4.0 PHYSICAL SURVEY – CARLTON GARDENS & EXHIBITION RESERVE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of views and vistas, plantings and hard and soft landscape elements within the Carlton Gardens and Exhibition Reserve Forecourts; reference is also made to the Melbourne Museum. It is based on an examination of the site, as well as the existing written analyses of Allom Lovell and Associates, John Patrick Landscape Architects, and Meredith Gould, Architect.

Carlton Gardens Tree Conservation Strategy 2006

Reference is also made to the Carlton Gardens Tree Conservation Strategy (Meredith Gould Architects Pty Ltd in association with Contour Design Australia Pty Ltd, 2006), which is the most recent and up-to-date detailed account of the Carlton Gardens landscape and plantings. This report contains information relating to each avenue within the gardens, including description, historical overview, conservation implications, and in relation to trees recommendations for retention, species, positioning of missing or replacement specimens, priorities, etc. The report also addresses lawn plantings including the parterres.

Documentation

The physical development of the Carlton Gardens may be traced from a range of different sources. Key documentary references are the Carlton Gardens Conservation Analysis, which was prepared by John Patrick Pty Ltd in June 2000; and the Draft West, East and South Forecourts Report prepared in September 2000 by Meredith Gould Architect. A more recent report referred to is Meredith Gould Architects Pty Ltd. Carlton Gardens Tree Conservation Strategy. Report prepared for the City of Melbourne, December 2006 (draft).

This chapter also includes a general history of the development of the gardens and examines individual elements in detail. Melbourne’s Historic Public Gardens, a Management and Conservation Guide by Rex Swanson, and Civilising the City by Georgina Whitehead also provided useful general information about the development of the subject and comparable public gardens.

As noted previously, historic images, plans and aerial photographs contained in Appendices D, E and F to this report compliment the information and analysis in this chapter. The chronological summary of development of Carlton Gardens, at Appendix C, also compliments this chapter. Reference is also made to Appendix H, site development plans.

Fabric & Setting

The Exhibition Reserve and Carlton Gardens provide a setting to the Royal Exhibition Building and the Melbourne Museum. The Gardens are one of half a dozen parks and gardens in inner Melbourne that were created in the mid- to late-nineteenth century and designed by notable surveyors and landscape designers.
Design & Layout

The current design and layout of the Carlton Gardens reflects the original layout of the reserve by Edward La Trobe Bateman, and later improvements made by Clement Hodgkinson and William Sangster who remodelled the gardens in preparation for, and to accommodate, the construction of the Exhibition Building and annexes. At this time (1879-80) the gardens were divided into the current North and South Gardens. Sangster’s plan was amended and worked upon by Nicholas Bickford, and again in the late nineteenth century, by John Guilfoyle. The Gardens also underwent some change between the early twentieth century and the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

In the 1970s, additional annexes were added to the Exhibition Building, again changing the landscape. The most recent and dramatic change to the landscape came about as a result of the construction of the Melbourne Museum (opened in 2000), and the consequent physical division between the North and South Gardens. The Museum Plaza was also created through this development.

4.2 Views & Vistas

The overall effect of the landscaping of the Carlton Gardens is to create a number of views and vistas which enhance the setting of the Royal Exhibition Building. The six key views and vistas in the South Garden are points along the path system, as listed below:
a) The terminus of all radial paths which form the *patte d’oeie* in the South Garden, which provide views to the Royal Exhibition Building and especially the dome;

b) Points on the north-south serpentine perimeter paths (paths parallel to Rathdowne and Nicholson streets), especially looking across the lakes towards the Royal Exhibition Building and where the dome is framed by vegetation (e.g. tree trunks and canopies); some of these are currently obscured by new or weedy plantings (Figure 55);

c) The southern terminus of all serpentine paths, and looking along their length; the layout of the paths is original to the 1850s Bateman design, and has the effect of ‘leading the eye’ into the landscape in manner accepted as typical of the picturesque;

d) Internally, between different areas of the South Garden, where there is an extended view across the lawns and specimen tree plantings. This applies primarily in the western side of the site due to the slope of the land from the main *Grand Alleé*; it is also extremely important at the Queensberry Street path terminus and along the length of promenade path, looking into the Gardens. This view is currently truncated and obscured by the Catenary Walk and the heavily vegetated shrubberies in the original parterre bed locations;

e) From the *Grand Alleé* terminus (designed originally as a circular garden bed and no longer extant, see Figure 54) to the Royal Exhibition Building, and externally in the opposite direction to Spring Street and Old Parliament House; and

f) Relevant points external to the site which provide views into the Carlton Gardens and to the Royal Exhibition Building.

