

La Trobe's Cottage

Continuing a Walk round my Garden

Understanding the Garden and Plant Provenance



2014

Title with acknowledgement to Helen Botham's *La Trobe's Jolimont: A Walk round my Garden*
Melbourne, C J La Trobe Society and Australian Garden History Society, 2006.

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Philosophy of the Garden



Leonotis leonurus Lions ears

The Cottage is now located in the King's Domain on a much smaller site than *Jolimont* which was 12.5 acres. This limits our ability to re-create the different areas of the garden. The plants and structures chosen are used as a representation of the original garden.

To make the garden at La Trobe's Cottage as authentic as possible and distinguish it from the later Victorian (post gold rush gardens) it was decided to use only plants that were available to La Trobe up until 1854, when he returned to England. This means that most of the plants chosen are

species (not hybrids or cultivars). Only in very special circumstances, when the original species is unsuitable and there is no other choice, is a modern cultivar or hybrid considered.

If you visit the Cottage and wander around, you will see many plants and several structures that are interpretations of what was in the original garden at *Jolimont*. To also help guide you around the garden we have produced a brochure *The garden at La Trobe's Cottage King's Domain Melbourne*.

History of the Garden

La Trobe purchased the land adjacent to the Government Reserve in a public auction on 10 June 1840 at £20.00 per acre and was very lucky no-one bid against him. He and his Swiss wife Sophie named the property *Jolimont* after the country house at Cerlier in Switzerland where they spent their honeymoon.



George Alexander Gilbert, *A View of Jolimont Melbourne, Port Phillip 1843-44*, Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria

The picture of *Jolimont* drawn by George Alexander Gilbert in 1843-44 depicts the garden as gardenesque, meaning the plants are grown to show their best advantage, there is space for them to grow and they are not touching each other. However, La Trobe soon realised with the harsh climate and scarcity of water that such a well-kept garden was not possible. Over time, and exacerbated by a lack of labour during the gold rush, the garden evolved into a Romantic style where plants were allowed to go wild, were not heavily pruned and were allowed to spill over the paths and grow into their natural habit.

The Romantic movement was also a reaction to the Industrial Revolution in Europe and was directly tied to the common man who went to work in the factories. Conditions were appalling in most factories and the Romantic style evolved to help the worker forget his dreary life working in a dirty loathsome factory. The idea was it would transport him to a world where there were no reminders of his daily drudge, where the garden was designed to let emotions take over reason and where balance and symmetry were used to appeal directly to the soul.

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Paths were curved, slightly overgrown of gravel or dirt and blended into the garden beds. You did not know what to expect around each corner. They took you on a journey of discovery with surprises and often misdirection. They were designed for enjoyment and relaxation. The beds were filled with exotic plants from all corners of the world. La Trobe loved his garden and often used the garden as a refuge from the stresses and strains of colonial administration, perhaps nipping back the roses while solving difficult government business.



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Edward La Trobe Bateman *Front view of Jolimont*
Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria

Identifying Plants

To help us re-create La Trobe's garden we use the following resources to identify what plants were grown at *Jolimont*:-

-) George Alexander Gibert's pastel drawing
-) Edward La Trobe Bateman's drawings
-) Wilbrahm Federick Evelyn Liardet's paintings
-) Helen Botham's book *La Trobe's Jolimont: a walk round my garden*
-) Internet sites concerning the genus *Latrobea* and species named after La Trobe

We also use correspondence from La Trobe's friend Ronald Campbell Gunn in Tasmania (Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales) and letters to his daughter Agnes who was sent back to Switzerland in 1845 for her education (Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria). Unfortunately, in his letters he does not mention the names of cultivars or hybrids of plants like roses or fruit trees.

Sourcing Plants

The Friends of La Trobe's Cottage are very particular about the species they plant. To check if plants were available in the 1840s and 1850s two Sydney plant data bases are used:

Historic Houses Trust – Colonial Plants Database
http://www.hht.net.au/collections/research/colonial_plants

Hortus Camdenensis
<http://www.hortuscampden.com>.

These two databases are used because the Melbourne catalogue of nurseries, *Plants Listed in Nursery Catalogues in Victoria 1855-1889*, published by the Garden Plant Conservation Association of Australia, starts in 1855, the year after La Trobe had returned to England.



