for shrub borders and grassed areas with specimen trees on the eastern and western flanks of the permanent annexes. A broadly symmetrical serpentine path connected the circles in the main entrances to the West and East Forecourts, with the gardens to the north.

2.7 Opening of the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition

The original contract had stipulated that the building must be completed by May 1880, to allow ample time for the exhibitors to install their displays. The deadline was more or less achieved; the building was indeed made accessible to the exhibitors by that time, and the Great Hall was also thrown open for a grand public inspection. However, a considerable amount of work remained unfinished, although mostly of a relatively minor nature. Finishing touches, such as the completion of the decorative scheme and the erection of the fountain, would continue in the last few months leading up to the official opening of the exhibition.

On 1 July 1880 the Exhibition Building was declared open for the reception of exhibitors who poured in. A bustling scene unfolded as setting up began in earnest both day and night. To facilitate operations, a massive timber framework had been erected at the goods entrances in Nicholson and Rathdowne Streets, on which travelling winches lifted the cases from the carts and placed them on trolley carts running on tramways which traversed all parts of the interior of the annexes. The largest articles were thus easily and expeditiously deposited on the sites where they were to be displayed, and the various courts soon began to assume an orderly appearance.

Finally, after an expenditure of almost a quarter of a million pounds all was in readiness for the opening on of the Melbourne International Exhibition on 1 October 1880. The event took place amid much pomp and ceremony (Figure 24). The day had been proclaimed a general holiday by the Government, and, as great public interest was taken in the event, the city thronged with thousands from the suburbs and the country, making an aggregation of population that had rarely before been assembled in Melbourne. Business was generally suspended, and flags were displayed from the buildings in the principal streets and on ships lying at the wharves. By eight o’clock in the morning large crowds had assembled in the streets, forming the route of the procession, and every place from which a good view could be obtained was soon occupied. A grand procession of sailors, trade unions and firemen led to the edifice in the Carlton Gardens.

The Marquis of Normanby, George Augustus Constantine, in the presence of the Governor of Victoria, and the Governors of the various Australian colonies, officially opened the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition (Figure 24). Other official guests included His Grace the Duke of Manchester, K.P., the British and Foreign and Colonial Commissioners, Her Majesty’s Ministers, and members of the Executive and Legislative Councils, the judges of the Supreme Court, the members of the Legislative Assembly. Foreign consuls, the captains
and officers of the British, French, German, and Italian men-of-war in port, the permanent officers, naval, military, and civil, of local Government, a large and representative gathering of the trades of Melbourne, and a numerous and brilliant assemblage, filled the nave of the building. The gentlemen wore full dress, and the ladies morning costume.

In the front of the grand organ, a gallery had been erected, on which were arranged over nine hundred choristers and musicians, and as soon as the Vice-Regal party had been seated, 'God Save the Queen' was sung by solo vocalists and the choristers. (Figure 26) This was followed by the performance of a cantata, written for the occasion by Mr. J W. Meaden, and sung to music composed by M. Caron (Figure 26). The 'Hallelujah Chorus', sung with great effect, concluded the ceremony. A number of addresses were given, and the Exhibition was then declared officially open at 12.45 pm, whereby the fountain was turned on, salutes were fired, and the Royal Standard was run up the flagpole on the dome.

On the day of the opening, Melbourne’s newspapers had all published profusely illustrated supplements that described the layout and principal features of the exhibition. However, it quickly became apparent that the average visitor would require many return visits in order to see everything. After entering the main building, a visitor would be confronted with the 'Avenue of Nations', which extended northwards 800 feet (243m), forming the spine of the vast temporary complex. Huge portions of the space were given over to displays by the major European countries including Italy, Germany, Austria and Belgium. The French Court was one of the largest, with over one thousand exhibitors displaying silk, linen, furniture, clocks, tapestries and porcelain.
Figure 24  The official opening of the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition.  
Source: Reproduced from *Victorian Icon: The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne*.

Figure 25  Under the dome at the 1880 Exhibition.  
Source: Reproduced from *Melbourne International Exhibition 1880-1881 Official Record*. 


Figure 26    Monsieur Leon Caron conducts the orchestra, 1880.
Source: Reproduced from Victorian Icon: The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne.
The British exhibits, which took up considerable space in the main building as well as the annexes, featured items by some of the country’s most reputable manufacturers of the day. There was pottery from Staffordshire and Worcestershire, cutlery from Sheffield, cotton from Paisley, and carpet from Kidderminster and Axminster. Asia was represented by the Indian Court, with its popular tea-tasting room and displays of brassware, pottery, ivory and silk. Considerably smaller, but not less interesting to the curious visitors, were the displays from Denmark, Jamaica, Fiji, Ceylon, Mauritius and the Straits Settlements.

Not surprisingly, the Victorian Court, showcasing the colony of Victoria, was by far the largest exhibit, occupying a vast space in the temporary complex, as well as the entire Eastern Annexe. On display were the various local achievements in the production of manufactured goods, machinery, furnishings, arts and crafts, winemaking, and so on, with the highlight being an impressive display of the colony’s booming gold-mining industry. A collection of geological maps, gold nuggets and mining equipment was complemented by a giant rhombic dodecahedron, coated in gold leaf, which was suspended from the ceiling to represent the amount of gold that had been mined in Victoria since 1851. The other Australian colonies were represented by considerably smaller courts, with displays which were largely devoted to their natural wealth of animal, vegetable and mineral products.

There was more to do at the Melbourne International Exhibition than merely gaze at a static display of national and international goods. Exhibition visitors could peruse the art gallery, relax in the fernery (see Figures 15 and 16, Appendix F), sample beer in the basement cellars, or dine in a number of restaurants. Soon after the exhibition opened, the dome
viewing area was also thrown open to the public, and subsequently proved to be a popular attraction. There were daily piano recitals, as well as numerous orchestral and vocal performances in the Concert Hall. A number of special events were held to ensure that the crowds returned. These included a fire engine race, several horticultural shows, and, in early 1881, a Wool Show. In May 1881, a Grand Promenade Concert was held to celebrate the closure of the exhibition which by then had been going for ten months.

2.8 Between the Exhibitions

Having hosted the largest exhibition in Australia, the Commissioners and Trustees needed to find a use for the vacant space of the Exhibition Building. It was clear that the space had to operate independently and become financially viable and self-supporting by leasing space and developing revenue-earning facilities in the grounds. One of the first ventures was the building of the Aquarium (see below); further initiatives included use of the space as a concert hall. Part of the building was also used as a Museum and later one section became a public ballroom.

By virtue of the Victorian Exhibition Act of 1878, the Carlton Gardens site was to remain in the control of the Executive Commissioners while actual exhibitions were being organised and implemented. At all other times, the building and grounds were to be the responsibility of a board of Trustees, who would be responsible for ensuring that the complex was put to suitable use between exhibitions. One of the first initiatives of the new Trustees was the establishment of the Aquarium which opened in February 1885 (between the exhibitions). The Aquarium was sited between the north elevation of the main building and the west elevation of the Eastern Annexe (i.e. in the south-east corner of the quadrangle between the annexes). Intended for education as well as entertainment, the Aquarium featured a variety of local and exotic marine life in large glass tanks, with a combination of dim lighting and rough cork wall panelling to create a mysterious grotto-like atmosphere. The Aquarium rapidly established itself as a public favourite, and the facilities were upgraded and extended numerous times over the decades.

To complement the Aquarium, the Trustees established a small Museum in the nearby Eastern Annexe. At the time of its opening in 1885, the Museum consisted of an ‘Ethnological Collection’ of material relating to early Melbourne, such as a tableau fixe representing a typical gold-digging scene of the 1850s. Over the next few years, the scope of the Museum’s collection expanded into numerous fields of science and natural history. The armour of Steve Hart, a member of Ned Kelly’s gang, was another popular exhibit, as was a collection of military uniforms and arms that had been acquired from the British after the close of the Centennial Exhibition. After a pair of mummies was presented to the Trustees in 1890, an ‘Egyptian Court’ was set up in the Museum. With murals and decoration by noted scenic artist John Henning, it remained a popular exhibit at the Museum for almost forty years. Henning was also responsible for the Cyclorama of Early Melbourne, which became another long-running attraction at the Museum. Painted in 1892, this huge mural provided curious visitors with a 360-degree view of how their city may have looked in the 1840s.

Notwithstanding the success of the Aquarium and the Museum, the Trustees found that considerable revenue could be generated simply by allowing the Main Building to be hired for privately-run events. One of the first of these, held in early 1882, was the ‘Old English Fair’ organised by the theatrical entrepreneur George Coppin. For the remainder of the century, the Exhibition Building was the preferred venue for a wide range of large-scale cultural,
social and even religious gatherings, as well as a bewildering array of popular entertainments of the day, such as circus-like shows, pageants, and novelty sporting contests. Concerts, which had proved so popular during the great exhibitions, also became a frequent event at the Exhibition Building during this time. In the late 1880s and the 1890s the Promenade Concerts became a regular event, comprising a range of orchestral, instrumental and vocal performances by artists that included Ada Crossley and a young Percy Grainger.

A number of privately-run exhibitions staged in the Exhibition Building were clearly modelled on the great exhibitions of 1880 and 1888. The largest of these imitative privately-run exhibitions was the Jubilee Exhibition of 1884, held to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of white settlement in Victoria. Billed as a ‘Jubilee Exhibition of Business and Pleasure’, the event combined commercial displays with musical performances and other forms of popular entertainment. Visitors could behold the ‘Enchanted Fountain’, with its kaleidoscopic coloured lights, or a reconstruction of a mediaeval London street, populated by actors in Elizabethan costumes. Local history was depicted by a tableau vivant of terracotta aborigines, while local manufacture was represented with a display of motors, engines and implements in the ‘Machinery Court’. The popular entertainment included innumerable performances by bands, choirs and orchestras, as well as pantomimes and ‘condensed’ Shakespearean plays.

2.9 Planning the 1888 Centennial International Exhibition

The Exhibition Trustees and Commissioners had rejoiced in the success of the 1880 Exhibition and in September 1886 when the question arose of holding a ‘grand International Exhibition of Arts and Industries to celebrate the close of the first century in the history of Australasia naturally originated in Sydney’, the decision was taken to hold a Centennial Exhibition in 1888. This required major building and horticultural additions to the existing site in the Carlton Gardens.

2.9.1 Changes to the Exhibition Building

The original temporary annexes built for the 1880 exhibition had been dismantled and sold after its closure, so an architectural competition was held for their replacements. First prize was awarded to George Johnson, and Joseph Reed’s firm, then known as Reed, Henderson and Smart, was placed second. The annexes designed by Johnson were similar in style and structure to Reed’s 1880 counterparts, with the most obvious difference being their extent. The Exhibition Commissioners were receiving so many applications for display space that the extent of the temporary annexes was revised several times. By the time the Exhibition opened in 1888, the temporary annexes extended north of the main building almost to the northern boundary of the site, completely enclosing the north lake and permanent eastern and western wings (see Figure 28 and site plan at Figure 39 at the end of this chapter).

Minor alterations were also made to the existing permanent buildings on the site. Electric lighting was installed, as well as a passenger lift located to the north of the western entrance to the Exhibition Building, to facilitate access to the viewing area atop the dome. The pipe organ was overhauled by its original manufacturer, George Fincham, and a false ceiling was constructed above to improve the concert hall’s acoustics. The exterior of the entire building was also repainted for the first time since its initial completion in 1880. While the exterior was painted for the modest sum of £1,883-10s by G C Williams, separate tenders were called for the interior. Beeler and Davies, art decorators, won the prestigious job for both