Unlike the South Garden, key views and vistas in the North Garden are more limited. The new Museum building obscures views of the north side of the Royal Exhibition Building; the depot and tennis courts additionally truncate some views within this area. Views and vistas in the North Garden include:

a) Terminus of all paths, and looking along their length; the layout of the paths dates to the c. 1892 reconstruction; poor integrity of the avenue planting along the paths near the former playground area can detract from maintaining views and vistas;

b) Central entry on Carlton Street, at Canning Street, where the original northern boundary promenade and avenue is extant;

c) Internally, between different areas of the North Garden, where there is an extended view across lawns and specimen tree plantings.
Figure 55 View along the Serpentine path.

Figure 56 Museum Plaza from the east.
4.3 Exhibition Reserve Forecourts

The Exhibition Reserve contains the East, West and South and the Museum Plaza. The Museum Plaza and the northern aspects of the East and West Forecourts (Figure 56) have been landscaped in accordance with Melbourne Museum criteria to create an interface between the two buildings.

Designed as a ‘bold and powerful landscape’ immediately around the vast Exhibition building, the East, West and South Forecourts are part of the ‘strong, architectural approach to the design’ for the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition. These spaces bridged the gap between a huge, heavily populated and busy exhibition hall; and the quiet, contemplative park setting. The careful balance of paved traffic zones – both vehicular and pedestrian – with highly structured landscape zones, enabled the gardens within the park to be prominent, despite the potential for large numbers of visitors.

The Forecourts are an essential component of the ‘palace-garden’ approach to the site. Although in some cases compromised by later works, each has a key role to play in providing a context which aids the perception of the impressive scale of the site.

4.3.1 The East & West Forecourts

For those attending the International Exhibitions, these Forecourts marked the entrance and exits to the Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens. The Nicholson Street East Forecourt, was named the ‘French Circle’ as it contains the French Fountain. As the principle entry to the Exhibition Reserve from Nicholson Street, this part of the site has been subject to frequent upgrades. The following two images highlight the alterations. In the 1880 photograph (Figure 57) the ground is gravel, whereas by the Second World War, the entrance had been cemented (Figure 58). It now comprises a central concrete and asphalt circular drive, in the centre of which is a grassed area with garden beds set out in a similar layout to that which was originally there. The detailing of the East Forecourt gradually diminished, although some of the planting of the central bed was reinstated in the 1980s.

As Meredith Gould notes, the northern edge of the East Forecourt has been planted with shrubs in planters to create an interface with the new Melbourne Museum. The serpentine perimeter path connects with the east side of the Circle and is separated from Nicholson Street.

The Westgarth Fountain (see Figure 68), which was originally located close to the Nicholson Street entrance, was re-installed, after restoration, to a position close to the Nicholson Street pavement because of the need for vehicular access to the East entrance to the Exhibition Building. Adjacent to the south-east corner of the building, is the Honourable John Woods Monument which has been located here since 1881. Elsewhere, the area is generally grassed and planted with various trees which contribute to the grandeur of the landscape.

The West Forecourt is currently a hard environment. It was known as the German Circle during the 1880 Exhibition because it included a central kiosk representing Germany. It retained its broad 1880s form until the mid-1950s. The Western Annexe, constructed soon after the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, maintained similar proportions to the 1880 machinery annex, leaving the West Forecourt area approximately the same size as in 1880. In 1956 the circle was removed and asphalted over to provide additional parking for exhibitors. The outline of the former circle is visible in the 1945 aerial (Figure 58).
Figure 57  View of the eastern entrance, 1880.
Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 58  1945 aerial photograph of the Exhibition Reserve showing West, South and East Forecourts, including the west and east circles.
Source: Airspy, University of Melbourne Archives Image Collection.
The old Grollo Fountain, originally located in front of the now demolished administration wing (the mirror box), has been dismantled and is currently being stored by Museum Victoria.