The young La Trobe Elm at RBG Nursery

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Important Plant Provenance

La Trobe's Elm *Ulmus procera* English Elm

Jenny Happell, volunteer guide at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, supplied the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage with the following information in December 2013:-

It was planted in the Gardens by La Trobe in 1851 in his capacity as Governor of the new state of Victoria. He planted it just outside what is now a new toilet block near the Tea Rooms, near the Touchwood bed.

Jenny was taking a guided walk in the Gardens one day in the 1990s, and one of the group said that his name was Cliff Grosvenor and that he had worked in the RBG as a gardener and propagator for 17 years (1960-1977). She later interviewed him about his time in the Gardens and he told a story about the elm: it had been rotting and was removed in 1977. Cliff collected some of its roots, about as thick as a finger, cut them into segments and planted them in the Nursery. He retired from the Gardens shortly afterwards. On paying a call a while later he found that small elms had grown one foot tall.

One of these resulting trees was planted on the site of the original tree by Dr. John Henry de La Trobe, La Trobe's great-nephew from Germany, on 4 May 1979. However, Jenny noticed to her horror in September 2012 that this tree had gone - apparently it had rotted again. Some more root cuttings were taken and the Nursery is looking after one of the plants, which has been incorporated into the City of Melbourne's replanting scheme for the Shrine Reserve; it will be planted just outside the Cottage fence in 2015.

***Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii' Weeping Elm**

The original was planted by Dr John Henry de La Trobe in 1989, at the former site of the Cottage where the Children's garden is now. In due course another one was planted at the current site but it died during the long drought. In March 2011 a third one, donated by the Friends of the Elms and bought from a nursery in Ballarat, was planted.

***Olea europaea* Olive**

'In the late 1840s, Georgiana McCrae gave a friend from the Liardet family a cutting from one of the olive trees growing in her orchards at Arthur's Seat. At that time, the Liardet family was preparing an orchard at their then new property, Ballam Park at Frankston. Today the tree at Ballam Park still stands and is very old.' – from 'Olive Tree Returned to McCrae Homestead' *National Trust Victorian News*, November 2010.



The *Olea europaea* Olive tree

Several cuttings were taken by the National Trust from the olive tree at Ballam Park in Frankston. One was planted on the 3 October 2010 at a re-enactment to celebrate La Trobe's arrival in Melbourne. The diamond shape garden bed replicates the bed in Gilberts' *A View of Jolimont... 1843-44*.

Rosa banksia

Dr Charles La Trobe Bateman, great great grandson of La Trobe, planted this in December 2006 when he was in Melbourne for the unveiling of the bronze statue of La Trobe at the State Library of Victoria.

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Pelargonium tomentosum Scented Geranium



Pelargonium tomentosum

Doug Gunn worked at Bedggood's Factory during the 1960s. He used to eat his lunch in the garden near what was left of the Cottage: La Trobe's dining room and the adjoining butler's pantry. At that time, there was a geranium growing near the Cottage, from which cuttings were taken. Doug's friend, Stewart Bradley, grew these cuttings. Stewart gave Helen Botham some cuttings from which were grown the plants around the Cottage. There is no written record of this story.

Pelargoniums Geraniums



Spring Pelargonium cucullatum

Pelargoniums otherwise known as geraniums are very popular garden plants, as they were in La Trobe's time. Using the sketches of Edward La Trobe Bateman we think that we have identified geraniums in his garden. We know from one of his letters to daughter Agnes that he established a geranium hedge. Our geranium hedge is situated along the back of the Kitchen Block. There are stories that geraniums and wormwood plants helped to keep away snakes, but whether this is true or not, we do not know.

The pelargoniums were donated by the Pelargonium Society based at the Geelong Botanic Gardens and the ones we planted are:

Pelargonium acetose
Pelargonium cucullatum
Pelargonium inquinans
Pelargonium trista

Heritage Roses

La Trobe loved roses and we know he had red and yellow ones and many were climbers. Unfortunately he does not record which ones he had, so we had to do our best. The roses chosen were ones that were available in the 1800s up until 1854 when he returned to England and are still available today from growers. The red roses of the 18th century were more of a deep burgundy colour, rather than the reds today of the Hybrid T's and Floribunda roses.



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We have the following roses:

Rosa alba 'Felicite Parmentier' (1834-36)
Rosa 'Arthur de Sansal' (1855)
Rosa banksiae (1807)
Rosa 'Chateau Neopoleon' (1826)
Rosa 'Duchesse d'Angouleme' (1835)

Rosa 'du Roi' (1812)
Rosa 'du Roi Fleurs pourpres' (1844)
Rosa 'Louise Odier' (1851)
Rosa spinosissima (1753?)

