2.0 HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE

Sources

The history of the Royal Exhibition Building, Exhibition Reserve and Carlton Gardens has been extensively researched and documented by David Dunstan et al in the monograph, *Victorian Icon The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne*, published in 1996. While this work covers many aspects of the building's history, there are some areas which have not been adequately dealt with, particularly the decoration and architectural history. A vast amount of primary and secondary source material has also been consolidated by Allan Willingham in his 1983 report, *The Royal Exhibition Building, Carlton: A Conservation Analysis*. By his own admission, Willingham made no attempt to provide a complete history of the building, but his report offers an extensive bibliography of published and unpublished sources, including exhibition catalogues, journal and newspaper articles, theses and architectural drawings. In 2000 Meredith Gould Architects Pty Ltd prepared a *Draft Review of Previous Conditions of the West, East and South Forecourts of the Exhibition Building, Carlton Gardens*; another report entitled, *Carlton Gardens: Shrub and Floral Plantings 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition* (a review of the implemented design and recommendations for future development); and another recent a report, *Carlton Gardens: Tree Conservation Strategy*. John Patrick Pty Ltd completed a Conservation Analysis of the site in June 2000, and in January 2002, John Patrick Pty Ltd in conjunction with Allom Lovell and Associates submitted a draft *Conservation Management Plan of the Carlton Gardens* commissioned by the City of Melbourne. Georgina Whitehead’s pictorial, *Civilising the City: A History of Melbourne’s Public Gardens*, documents various plans and layouts relating to the historical development of the Carlton Gardens; and her most recent, though brief history of the Carlton Gardens is included in Peter Yule’s edited volume published in April 2004, *Carlton: A History*. Importantly, *Victorian Icon The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne* and Allan Willingham’s *Conservation Analysis*, present significant complementary material. These, together with the work of Rex Swanson, *Melbourne’s Historic Public Gardens: A Management and Conservation Guide*, 1984, and additional material authored by Meredith Gould Architects Pty Ltd, John Patrick Pty Ltd, and Allom Lovell and Associates, constitute the basis of this report. Some additional research has been undertaken, however, including reference to additional primary sources such as original or early architectural drawings, building plans, site plans and historic images.

Appendices & Illustrations

As noted in the preceding chapter, appendices to this report provide additional historic and graphic material. Appendix D contains historic site plans and aerial photographs. Appendix E reproduces architectural drawings and plans of the Royal Exhibition Building. Additional historic images are also contained in Appendix F.

History of Gardens

The history in this chapter is augmented by the chronological summary of change and development of the Carlton Gardens and Exhibition Reserve in Appendix C, and by the historic plans and images in Appendices D and F which illustrate the evolution of the site. Chapter 4 also contains historical information and context relating to the gardens.
**Site Development Plans**

A series of key plans (chronological) is also included at Appendix H, which illustrate changes to the Carlton Gardens and Exhibition Reserve over time.

**Glossary**

A glossary of terms is included at the end of Chapter 3.

### 2.1 Carlton Gardens to 1879

#### 2.1.1 Edward La Trobe Bateman & the Creation of the Gardens

The 64 acre (26 hectare) site of the Carlton Gardens was reserved for public purposes in the early 1850s. The Carlton Gardens were mentioned by name as a ‘recreation reserve’ when the Colonial Secretary replied to questions in the Legislative Council on 16 November 1852. In 1855 the Melbourne Town Council used the site to trench for street manure and night soil and in 1856 fenced the perimeter with a paling fence and let contracts to grub stumps. The Government took control for the reserve back from the Council in 1858 and allocated £500 for paths, ‘picking’ (possibly a hollow tine process), filling the gully, harrowing and construction of a forcing house (green house) to propagate plants.

In 1856 Edward La Trobe Bateman (see Biography below) designed a landscape scheme for the Fitzroy and Carlton Gardens for the City’s Park Lands Committee (Figure 3). Work commenced on the Fitzroy Gardens without delay, however problems beset the Carlton Gardens from the beginning. The site had little topsoil over a hard clay base and lacked the reliable water supply from which other public gardens had benefited. Pedestrian traffic used the gardens to connect between Fitzroy and Carlton, and private goat herds grazed the area, killing plants and eating out the grass. The path system gave access from the principal adjoining streets, and was designed in sweeping curves in a pattern of complex symmetry developed around a central oval. A promenade avenue ran across the northern end.

In 1864 the Government gazetted its intention to permanently reserve the gardens and vest them in the Melbourne Town Council. However, because of a legal oversight, the process was never completed, and this caused problems in future years.

