

Over the Garden Fence

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The fence in the Australian garden is symbolic: by defining the boundary between 'the country' and the garden, it is seen as defining the limitations of men's and women's efforts to remake the landscape. In Australia it is argued the garden does not jump the fence and extend into the countryside but that it huddles around the house. Consequently the garden is seen as a symbol of an alien, imported world unable to make progress against the forces of nature that are the Australian environment. The fence divides the wished-for world from the reality of the country.

This perception of the place of gardens in the landscape presupposes that the colonist felt alienated from the landscape. Yet woman like writer and painter, Louisa Atkinson who was later to marry James Calvert of Yass, a man who had journeyed with Leichhardt to the northern regions of Australia, can be found in the 1860s collecting plants from Mount Tomah for her garden. This appreciation of native flora is not confined to the botanising lady, as Judge Bindon - when not giving his attention to the law - could be found in the spring of 1868 photographing the wildflowers of Gippsland. Men and women took delight in being among the flowers of the colony.

Among such people were the gardeners of the day. In a lecture delivered in 1873 entitled *A Few Hints for Enlivening the Garden during Winter*, Dines, the gardener to Sir Frederick Sargood of Melbourne, recommended Australian plants:

'The *Grevillea* named in honour of the right C.F. Greville, a promoter of natural history, *Latrobeii* after Governor La Trobe. This pretty dwarf species is found growing wild at Malvern and various parts of the colony; the flowers vary in colour on the same plant, being from lemon to bright rose colour. This is a lovely species and does best in heavy soils.'

Apart from the obvious delight displayed by Dines this recommendation is important because it tells us that Dines has seen the plant in its uncultivated state and that like Louisa Atkinson, he brings back to the garden what he has seen beyond it. Moreover Dines does not confine himself to only this Australian plant for, in his lecture, he praises and delights in *Hakeas*, *Banksias*, *Correas*, the *Westringa* and *Boronia*. If Dines is any guide, Australian plants had a place in the garden of the Melbourne suburban villa.

In the countryside, it is known that Mr. Molesworth Greene, the owner of Greystones near Bacchus Marsh in Victoria, had ordered that in establishing his garden every measure should be undertaken to keep the native trees. This suggests that not all colonists felt that the elements of the countryside should be banished from the acre around the house. Dines as a gardener had reservations about such preferences:

'Some people who have on their places native trees such as gums and wattles will not have them removed no matter how unsightly they are, but it is quite certain that no garden plant will ever make a healthy growth if within reach of their roots.'

Indeed he suggested they be cut down; the demands of form and pattern book taste may lie behind the recommendation of a man who had gone botanising in the wilds of Malvern. Yet it appears owners could not be so easily persuaded to sacrifice native trees for the sake of conforming to such taste. Indeed the construction of ha-ha walls by the Chirnsides in 1857 at the second house at Werribee Park, at Russells' Leslie Manor near Camperdown and at Merrang near Hexham in the 1860s suggests a desire on behalf of the occupants to leap over the fence and include the countryside in their vision. The retention of trees and the building of ha-has both reflect an accommodation with

the nature of the place. The garden may not necessarily be seen as the antithesis of the surrounding countryside.

An understanding of how to read the above efforts may be found in the story *Hugh Lindsay's Guest* written by the British-born, South Australian governess, Catherine Helen Spence. Published in 1874, a year after Dines's lecture, Spence has her heroine, Amy, return to England after a sojourn in the back country of South Australia. The gentleman's estate is an image carefully contrived by Spence to suggest the limitations of taste as encountered in the English pleasure ground:

'Mr Derrick had spared no expense in laying out the extensive pleasure grounds and although he had no great taste in these things he had availed himself of the taste and skill of others; and the lawn and terraces and clumps of wood and artificial lakes and rockeries gave a variety of what was originally a flat and bare piece of ground and also had the effect of making fifty acres look like a hundred.'

Spence undercuts this landscape of taste by having her heroine's thoughts travel to South Australia as she journeys through the pleasure grounds and by having her heroine suggest that some stately gums could improve the scene.