More provenance:

***Maurandya barclaiana* Mrs. Perry's Creeper**

Mrs. Perry (Bishop Perry's wife) is noted to have seen this creeper in La Trobe's garden.

Jan. 25 [1848] ... We have only seen two creepers in flower yet, and they were both at Mr L [a Trobe]'s; one was my pet, which used to hang so gracefully from the baskets in our garden at Cambridge. From *Australian Sketches: The Journals and Letters of Frances Perry*, p.71.



Maurandya barclaiana growing on the lattice

The Friends of La Trobe's Cottage planted a *Maurandya barclaiana* in the front of the Cottage on the newly installed lattice. It came from Jenny Happell, who is Georgiana McCrae's great great grand-daughter and a volunteer guide at the Royal Botanic Gardens. In September 2013 we donated one to Bishops court, which was built for Bishop Perry in 1853.

Garden Bench

Using a sketch of Edward La Trobe Bateman's *Part of lower rockery at Jolimont*, Alastair Boell of Melbourne Guild of Fine Woodworking was able to build a replica of the garden bench and donate it to the garden in 2013.



Plants named after La Trobe

La Trobe was a keen botanist and throughout his travels to Switzerland, America and Australia he collected plants and sent them to be described. Why he did not send them to the English botanists of the day is a puzzle. Instead he sent them to Dr Carl Meisner (1800-1874) who was a botanist at Basal University in Switzerland. Meisner described hundreds of species of Australian plants in the families of Proteaceae, Fabaceae, Mimosaceae and Myrtaceae.



The original *Glycine latrobeana* in the Elm bed

To read more about Meisner see *Genus Latrobea*

<http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/GardenGenusLatrobea.pdf>

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In honour of La Trobe, Meisner named a genus after him calling it Latrobea, which is a Western Australian species in the Fabaceae alt. Papilionaceae family. Another well known botanist [Ferdinand Mueller](#), who was appointed the first qualified Government Botanist by La Trobe in 1853, named several plants in his honour. We have planted many of these plants in the garden. The three plants still named after La Trobe are:

Eremophila latrobei

Correa lawrenceana var. *latrobeana*

Glycine latrobeana

Crimson Turkey Bush

Mountain correa

Clover glycine

Flowers developing of *Correa lawrenceana* var. *latrobeana*

Glycine latrobeana

Glycine latrobeana known as Purple clover is a relative of the soya bean. It is a small perennial herb and looks similar to common pasture clover. Its distribution is down the southeast coast of Australia including Tasmania and South Australia.

Its habitat has been destroyed due to European animals grazing and the disruption of the gold rushes in the 19th century. The current conservation status of Clover Glycine, *Glycine latrobeana*, legislation is:

National: Listed as Vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

South Australia: Listed as Vulnerable under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*.

Tasmania: Listed as Vulnerable under the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*.

Victoria: Listed as Threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.



For further information on *Glycine latrobeana* go to http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/Garden_Glycine.pdf

In early 2014 the garden received a donation of seventeen plants, plus some local soil, from a property opposite High Camp Flora and Fauna Reserve on the Northern Highway, to the west of Broadford. So far they are doing well.

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Discoveries

Over the nearly 15 years that La Trobe was here, he rode around Victoria visiting communities and collecting plants along the way. Two plants we know of are:

Derwentia perfoliata (Diggers Speedwell) Scrophulariaceae collected in 1850 around the upper Loddon River and currently housed at the Melbourne Herbarium

<http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/Derwentia%20perfoliata.pdf>

and

Platylobium obtusangulum (Common Flat Pea) Fabaceae collected in the Port Phillip region in 1842 and now housed at Université de Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/Platylobium_obtusangulum.pdf

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Pictures of the Garden in the King's Domain



Weeping Elm bed, Spring 2011



Arum lilies – Dining room verandah



Newly planted Succulent bed



Camellia flowering

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Prostanthera lasiantha
Hardenbergia violacea
Native mint bush with
'Happy Wanderer' (purple flower)



Aporocactus flagelliformis
Rat's tail



Aloe arborescens



Blue Iris in Spring, 2012



Valerian in the Weeping Elm bed



Weeping Elm bed, Winter 2012



Parodia ottonis about to flower