



BISHOPSCOURT

Welcome to Bishopscourt, the home of the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne and Metropolitan of Victoria.

Bishopscourt is one of the oldest properties in East Melbourne and has been the official residence of the Anglican Bishops and later the Archbishops of Melbourne since 1853. It is the last intact urban estate within the City of Melbourne. For a time, it was used as the residence of the Victorian Governor.

Bishop Perry, the first Bishop of Melbourne, selected this prime site in 1848. 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 bluestone house was designed by the architects Newson and Blackburn and was finally ready for occupation in January 1853. Until 1874 it was home to Bishop Perry and Mrs Frances Perry. The redbrick northern wing designed by architects Inskip and 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 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 seedling of the mature River Red Gum on the Clarendon Street fenceline has been planted in the lawn as a replacement.

Walter Butler was a talented architect and it is believed that during the 1903 extensions to the house he had some influence on the garden. 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 and Archbishops and their families have enjoyed the garden and many have made their own contributions. Bishop James Moorhouse chose to bury his faithful dog under the Corroboree Tree in 1884 and the headstone may still be seen with the touching inscription: *'In memory of Dear Old Tim, a friend true and tried'*. Bishop Lowther Clarke and Mrs Clarke, 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 newspaper reports of garden parties in the grounds 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'. The Deanery is the house on the neighbouring property which was then owned by the church and was the residence of the Dean of Melbourne. Archbishop Woods' love of figs resulted in two of these trees being planted in the orchard.

Archbishop Peter Watson pursued possum control methods (sadly unsuccessful) and his wife Margo was tireless in watering during the drought years. The Watsons lived at Bishopscourt from 2000 to 2005.

From the 1960s, garden maintenance focused on a tidy appearance and little, if any, real gardening was done. In 1998 the church lodged an application with Heritage Victoria to subdivide Bishopscourt and excise the south-eastern corner of the site where the vegetable garden is located. 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 third Wednesday of each month. Layers of rubbish, ivy and other weeds had built up in the shrubberies and this was the first problem to be addressed at the working bees. Nowadays plant material is chipped for mulch or composted and returned to the garden.



Bishopscourt (both the house and garden) is included on the Victorian Heritage Register and 18 trees are listed 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 x hollandica*). Some of these trees were planted in the 1800s.

The root zone of the Port Jackson Fig was for many years covered by heaps of logs and the tree suffered from extreme stress due to soil compaction. The wood heap was relocated, enabling the tree to receive some much-needed attention. It responded well and has been added to the National Trust's Significant Tree Register. In 2002 a number of brick paths complete 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 of the garden paths to be resurfaced. Later the gutters along the driveway were rehabilitated. The pergola, which had been lost, was reconstructed and four Dutch Elms, a Kauri Pine (*Agathis robusta*), a Golden Robinia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) and a Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) were replaced.

In 2011 a large underground brick cistern (30,000 litre), originally the water supply for the house, was rediscovered and cleaned. The old hand pump, found buried under the accumulated silt, has been rebuilt and is in working order. The cistern and a new tank (100,000 litre) installed under the front lawn and filled by rainwater from the roof of the house, have been integrated into a water capture and watering scheme for the garden. This was made possible through the generous support of the Vera Moore Foundation.

Beehives managed by Melbourne City Rooftop Honey contribute to the health of the garden.

As with all gardens, Bishopscourt continues to present many challenges – including water restrictions, elm suckers, possums, rats and weeds (particularly acanthus, ivy, tradescantia and oxalis). Trees must be kept in good condition, lawns mowed, garden beds planted and maintained and general upkeep undertaken.

After moving to Bishopscourt in 2006, the Archbishop and Mrs Freier have set about the rehabilitation and restoration of the interior and exterior of the house, starting with the main reception and dining rooms which are used extensively for church and community purposes. The exterior of the house is currently being worked on.

Donations received from tours of the house and garden and from events such as Open Gardens (2002, 2003, 2013 and 2017) enable ongoing maintenance of the garden. Costs include arborists, elm leaf beetle treatment, maintenance of lawns, tools for the volunteer team and successive infrastructure renewal projects. Over the past 15 years there have been a number of supporters of the garden and all donations are gratefully received. The goal is for the garden to be financially self-sustaining.

Thanks are due to very many people who have supported the Bishopscourt garden in a wide range of ways over the past two decades, especially the Vera Moore Foundation. More recently responsibility for the property has been taken over by a Board of Trustees. One of their major tasks is to raise money to create an endowment fund to generate income to sustain the property.

Tours of the house and garden with morning tea are available by request. A donation of \$20 per person with a \$400 minimum is requested prior to the tour.

Garden volunteers work in the garden every Thursday except for the week of the third Wednesday of each month, when the gardening is done on the Wednesday. For tour or Bishopscourt working bee enquiries please contact Libby Marsden on 0407 825 226 or marsden.libby@gmail.com.