What this improving eye unconsciously reflects is the nineteenth century's acceptance that a scene can contain elements from other parts of the globe; a not unnatural perception given the explosion of plant material brought back by intrepid plant collectors from all over the globe, and given the nature of the colonists' own voyages to the Australian colonies where they caught glimpses of other worlds. In raising plants from all over the world in their gardens, the nineteenth century Australian colonists were not expressing alienation but were reflecting the passion for the new plant engendered by plant collectors and by their own experiences. Dines reflects this interest in his lecture when he enlivens it with the pedigree of the plant; who found it and after whom it was

named. Dines's audience who, like him, had ventured at least to the wilds of Malvern, must have found something in common with the plant collector; for they too had crossed the world to seek out the *Grevillea* or the wildflowers of Gippsland.

The garden in the nineteenth century became a place where vegetation from all over the globe could be collected. Consequently, Dines in his lecture not only recommends Australian plants but also 'the natives of the Cape of Good Hope', plants from Brazil, South America and China whilst New Zealand is described as 'the country of the *Veronica*'. This perception also underlies the efforts made by Daniel Bunce, curator of the Geelong Botanical Gardens, in planting these gardens. For instance, he was sent in 1862 eight cotton seeds collected by Dr. Livingstone in Africa, seeds from the Haast expedition to New Zealand in 1864, as well as being presented with *Quercus ilex* acorns by Charles Ibbotson, owner of The Heights, Geelong, after his return from Europe in 1865. Introductions of plant material into Australia were not merely introductions from the old world, they also represented the fruits of scientific exploration and the colonists' ability to journey across the seas.

Just how much a garden could reflect the fruits of travel can be judged by the example of Charles Ryan, the owner of the fabled Macedon retreat, Derriweit Heights. Ryan in the early 1880s travelled to England across the United States. As his journey progressed ever eastward, he spied plants en route, ordered them from nurseries and had them shipped back to await his return. Thus the garden in Australia may also be seen as a symbol of a man who had undertaken a grand tour, grander than most of his European contemporaries who stepped no further in search of sights and stones than Venice.

In the garden at The Heights, Geelong, there are *Quercus ilex*, presumably raised from the acorns Ibbotson collected during his grand tour in 1865. If true, their presence is a delightful detail around a house which floated twelve thousand miles on the sea from Germany before being beached and its prefabricated parts assembled in 1855. One image from one voyage is 'overlayed' by an image gathered from another.

By the nineteenth century, the world had contracted to such a degree that there could be many worlds within gardens. Thus Ryan not only shipped back the latest English alpinists but also North American trees. In the same manner, some twenty years earlier, the Officers of Murray Downs, across the river from Swan Hill, had shipped back from their Mediterranean honeymoon oranges from Jaffa, cedars from Lebanon and palms. The colonial garden became a place where the journey from and to the colony could be recalled and where in one's isolation up-country one could be linked to a wider world. For a colonist to go out into the garden was to place himself in the Cosmos.

For an Australian colonist and member of Empire, self-definition was, in part, in terms of one's place in a globe coloured red by the cartographer. Thus colonial novelist Rolf Boldrewood saw the gardens at Derriveit in imperial terms describing them as 'that Simla of the south,' (Figure 1) while Dines's talk of 'the natives of the Cape Colony' reflects the language of superiority that was Empire. And would not the ties of Empire have been stronger for the citizens of that toehold of the great continent, Geelong, when they could see by 1864 the eight seeds collected by that great missionary of Empire growing in their own public gardens? Darkest Africa could even be glimpsed in Geelong.