Considerable pressure was exerted in 1870 by the Government to construct a road through the centre of the reserve, connecting Queensberry Street with Gertrude Street. The City Council opposed the road, took Supreme Court action to prevent it, and to establish control of the gardens by the Council rather than the Government.

Some progress in tree planting was made after the Yan Yean water supply reached the gardens in 1863. By 1869, 18,000 trees had been planted and reputedly eight miles of walks installed, although the location of the walks/paths is not known. By 1872, the gardens were described unfavourably by the new Parks Ranger, noting poor drainage, broken fences and stunted tree growth. In 1873, management of the parks returned to the Government for a ten year period. From this date, Clement Hodgkinson, Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey and Inspector General of Metropolitan Gardens, Parks and Reserves, began a well co-ordinated program of improvements. He adapted Bateman’s plan (Figure 3), straightening paths and creating a new feature, a broad straight promenade across the central part of the site along the alignment of the proposed roadway.
Figure 3  Lithograph of Edward La Trobe Bateman’s 1856 plan (includes Hodgkinson’s alterations made in 1874).

Key Plan Features: a wide tree-lined avenue on the north boundary; entrances at each of the four corners leading to a diagonal path and the perimeter path; entrances at each of the major streets beyond the park (on the east, Palmer Street and Gertrude Street; on the west, Pelham and Queensbury Streets; and on the south, an off-centre entrance at the intersection of La Trobe and Spring Streets); the serpentine perimeter path; and the small lake in the north-west.

Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.
Figure 4  Dolphin Fountain in the Carlton Gardens, c. 1870.  
The fountain was mounted on a rusticated masonry base, which supported a circular garden rockery, located on an island in the pond in the north-west corner of the gardens. Hodgkinson recommended that the cedars and other forest trees planted around the basin be removed and replaced with palms, ferns, variegated New Zealand flax, bamboo-reed, pampas grass and flowering creepers.  
Source: Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 5  Looking east to Gertrude Street across the Carlton Gardens (as improved by Hodgkinson) c. 1875, with Royal Terrace in the background.  
The area to the left became the site of the Exhibition Building.  
Figure 6  Carlton Gardens, showing the Gertrude-Queensbury Street walk, c. 1875. Note immature Italian cypress plantings in background (top right of picture) and Monterey Pine bottom right. Source: Reproduced from Melbourne’s Historic Public Gardens: A Management and Conservation Guide.

Figure 7  Carlton Gardens c. 1875. Source: Reproduced from Civilising the City: A History of Melbourne’s Public Gardens.
The lake shown in the north-west corner of the above lithograph is of Hodgkinson’s design. Located at one of the highest parts of the gardens, Whitehead proposes it may have been intended to serve the dual purpose of assisting irrigation as well as ornamentation.\textsuperscript{18}

In the autumn of 1873, Hodgkinson recommended that a circle of deformed cedars around the Dolphin Statue (constructed in 1862 and located on the pond island in the north-west corner of the gardens, shown on Bateman’s plan, see Figure 3 and Figure 4), should be replaced with ‘palms, ferns, variegated New Zealand flax and bamboo-reed, pampas grass and flowering creepers’.\textsuperscript{19}

Grander plans included extensive walks bordered by annual ribbon beds, extensive use of statuary along the new northern walk (as Hodgkinson had already introduced to the Fitzroy Gardens), and ornate entrance gates and stands of trees chosen for the contrast in their autumnal shades. Large figs (\textit{Ficus macrophylla}), cypress (\textit{Cupressus sp.}), melias (\textit{Melia azedarach} var. \textit{australasica}), oaks and other trees were transplanted from the Fitzroy and Treasury Gardens.\textsuperscript{20} On Hodgkinson’s retirement in 1874, responsibility for the gardens passed to Nicholas Bickford, the Lands Department’s Inspector of Bailiffs and Overseer of Parks. He was later appointed as Curator of Metropolitan Parks and Gardens.\textsuperscript{21}

By 1875 a staff of thirteen was making substantial progress on the gardens (Figure 5) but plans were never fully realised because the site had been selected by the Government as the ideal location for an international exhibition. Management was transferred to the Trustees of the Melbourne International Exhibition to be held in 1880 and control was therefore taken out of the hands of Nicholas Bickford.