The serpentine perimeter path system around the whole site forms a broad path, connecting the West Forecourt with the terrace to the south and the western flank to the north. Garden beds across the Rathdowne Street frontage contain specimen trees in grass and some shrub boarders. The entry off Rathdowne Street and the circular driveway, created over the former West Circle, are aligned with the east-west axis of the building.

The 1880 Exhibition ‘egress’ gates at the Rathdowne Street crossover are thought to have been removed in the 1920s, as part of the removal of the perimeter fence. The installation of a basement car park exhaust in the northern portion of the West Forecourt occurred during the building of the Museum car park. Vehicle control boxes and boom gates were installed on the extremity of the West Forecourt.

Three trees likely to belong to the 1880 plantings remain and define the alignment of the previous circle and garden beds – a huge Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*) and two *Araucaria* species. An Elm (*Ulmus*) species in the south-west garden may also be an 1880 planting. The removal of an elm tree, thought to have been planted in 1880, in the west garden bed occurred in 1998-9.

The West Forecourt is now dominated by car parking. It currently provides for a truck loading area and temporary bus parking. The only built intrusion into the West Forecourt has occurred with a car park exhaust vent which is located within the planter box. A new planter box extends into the West Forecourt some 7 metres, for a length of approximately 35 metres.
Figure 60  View of the South Forecourt during the ceremonial opening 1880.
Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 61  German beer garden, west elevation, 1880-81.
Source: State Library of Victoria Picture Collection.
Removal of the Western Annex and the building of the new Museum changed the enclosure of the West Forecourt, opening it up to the north (Figure 59). A small planting, corresponding with the northern aspect of the East Forecourt, acts as an interface with the Museum.

4.3.2 The South Forecourt

“The South Forecourt is the ‘terrace’ and ‘promenade’ for the ‘palace’ gardens. It is an intricately detailed pedestrian space from which the expansive park to the south can be viewed and within which the impressive scale of the Exhibition Building can be perceived.”

The impressive ceremonial entry to the Royal Exhibition Building, located within the South Forecourt, is comprised of the upper promenade, or terrace, and flanking parterres; the grassy margin against the building; and the lower promenade. They are discussed below.

The main east-west drive runs along the south façade of the building. Essentially it is an asphalt carriageway variously marked out with parking bays and used for that purpose in addition to accessing the site.

The Terrace Promenade (South Drive) & the Parterre Gardens

The broad terrace beyond the grassy margin was the principal pedestrian promenade area during the Exhibitions. A more formal ‘ceremonial’ entry to the building was via the Grand Allée from Victoria Parade. Several features also defined the broad terrace in the 1880 and 1888 International Exhibitions, including giant flagpoles with an upper vertical banner and lower angled flags located along the south side. Very large decorative urns (around the height of a person) and cast iron light standards marked essential points in the pathway and/or the parterre system. These were removed, possibly around the time of the Second World War.

Parterres to the south define and emphasize the large open space. These are of similar size and shape and are balanced around the central Hochgürtel Fountain. Set in a broad circular bed, the fountain terminates the Grand Allée and marks the ceremonial entry to the Exhibition site and the dome.

Immediately to the east and west are beds, symmetrical in plan but not design, including beds in a ‘wagon wheel’ and ‘bishop mitre’s’ plan. Originally, the planting was diverse and was intended to attract attention to the geometrical shapes. Initially these beds had low planting articulated by the varying foliage and the decorative urns (since removed). The elaborate patterns could be appreciated from the slightly elevated terrace and the Exhibition dome; their low scale provided an even, wide, open space in front of the building, ensuring an unobstructed view of the impressive scale of the building when viewed from the south.

The eastern end of the Terrace was the only pedestrian entry to the Exhibition site from Nicholson Street. The Terrace design sought and achieved a striking effect with intricate plantings within the east central parterre.

The Lower Promenade: South Forecourt Design

Bisecting the fountain east-west, and bordering the south side of the parterres, is a second promenade, called the lower promenade because of its location rather than its height. The west end of the lower promenade was the principal pedestrian entry to the 1880 Exhibition
site from Rathdowne Street. At the western end, the entry was flanked by a lower lineal scroll shaped *parterre*, to the south, and at the eastern end by the lake. The lower promenade is clear in the construction photograph c.1880 which shows the lower lineal *parterre* pattern. This was originally planted with roses in 1880, and reorganised in 1888.

