



BISHOPSCOURT

Welcome to Bishopscourt, the home of the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate of Australia.

Bishopscourt, one of the oldest properties in East Melbourne, has been the official residence of the Anglican Bishop, later Archbishop, of Melbourne since 1853. It is the last intact urban estate within the City of Melbourne. For a time it was the residence of the State Governor.

Bishop Perry, the first Bishop of Melbourne, selected the site in 1848. A prime site in East Melbourne, its main views at the time were south across Jolimont and Richmond Paddock, (later Yarra Park), to the Yarra River Flats and the Domain beyond. The Fitzroy Gardens to the west of the site were not developed until the 1860s. The house, designed by the architects, Newson and Blackburn, was finally ready for occupation in January 1853 and was Bishop Perry's home until 1874. The red brick northern wing, designed by the architects, Inskip and (Walter) Butler, was completed in 1903.

In 1854, architect Charles Swyer laid out the grounds. His job was made easy by the siting of the residence by Newson and Blackburn in the north-eastern corner of the property, east of an ancient river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). This eucalypt, often referred to as the Corroboree Tree, survived on the site until the 1990s. A replacement tree, a seedling of the mature river red gum on the Clarendon St fence line, has been planted in the lawn.

Walter Butler was a talented landscape architect and it is believed that during the 1903 extensions to the house he had some influence on the garden. Indeed, it was at this time that he delivered a seminal paper on landscape design to the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects which included this comment: *'If a garden is as much a work of man's art as his house is, it is – owing to their oneness, and inseparableness – as much the architect's business to design the garden as to design the house.'*

Resident bishops or archbishops and their families have enjoyed the garden and many have made their own contribution. Bishop James Moorhouse chose the garden to bury his faithful dog in 1884 and the headstone can still be seen with the touching inscription *'In memory of Dear Old Tim, a friend true and tried'*. Bishop Lowther Clark and his wife, who took up occupancy in 1904, are reported to have held many garden parties, as did Archbishop Harrington Lees. The tradition continued and there are numerous reports available of garden parties right up until the present day.

Archbishop Woods and his wife were both keen gardeners and lived with their family at Bishopscourt for 20 years (1957–1977). They planted the escallonia hedge to screen the southern garden from the driveway and provide privacy. Mrs Woods planted several native trees on the eastern boundary of the southern garden and the family named this planting 'the Deanery Screenery' referring to the neighbouring property which was then owned by the church and the residence of the Dean of Melbourne. Archbishop Woods' love of figs resulted in several of these trees being planted in the orchard. Archbishop Peter Watson, pursued (unsuccessfully) possum control methods and his wife Margo was tireless in watering according to restrictions of the day.



From the 1960s, garden maintenance focused on a tidy appearance and little real gardening was done. In 1998 the church lodged an application to Heritage Victoria to subdivide the land at Bishopscourt. They wished to excise the south-eastern corner of the site. The East Melbourne Group and the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) were objectors. Heritage Victoria disallowed the subdivision. In July 2001 the AGHS commenced a program of working bees on the 3rd Wednesday of each month which continue today. New volunteers of any ability and gardening experience are welcome to join.

Following years of neglect, plants had been lost and layers of rubbish, ivy and other weeds built up in the shrubberies. The working bees cleared much away and rubbish continues to be managed by separating chippable material from that suitable for composting.

Bishopscourt (house and garden) is included on the Victorian Heritage Register and 18 trees are included on the citation. Nine of the major trees are also on the City of Melbourne's register of exceptional trees. These include two English elms (*Ulmus procera*), the Port Jackson fig (*Ficus rubiginosa*), the Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), two Monterey cypresses (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), the river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), and two Dutch elms (*Ulmus xhollandica*), some of which were planted in the late 1800s.

The root zone of the Port Jackson fig (*Ficus rubiginosa*) was for years covered by logs and suffered from extreme stress due to soil compaction. The wood heap was relocated to enable the tree to receive attention; it responded well and has been added to the National Trust's Significant Tree Register. In 2002 a number of brick paths with spoon drains were rediscovered under the fig. These paths are important elements of the garden's path network although they are currently covered with gravel.

Heritage Victoria funding enabled the driveway and some garden paths to be resurfaced, the pergola to be reconstructed and four *Ulmus x hollandica* (Dutch elm), an *Agathis robusta*, a *Robinia pseudoacacia* and a *Magnolia grandiflora* to be replaced. Donations received from events and tours of the house and garden enable ongoing maintenance of the garden. Beehives sponsored by local organisations have been located in the vegetable garden, improving pollination throughout the garden.

In December 2006 Archbishop Philip and Joy Freier moved into the Chaplain's residence and then in 2007 into the main house that they have made their home. With an intensity equal to efforts in the garden, the Archbishop and Mrs Freier have set about the rehabilitation and restoration of the interior of the house, starting with the main reception and dining rooms that are used extensively for church and community purposes.

Bishopscourt continues to present challenges including water restrictions, elm suckers, possums, rats and weeds, particularly acanthus, ivy, wandering jew and oxalis.

In 2011 an underground brick cistern (approx. 20,000 litres) – originally the house water supply – was rediscovered and cleaned. The old hand pump, buried under the accumulated silt, has been rebuilt. The cistern and a new tank installed under the front lawn and filled by rainwater from the house roof, have been integrated into a capture and watering scheme for the garden – made possible through the support of the Vera Moore Foundation.

Over the last 15 years there have been a number of supporters of the garden and all donations and assistance are gratefully received. The goal is for the garden to be financially self-sustaining.

For information about tours and working bees contact Libby Marsden at marsden.libby@gmail.com.