

# Australian Garden

vol 28 no 4 April 2017

## HISTORY



A modern-day plant hunter  
Campaign for an avenue of honour  
Betty Quelhurst's floral carpets



Sandra Pullman

The first part of this article was published in vol 28 no 3 January 2017 of Australian Garden History.

# *Charles Joseph La Trobe's garden* PART 2



Surprisingly, the plants available to Charles La Trobe for his Melbourne garden included quite a few native species. Although it is sometimes popularly believed that Australians of the time did not like natives, this is not so, as the work of the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage shows. Plants such as mintbush (*Prostanthera lasianthos*), white correa (*Correa alba*) and Gynea lily (*Doryanthes excelsa*) were available.

## Plant sleuths

Page 21: George Alexander Gilbert  
*A View of Jolimont*,  
Melbourne, Port  
Phillip 1843–44.

State Library of Victoria

Page 21: Front view  
of Jolimont. Pencil  
and Chinese white  
drawing on brown  
paper by Edward  
La Trobe Bateman,  
ca 1852–54.

State Library of Victoria

Sourcing heritage plants can be difficult because today most modern nurseries only stock popular hybrids or cultivars, rarely the good old species plants. It took a while but finally a list of growers was established who supplied unusual plants. These growers include the Growing Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, the Propagation Group of the Friends of Burnley Gardens, the Salvia Society Victoria, the Pelargonium Society based at the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Andrew Thompson from Cactusland.

While some of the plants in La Trobe Bateman's sketches, such as the flax (*Phormium tenax*), were really easy to identify, others were really hard. It is quite possible that the identity of some, such as creepers growing on the trellis and on the roof of the cottage, may never be known.

The next problem arose when choosing plants like the roses and the apple trees. Where there are thousands to choose from, which ones did La Trobe grow? He gives no clues, except to say in the case of the roses, that they were red and yellow. In these circumstances the Friends did their best to stay within the time period and were guided by what growers can supply today.

## Plants named after La Trobe

To their delight, the Friends discovered that La Trobe had quite a few plants named after him, including his own genus. We decided to have as many as these plants as possible in the garden. You can find *Acacia acinacea* (syn. *Acacia latrobei*) gold-dust wattle, *Correa lawrenceana* var. *latrobeana* mountain correa, *Glycine latrobeana* purple clover, *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* subsp. *rosmarinifolia* (syn. *G. latrobei*) rosemary grevillea, *Eremophila latrobei* crimson turkey bush, and *Pandorea pandorana* (syn. *T. latrobei* (Mueller)) wonga vine. We have been unable to source plants of the Western Australian genus *Latrobea*.

La Trobe was a keen botanist. He made 94 journeys into the wilds of undiscovered Victoria, often visiting places that few if any European

settlers had visited (Reilly Drury 2006). On these amazing trips he would collect plants. La Trobe sent his specimens to the Swiss botanist Carl Meisner (1800–74), a prominent European professor of botany for 40 years at Basel University, whose speciality was Australian plants, in particular the families of Proteaceae, Fabaceae, Mimosaceae and Myrtaceae. Why La Trobe sent them to Meisner and not to the famous English botanists of the time Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911) or George Bentham (1800–84) is not known. It was Meisner who named a new genus *Latrobea* in the Fabaceae family after La Trobe.

## La Trobe's collecting

Another exciting discovery was that the National Herbarium of Victoria contains a specimen of digger's speedwell (*Derwentia perfoliata*) collected by La Trobe in 1850 in the upper reaches of the Loddon River while he was exploring the Great Dividing Range. So of course one of these had to be planted in the garden.