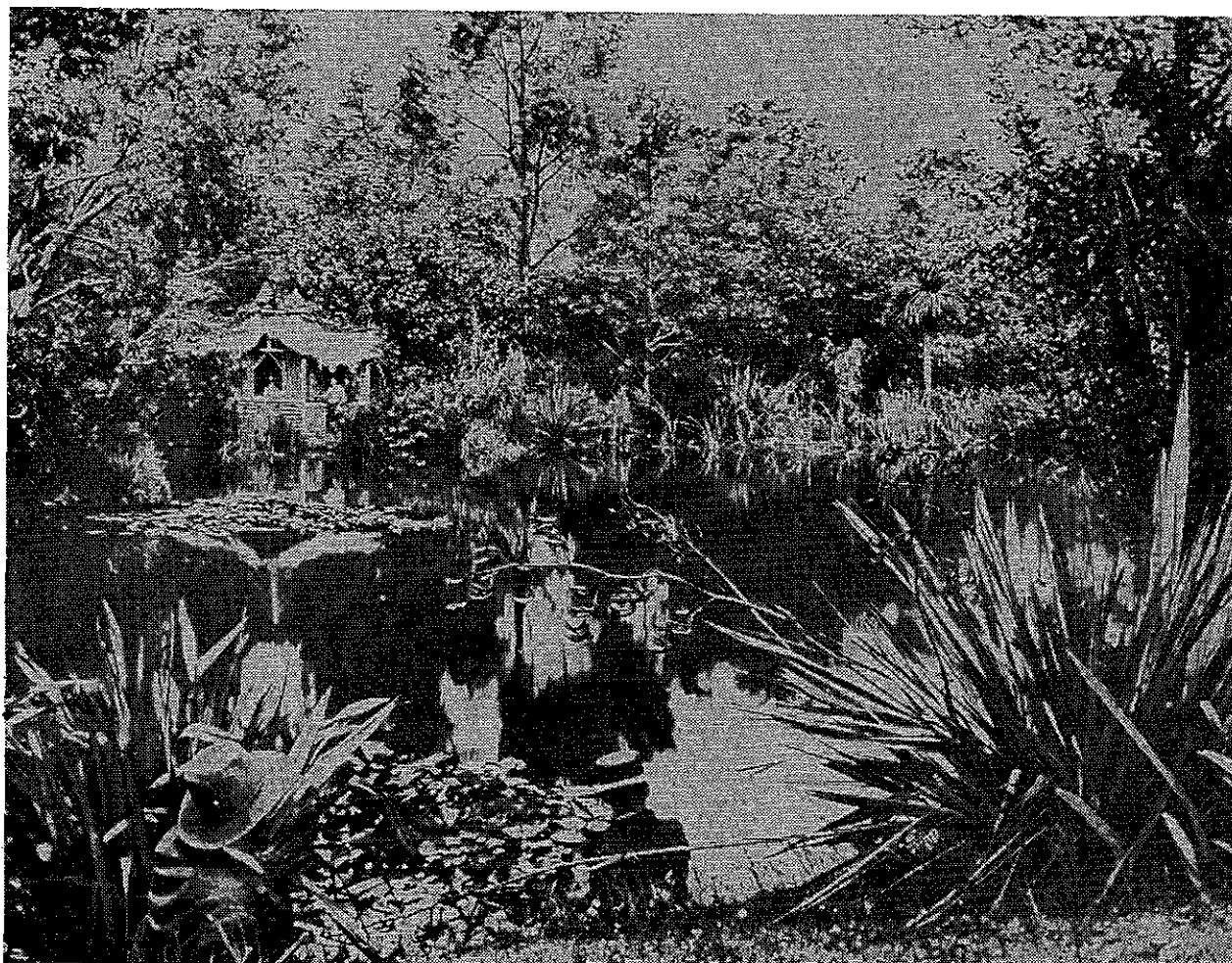


Figure 1 Derriveit Heights, Mount Macedon - property of Charles Ryan - the Simla of the South (La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria)

This comparative aspect of the colonial experience can be seen in the planting of particular trees in the colony. For instance the planting of *Wellingtonia gigantea* reflects a contemporary comparison of Australia with another part of the world. The planting of this tree in Australian gardens was accompanied by newspaper columns devoted to its characteristics and the places where it grew naturally. One such article appeared in Henry Parkes' newspaper *The Empire* which in July 1864 ran a story on the 'Mammoth Trees of California'. It was only in 1853 that the plant hunter William Lobb had introduced the *Wellingtonia* into England, yet five years later Daniel Bunce in Geelong had seed of this plant and by 1862 George Longley, curator of the Ballarat Botanic Gardens, had raised sufficient numbers of this tree to plant the avenue of *Wellingtonias* which we see there today.

The planting of these trees should not be considered as symbols of alienation - the reverse is true. It in fact reflects the comparison that the colonist was making with the newly discovered trees in the forests of Gippsland. The debate that centred on the comparison was which country had the tallest trees in the world, California with its *Wellingtonia* or Victoria with its *Eucalyptus regnans* (Mountain Ash).