The Council, resisting a take-over of the site by the Exhibition Commissioners fought and eventually gained a compromise. For the duration of the Exhibition, the Commissioners were to have control of the entire gardens. When it was finished, they would retain sole control of the land and building of the central section when they were in use for public exhibitions, but the legal estate was to remain with the original Trustees.\textsuperscript{22}

2.1.2 \textit{Development of Parkland in Melbourne up to 1878-9}

The idea that parks and gardens, freely available to the public, were essential to maintain and improve the physical well-being and moral character of the people, helping to bind society together, was at the forefront of social reform in England in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The Superintendent of the Colony of Victoria, Charles Joseph La Trobe, who had arrived in September 1839, endorsed this philosophy. Soon after he arrived in Melbourne, La Trobe began setting aside from sale, large areas that he described as being ‘for public advantage and recreation’. While acknowledging the indispensability of pastoralism in Victoria, La Trobe sought to temper economic pragmatism with what he regarded as the higher ideal of community.\textsuperscript{23} As historian Raymond Wright emphasises, throughout the 1840s, he fostered social, educational and religious institutions in Melbourne. Recreation, and its special expression in ‘parks, gardens, promenades and sporting reserves’ was part of that broader ethos.\textsuperscript{24}

The idea of public gardens was also embraced by the founders of Melbourne who frequently made provision for public reserves when laying out patterns of subdivision and urban development.\textsuperscript{25} In 1844 the Melbourne Town Council wrote to Charles La Trobe that

\begin{quote}
It is of vital importance to the health of the inhabitants there should be parks within a distance of the town ... in such places of public resort the
\end{quote}
kindliest feelings of human nature are cherished, there the employer sees his faithful servant discharging the higher duties of a Burgess, as a husband or a father.26

The most obvious manifestation of this in the metropolitan area is the magnificent ring of gardens which encircle the City of Melbourne. These gardens, the Domain and the Alexandra, Carlton, Fitzroy, Treasury and Flagstaff Gardens, were laid out by the leading landscape and urban designers of the time, the latter four by Clement Hodgkinson.27

Moreover, considered within a broader context, Georgina Whitehead affirms that the introduction of thousands of new plants into cultivation from all over the world and the establishment of public botanic gardens – the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in 1840 and the Melbourne Botanic Gardens in 1846 – helped to encourage a general interest in botany and horticulture during the same period, which was supported by the emergence of gardening magazines, horticultural publications, and extensive writings of the Scottish landscape gardener, John Claudius Loudon.28

To varying degrees the gardens have retained the qualities of their original designs, which for the most part are characterised by strong avenue plantings.29

Initially it was thought that the indigenous trees were the most suitable, and available, for planting in public gardens. These included Araucaria, Moreton Bay fig, and South Australian Blue Gum. The Victorian Gardeners’ Mutual Improvement Society also recommended in 1860 that ‘very many of the native trees of Victoria are peculiarly adapted for park planting, and should be used as far as possible’.30 Ultimately, however, it was the deciduous trees brought out from England in the period 1860-1880 – elms, poplars and oaks, and many then recently discovered conifers including Monterey pine and cypress - which were favoured in the belief that parks ‘should be planted on the principles of park planting known and practised in Britain as far as those are applicable to our climate and circumstances’.31

The trend towards pockets of public gardens continued into the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries as the development of the public health movement in Victoria brought renewed concerns for ‘fresh air’ and improved methods of sanitation. Public recreational space was increased in Melbourne’s inner suburbs where unhealthy industrial practices and overcrowded streets were feared by public health professionals and government policy makers.32 Parks were seen as the ‘lungs’ of the inner suburbs and were therefore an essential component of the town layout.

Parks, gardens and squares also proliferated throughout the next ring of Melbourne suburbs during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Suburban parks included those named Carlton, Princes and Royal Parks; squares included University, Lincoln, Argyle, Murchison, Macarthur and Curtain; and gardens included those named South Yarra (Fawkner Park), Prahran (Victoria Gardens), St Kilda East (Alma Park). Additionally, gardens and parks in other suburbs included St Kilda (Catani Gardens and St Kilda Botanical Gardens), Albert Park (St Vincent Gardens), Elwood (Elsternwick Park), Hawthorn (St James Park and Central Gardens), Malvern (Central Park, Malvern Public Gardens) and Caulfield (Caulfield Park).

2.2 International Exhibitions

The phenomenon of international exhibitions began in 1851 and continued until 1915. It reflected a dynamic and transitional phase in modern history, which saw the growth and spread of the benefits of industrialisation in the form of technological advancements and social progress. International exhibitions became the transmitter of ideas and cultural values
around the world, and the rapid development of an extensive international economy. The exhibitions themselves brought people and ideas together on a grand scale, in diverse locations around the world, and greatly enhanced international social and economic links. They provided a mechanism for the worldwide exchange of goods, technology, ideas, culture and values, and heralded a new era of trading networks and the modern international economy. The exhibitions were ‘a spectacular shopfront for the industrial revolution’ which shaped some of the greatest global social and economic transformations.\(^{33}\)

2.2.1 Origins of the Great Exhibitions

The origin of the big international expos that are common today was in eighteenth century England. The Royal Society of Arts, one of Britain’s learned societies, was founded in 1754 with one of its objects being to encourage ‘the arts, manufactures and commerce’. Its first attempt to carry out this part of its charter was in 1761 when it purchased award-winning exhibits from its annual prize giving and placed them on show for two weeks in a warehouse. The exhibition proved so popular that it was continued for another five weeks in the Royal Academy’s premises. So popular was this event that the new premises designed for the Academy by Robert Adam included an exhibition hall known as the ‘repository’.\(^{34}\) This then was the forerunner of what later became the great international exhibitions of manufacturers.