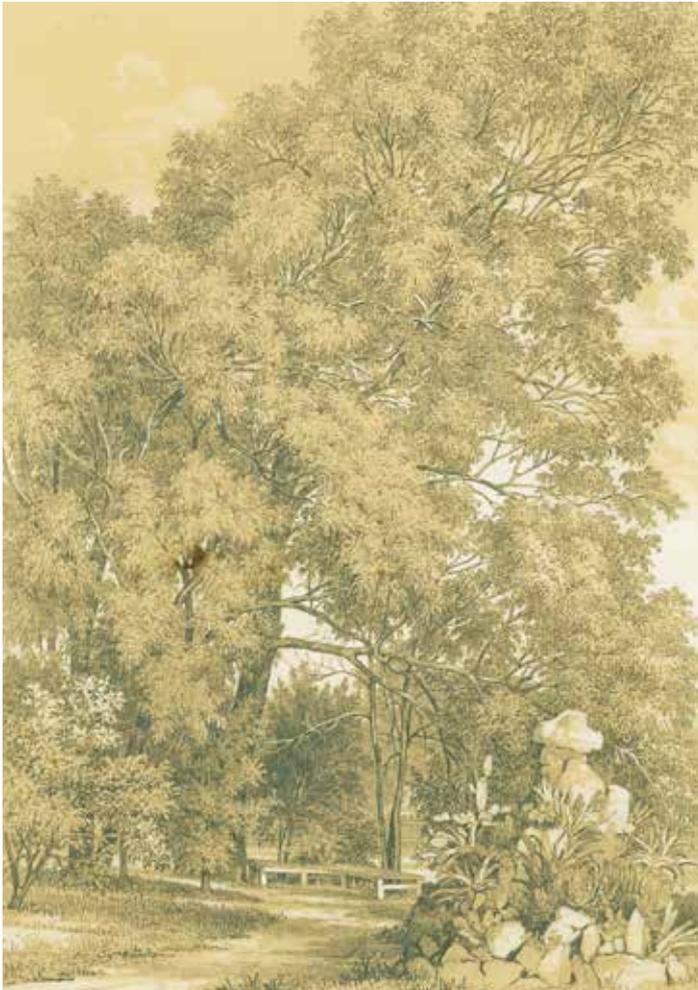
In 1853 La Trobe employed Dr Ferdinand von Mueller as Victoria's first professional botanist. In gratitude for La Trobe's patronage, Mueller named the wonga wonga vine *Tecoma latrobei* after La Trobe. This plant has had several name changes, and the synonyms tell the story of its naming. It is now known as *Pandorea pandorana* (Steenis 1928) syn. *Bignonia pandorana* (Andrews 1800), syn. *Tecoma australis* (Brown 1810), syn. *Tecoma latrobei* (Mueller 1853). There is a delightful letter from von Mueller to William Hooker at Kew, lamenting that *Tecoma latrobei* was going to be changed to *T. australis* (Home 1998, 2012).

### Changes in botanical names

Many plants incur name changes. The protocol for naming algae, fungi, and plants in the International Code of Nomenclature is that the first person to describe and publish the information about the plant has the right to name it. Communication in the 19th century was very slow compared to today's speed of sharing knowledge, and it would not have been uncommon for other botanists to be unaware that a plant had already been named.

## Garden treasures

The garden at La Trobe's Cottage is full of interesting plants that have connections to La Trobe, his friends and family. There is the scented geranium that is said to have come from a cutting when the cottage was in Jolimont, and the angel's trumpet – or as the Friends call it, Mrs Perry's Creeper (*Maurandya barclayana*)



— growing over the trellis on the front steps. The Bishop and Mrs Frances Perry lived at Upper Jolimont while their home Bishops Court was being built in East Melbourne. Mrs Perry noted in her journal that she had seen it growing in La Trobe's garden (A de Q Robin 1983).

Another two plants of interest which have connections with La Trobe are the banksia rose (*Rosa banksiae*) and the weeping elm (*Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdownii'). The banksia rose was planted on the corner of the verandah in 2006 when Dr Charles La Trobe Blake, great-great-grandson of La Trobe, was visiting Melbourne for the unveiling of the bronze statue of La Trobe outside the State Library of Victoria.

Dr John Henry de La Trobe planted the original weeping elm in 1989 on the site that is now the children's garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. His great-great-grandfather John Frederic de La Trobe was the younger brother of Christian Ignatius La Trobe, who was Charles La Trobe's father. When the cottage moved across the road to the Kings Domain either the elm was moved or another specimen was planted, but it died due to the 14 years of drought that Melbourne experienced from 1995 to 2009.

In March 2011, the Friends sourced another one (they had become hard to get) and it was donated by the Friends of the Elms. It now is thriving, after an early setback when it was nearly ringbarked by possums.