The planting of the *Wellingtonia* is a physical expression of this debate. For the colonist whose self-image was in part defined by being a member of Empire, it seemed only natural to call upon visiting royalty to participate in the debate. In 1867, the citizens of Castlemaine had Alfred, the second son of their Queen, plant a *Wellingtonia* in their botanical gardens; at the same time the first man to put this comparison into words, Ferdinand von Mueller, was enthusing about Gippsland where the Mountain Ash grew tall:

'Until the breaking out of the great rush to Gippsland comparatively few persons knew of the wonderful variety of vegetation which exists on the eastern side of the colony...Perhaps however the most curious fact in regard to Australia and Victoria is the immense size it attains.'

Indeed, at the Black Spur near Fernshaw, where the mountain ash grew immense, and invariably the place where the comparison was drawn, the photographer, Lindt, planted two *Wellingtonias* in the grounds of his newly built Hermitage (1896). Here the two contenders could grow in the same conditions and with time scientific observation would determine the truthfulness of the claims. These two trees still grow on the Spur, a testament to a debate which engaged the minds of men over a century ago.

Unless the scientific nature of the nineteenth century is recognized by the historian, the garden will continue to be seen as a place contained within the fence. Yet the changes induced in the landscape by European occupation demanded that it go beyond the fence. Between 1863 and 1866 Victoria was in the grip of a drought; a drought which Foster Fyans, the first but by then retired Land Commissioner of Geelong, observed had brought ruin to many a squatter. Consequently, the drought brought with it a sense of urgency and heartsearching amongst members of the squattocracy who had taken up country where no hard-footed animal had been encountered previously.

The heartsearching can be glimpsed in the title given by the failed squatter turned publicist, William Lockhart Morton, to an address in 1865. He spoke on *Physical Changes Resulting from Australian Colonization* and in words of prophetic warning he concluded with a nightmarish image:

'But where will the destruction end? If, after having destroyed the trees in the pastoral districts, insects extend their ravages to other members of the eucalypti on the ranges and mountains, as they will probably do, it is hard to say what a ruinous effect such a calamity might have on the climate.'

To gentlemen acquainted with the scientific theories of the day the lack of trees spelled nightmare for according to the widely read German scientist, Humboldt, author of *The Cosmos*, it was tree cover that provided rain.



Figure 2 Photograph of red gum forest by Richard Daintree
(La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria)

During the 1850s the tree cover of the colony had been reduced significantly by mining and during the 1860s there were reports of millions of trees dying in the colony of Victoria. To men of scientific sensibility the future must have been grim. These circumstances compelled the Victorian surveyor and geologist, Richard Daintree, to use the camera to record the condition of a red gum forest. (Figure 2) In that image appear dead trees. Such images perplexed Baron von Mueller, who had travelled with the explorer Gregory over vast tracts of

country where no trees grew. He asked 'why the tenants in pastoral districts subject to drought do not cause the seeds of trees to be gathered and sown with the view of establishing belts of timber'. Mueller in dogged fashion continued to speak on the need for trees so that in 1879 the members of that scientific body, The Royal Society of Victoria, sat in their tiered lecture theatre listening to his address on the maintenance, creation and enrichment of forests. It became imperative that men jump the garden fence for unlike Molesworth

Greene's property, either the trees were never there or had perished due to changes European man had set in motion.

Indeed the fence was jumped. During the 'winter' of the drought year of 1864, Mr. Andrew Chirnside of Carranballac, near Skipton, ordered two hundred pines from Thomas Lang's nursery at Ballarat with a view to forming a belt of trees across his property. This endeavour was seen by the **Ballarat Star** as being 'indicative of a position on the part of landowners to bear their part in enforesting the country with a view to the amelioration of the climate'.

Chirnside also was responsible for planting beyond the home paddock on his other properties. By the beginning of 1876 he had established plantations on 'the desolate plains' at Glencoe in south-east South Australia and at Mount Bute in the Western District.

Nor was Chirnside the only squatter who responded to the scientific perceptions of the needs of the landscape. At Windermere near Lara where the blue You Yangs rise in the distance above the plains, George Fairbairn began sowing seeds in the spring of 1876 and in the following year he had them planted out in rows along the fences.

The popularised ideas of Humboldt were again acknowledged by the journalist visitor to the property in 1880:

'If forest trees were encouraged to row upon the You Yangs and extensive plantations were formed upon the plains, the rain clouds instead of being forced to rise by the radiation of heat would be likely to descend and part with their water on the country which is now so frequently missed.'