**The ‘Margin’ against the Building: South Forecourt Design**

An area of approximately 12 metres separates the building from the hard surface of the terrace. The west end adjoining the basement was fenced in 1880, probably defining a retaining wall to a lower ground level. In the 1888 rendering of the building, the basement is clearly seen as a full external wall with windows, rather than the current half basement. This is also visible in the construction and opening photographs of 1880. The ‘margin’ against the building along the west elevation was also used as a German beer garden during the 1880-81 Exhibition (Figure 61). Elaborate cast iron standard lights, each with three orbs, illuminated the south entry to the building and entry and the connecting paths to the north. These urns are shown in later photographs taken in the early twentieth century.

### 4.4 Carlton Gardens & Exhibition Reserve: Soft Landscape Elements

#### 4.4.1 Plane Tree Avenue/The Grand Allée

The Plane Tree Avenue or *allée* in the South Garden consists of a row of plane trees on the east and west sides of the avenue, at an approximate spacing of 9 metres between trees. The width of the *allée* is approximately 31 m and the internal space contains two side paths, 5 metres wide with a 17 metre lawn between them at the centre.

The Plane Tree Avenue provides one of the grandest vistas to the Royal Exhibition Building, incorporating the view of the Hochgürtel Fountain. La Trobe Bateman’s plan for the Carlton Gardens provided for a serpentine path system with two lakes. There was no suggestion of a major *allée* in the European style in these plans. The existing *Grand Allée* stems from the Reed and Barnes plan of 1879-1880 when an *allée* was proposed, to focus on the Hochgürtel Fountain and the Royal Exhibition Building to the north and appear to extend Spring Street into the gardens at the south. This latter element was to be achieved by means of a circular terminal feature at the south together with a planted gooseneck deflecting the axis onto Spring Street. The proposal to remove every second tree from the avenue prior to the First World War was apparently never implemented.

Two of the trees, both on the western side of the *allée* have been removed. Remaining trees have all reached a considerable height and girth. The width of the *allée* and the closeness of the tree planting have achieved a landscape effect that is unique in Melbourne, and possibly in Australia, with the canopy of the trees providing a unique frame for the portal of the Royal Exhibition Building.

As Gould remarks:

the close spacing encourages more vertical growth and less low spreading branches, enabling the avenue to frame the entrance portal and dome, without obscuring it. The avenue scale which has resulted after 127 years is stunning and without equal in Melbourne. It is at the same time a street and a park...
Like a European Baroque Palace, the grand allée at the Royal Exhibition Building enables the ‘ownership’ of city to be seen to derive from the ‘Palace of Industry’, and the ‘Palace of Industry’ to be at the same time part of the city infrastructure.

The Plane Tree Avenue or Grand Allée is one of the most readily identified icons of Melbourne, forming a suitably scaled and fitting setting for the Royal Exhibition Building. The allée dominates the landscape of the Carlton gardens and is a major component of the landscape of inner northern Melbourne (Figure 62).

4.4.2 Melias

Melias (*Melia azedarach* var. *australisca*, see Figure 63) were planted in the South Garden in about 1879 along the east-west path parallel to the promenade in front of the Exhibition Building, under the supervision of William Sangster. Dunstan states that ‘Melias lined the path parallel with the promenade, their main function being to grow rapidly - though never high enough to interrupt the view – and to provide shade’.

The Melias are believed to have been planted or spaced at about the mid-point of each of the parterres.110 The remaining trees appear to be in reasonable condition, but the possum bands around the lower trunk suggest possums have browsed them significantly in the past. Replacement specimens have been planted along the avenue alignment, outnumbering the original plantings.
4.4.3 Planting Beds & Shrubberies

The provision of ornamental flowering beds to the southern façade of the Exhibition Building was an integral feature of the Reed and Barnes 1880 plan for the Carlton Gardens. The perspective drawing 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.

Intended to be viewed to best advantage from the observation deck on the outside of the dome, the scheme of sunken rectangles and triangles delineated by patterns of brightly coloured flowering and foliage plants, was a typical Gardenesque extravaganza, perfect as the landscape adjunct to the Exhibition Building.

When viewed from the observatory deck they were described as ‘circles and curves, rays and triangles, set in a field of green’. 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, and include *Cantua buxifolia*, deutzias, coral tree, tecomas and *Hibiscus splendens*.

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