Other plants of interest are *Pelargonium acetosum* sorrel-leaved pelargonium, *P. cucullatum* tree pelargonium, *P. inquinans* (2011) scarlet geranium, *Salvia patens* gentian sage, *Camellia japonica* 'Anemoniflora', waratah camellia *C. japonica* 'Welbankii' (white flower), Iris 'Jolimont' (white) bearded iris, *Rosa* 'Duchesse d' Angouleme' (gallica rose), *Rosa* 'Chateau de Napoleon' (moss rose), *Rosa alba* 'Felicite Parmentier' (alba rose), *Rosa* 'Louise Odier' (bourbon rose), Rose du Roi a 'Fleurs Pourpres', *Malus* 'Ribston Pippin' (1709) apple, and *Malus* 'Pomme de Neige' (pre 1800s).

This is but a small selection of species. There is more information on our plants and their provenance on the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage website [www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/garden.html](http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/garden.html). Over the last seven years, the cottage and garden have been transformed. Visitors often give positive feedback about the garden and the volunteers are proud of a garden that reflects their hard work and dedication to creating a garden similar to the one La Trobe himself created.

Left: Part of lower rockery at Jolimont. Sketch by E La Trobe Bateman. State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Picture Collection

Right: The weeping elm bed in summer. photo Sandra Pullman

La Trobe's Cottage  
open October–April  
2–4pm Sundays

Tours of La Trobe's  
Cottage and  
Government  
House Monday  
and Thursday  
mornings, book on  
the National Trust  
website

### Garden styles of La Trobe's time: picturesque and gardenesque

More investigation is needed before resolving the question of what style (if any) La Trobe designed his garden in. In the Conservation Analysis report prepared for the National Trust Victoria, Miles Lewis (1994) notes that La Trobe was a 'connoisseur of the picturesque and landscape painter of talent'. But this contradicts Gilbert's painting *A View of Jolimont*, which shows a gardenesque arrangement where there is enough space between each plant to show their characteristics and grow into each other. However, by the time his cousin Edward La Trobe Bateman is sketching the garden in 1853–54, it had gone romantic and wild. An interesting question arises, did La Trobe deliberately create a wild garden or did it go wild because of the lack of labour? It is a question that we may never know the answer to. But it does fit into the picturesque aesthetic, as the picturesque was a reaction to the formal manicured gardens.

The picturesque was an 18th century ideal introduced to the cultural debate by garden theorist William Gilpin (1724–1804) who liked natural gardens. He intended that the landscapes were to be appreciated in the romantic view of the painters such as Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) or Claude Lorrain (1604–1682). The picturesque was concerned with the question of what was beauty and what was sublime? Beautiful elements could be smoothness and gentle curves, and sublime could be dramatic natural landscapes using scenes such as wild rivers or jagged craggy mountains with mists swirling round or ruins of castles. They could also include landscapes where the viewer got a shock or surprise, making the senses come alive if viewers were not expecting something so rugged, dramatic, or scary (C Anne Neale 2002). None of the landscapes were natural – they were manipulated to create the effect a gardener wanted.

Top: Love-in-a-mist.  
photo Sandra Pullman

Bottom: Heritage  
apples ripening,  
La Trobe's Cottage.  
photo Sandra Pullman



### Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr Dianne Reilly for her guidance in writing this two-part article.

### Notes

- 1 Advertiser [Adel], Friends of La Trobe's Cottage, Garden Page, The genus *Latrobea* [www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/GardenGenusLatrobea.pdf](http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/GardenGenusLatrobea.pdf)
- 2 Friends of La Trobe's Cottage, Garden Page, *Derwentia perfoliata* [www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/Derwentia%20perfoliata.pdf](http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/documents/Derwentia%20perfoliata.pdf).
- 3 Friends of La Trobe's Cottage, Garden Page, Charles La Trobe and Ferdinand Mueller [www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/Mueller.html](http://www.foltc.latrobesociety.org.au/Mueller.html).

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The work of **Sandra Pullman** (graduate of Burnley 2005) with the Friends of La Trobe's Cottage won the historical interpretation category of the Victorian Community History Awards in 2014 for the La Trobe Cottage garden. Sandra is interested in early students at the Burnley School of Horticulture, and is doing a Master of Architecture (Research) at Deakin University on Burnley graduate Ina Higgins (1900).