Fairbairn's plantations were a private response to the denuded You Yangs; a



Figure 3 Windermere, near Lara, property of George Fairbairn, photographed by Fred Kruger (National Gallery of Victoria)

response in part formed by scientific perceptions of the influence of vegetation on the climate. Fairbairn by his actions had taken a page out of *The Cosmos* and given it three-dimensional form.

Four years of tree planting saw these plantations measured in miles - planting had gone far beyond the immediate confines of the newly built bulk of the homestead. Yet picturesque concerns were not sacrificed in the pursuit of scientific ideals for while most of the trees were blue gums, *Pinus insignis* and 'one or two varieties of stone pine', some plantations were made up of cypress, Murray Pines and other trees 'put in to add to the variety of foliage'. To the visitor of 1880 the planting made it a 'beautiful park'. Yet the form of that park is very different to the artifice of the gentleman's estate so carefully described earlier by Catherine Helen Spence. The boundaries are planted out in plantations of straight rows of trees and there are smaller plantations within this enclosure whilst 'an expansive and picturesque sheet of water half a mile in length' is formed by a dam at the juncture of two shallow creeks. There are no clumps of trees, only rows. This indeed was a park where stately gums were to be seen!

Here then is a colonial attempt to transpose Lake Windermere of the English Lake district. Yet the view of the estate taken by the photographer, Frederick Kruger, (Figure 3) from the second storey of that peculiar colonial invention, the verandah, shows us there is little to compare between the two Windermeres.

The colonial practice of plantations made for a very different image yet to the colonial the transported image had been realized; so much so that the journalist could envisage Fairbairn's Cambridge-educated sons who had rowed for their alma mater at 'the bumps', rowing on the dam to be found on the Lara Plains.

Garden historians looking for clumps of trees in the eighteenth century picturesque mode or for examples of Loudon's suggestions for planting have found few examples in Victoria; Murndal near Hamilton and the groups of three elms in the front paddock of

Mount Noorat appear respectively to be the only examples. Yet the visitor to Windermere saw the smaller plantations, even though they were in rows, as 'clumps'. To the mind's eye of the colonist, plantations were a thing of beauty in the landscape. This is implied by the 1880 visitor who when suggesting that the example set by Fairbairn be widely followed argues not only for reasons of climatic amelioration but also because it would 'add beauty to the landscape'. This concern over variety of foliage and over the description of plantations as 'clumps' suggests that the colonist saw linear plantations as being picturesque. Ironically the language of the picturesque is being used to describe something that the eighteenth century would have considered the opposite of picturesque. If this is the case, then the plantation in the Australian landscape should be regarded as a re-working for colonial conditions of the form of the picturesque English estate. The linear plantation is the form taken by the jump over the garden fence in the colonies.

Moreover, it is known that in some instances plantations were designed by individuals who were trained as gardeners. One such individual was Hugh Linaker who fittingly and significantly is commemorated in a plantation planted in his honour on the Melbourne-Geelong road. Linaker began his career in 1889 apprenticed to the Ballarat Town Council at the Gong Gong Reserve plantations and later became curator of the Botanical Gardens at Ararat. At the turn of the century, Linaker laid out plantations at Alexandra Park (Learmonth), North Woodland (Navarre), Mount William Estate (Mount William), Swinton (Glenorchy), Chalicum (Buangor) and Geelong Grammar School; showing that at the turn of the century in the colonies, the plantation was thought worthy enough to occupy the attention of a designer.

The nature of the colonial garden as a cosmos is an important concept for it re-examines the evidence and symbols of European alienation in the Australian colonies. It suggests that the nature of the nineteenth century colonial experience in Victoria was the exposure to images drawn from different parts of the globe, not

necessarily from England. One of these was vegetation which had been accessible through the plant hunter, nursery and traveller. Such images when transported to Victoria acted as points of contact and comparison with one's own place on the globe; they are not images of alienation but rather images by which one can place oneself in the wider cosmos. Moreover it can be argued that as a response to colonial conditions the garden did jump the fence into the wider landscape. The form it took was the now familiar plantation of trees on one edge of the paddock which may be an indigenous formulation of beauty. That the garden did jump the fence reflects not an inability to come to terms with the forces of nature that are supposedly inherent in 'the land', but a belief derived from the popularisation of a scientific theory found in Humboldt's *Cosmos*, arguing that these forces could be ameliorated. There are indeed worlds within gardens beyond the fence.