The next step was taken in France, when after years of revolution and a cessation of trade, the three former Royal manufactories of Sèvres, Savonneries and Gobelin, found themselves with surplus stock and no customers. Consequently it was decided to hold an exhibition to market the wares manufactured by these companies, which included many other items in addition to porcelain, carpets and tapestries. Again this was a great success and François de Neufchâteau, the government Minister who established the Louvre, declared an annual series of exhibitions. The first of these was held in a purpose built building on the banks of the Seine. The theme behind this promotion, as evidenced by the catalogue and report of the exhibition, was to promote the belief that French manufactures were superior to their British equivalents. However, due to European hostility towards the French in general and Napoleon in particular, annual exhibitions did not commence until 1801. The first exhibition was held in the grounds of the Louvre and covered the whole range of French manufacturing including the first exhibition of the Jacquard loom which was to become so influential in the weaving of textiles and carpets.

Meanwhile, similar early attempts to stage exhibitions in England failed, apparently due to English manufacturers’ belief in the superiority of their own products which, they thought, did not need promotion along the lines adopted by the French. However, from 1847 the Society of Arts exhibitions did create interest and with the active encouragement of the Society’s president, Prince Albert, by 1849 attendances rose to 73,000. In 1849 Britain’s first purpose-built exhibition hall was erected in Birmingham and an exhibition was staged in conjunction with the Association for the Advancement of Science.

Following a visit to the French National Exhibition in 1849 by Henry Cole, Assistant Keeper at the Public Records Office, and notable architect Matthew Digby Wyatt, Cole discussed the idea of staging an international exhibition in London with Prince Albert who immediately requested that Cole find the best exhibition site in Hyde Park. Events then moved rapidly and the full scope of the exhibition was quickly established. It was to be industrial in bias and divided into four sections: raw materials, machinery, manufactured products and sculpture and plastic art with no fine art, meaning painting.
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It was decided that the exhibition should be an international exhibition, with prizes offered to encourage exhibitors. Furthermore, the exhibition would be organised by a Royal Commission with Prince Albert at the head, and the finances arranged by the Society of Arts. Funds were borrowed from the Bank of England against the personal guarantee of the individual exhibition commissioners. Henry Cole put up £500, Charles Dilke £1,000 and Charles Fox, the contractor, guaranteed £2,000.35

This planning culminated in the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations held in 1851 in a purpose built venue, the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park (Figure 8). This was a significant event with far-reaching consequences for construction and industrial design.

While the concept of the Crystal Palace had its origins in Joseph Paxton's design for the Victoria Regina House at Chatsworth, its construction, carried out by Charles Fox of Fox Henderson and Co engineers (who later also worked on projects for the Queensland Railways) was a turning point in the history of prefabricated construction. The Exhibition was immensely profitable and lead to the creation of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Royal Albert Hall in South Kensington. Today they are enduring monuments to the legacy of Prince Albert and to education in design.

2.2.2 In the Wake of the Great Exhibition & the Crystal Palace

In the years following the Great Exhibition, new exhibition buildings were constructed all over the world, including Dublin and New York (1853) and Paris (1855). For the remainder of the nineteenth century, and into the early twentieth century, an international exhibition would be held every few years somewhere in Europe, America or Australasia. While the scope of these exhibitions varied from international to national, inter-colonial and provincial, they all ultimately derived from the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Melbourne acquired its first exhibition building in 1854 and its debt to the Crystal Palace is obvious (Figure 9). It was constructed on the corner of William and Little Lonsdale Streets on the site now occupied by the former Royal Mint building. It contained 200 ornamental windows and was lit by 306 gas lights. Australia's first exhibition was held here from October to December 1854; it included 428 exhibits.
Figure 9  Melbourne’s first Exhibition Building, 1854-61.
Source:  Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Figure 10  Palais de l’industrie, Paris, 1867.
Source:  Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.
Figure 11 The London Exhibition Building, 1862.
Source: Reproduced from Buildings of the World Exhibitions.

Figure 12 Hydraulic lifts, Paris Exhibition of 1867.
Source: Reproduced from Victorian Icon: The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne.