

# COLAC BOTANIC GARDENS



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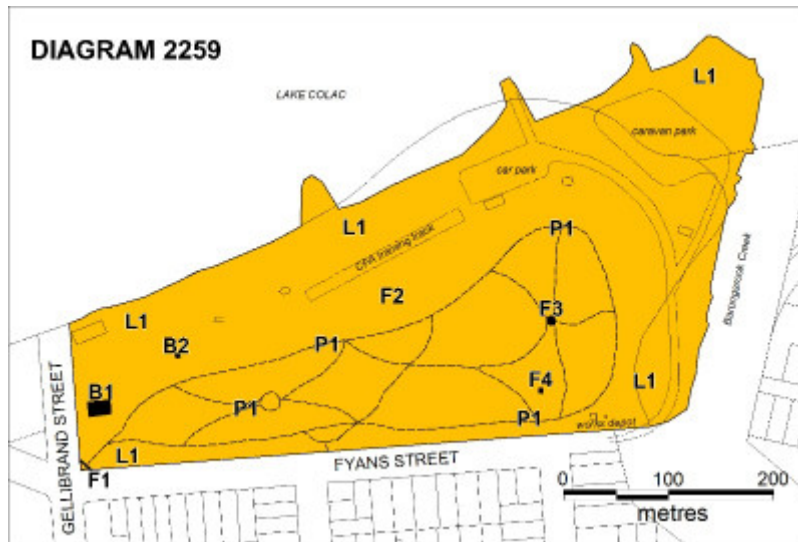
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colac botanic gardens plan.jpg

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## Location

1-5 FYANS STREET COLAC, COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

## Municipality

COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2259

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO113

## VHR Registration

December 9, 2010

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Colac Botanic Gardens occupy an elevated site of approximately 16 hectares north-east of the town centre bounded by the southern shores of Lake Colac, Gellibrand Street, Fyans Street and Barongarook Creek.

The main entrance to the Colac Botanic Garden is through the south-west entrance Bilson gates (1962) on the corner of Fyans Street and Gellibrand Street where a carriage drive, lined with predominantly *Quercus robur* (English Oak) and few *Quercus cerris* (Turkey Oak), forms a row around the perimeter of the Gardens and is open to vehicle access. The area enclosed by the drive has a network of winding paths and is mainly open lawn with specimen trees, shrubberies, some bedding plants together with a palm bed, rose garden, rose arbour, pond and fountain, and cannon (acquired 1904) near the south eastern gate. The curator's cottage (c.1924, now a cafe) is located at the western end of the gardens with playground equipment, picnic facilities and car parking at the eastern end. A caravan park occupies the north-east corner along Barongarook Creek adjacent to the lake shore.

A steep escarpment planted with *Pinus radiata* (Monterey Pines) and specimen trees runs between the botanic gardens and the flat area around the shore of Lake Colac which contains remnant terracing, an old brick toilet block with castellated roof (c1930s), a walking track, a fire brigade asphalt training track and shed, rotunda (1999), car parks, a rowing club, angling club, public toilets, boat ramp (1968) and jetty (1971). The escarpment provides separation between the two areas and provides extensive views from the Botanic Gardens over Lake Colac.

The site was temporarily reserved in 1865 for botanical and recreational purposes after a request from local residents. Little progress was made until 1868 when Daniel Bunce, Director of the Geelong Botanic Gardens, was approached to lay out a plan for the garden. Implementation of the plan was slow with the construction of a carriageway and planting of trees the only known details.

Between c1875 -80, curators Reeves and McDonald made changes to the carriageway and introduced garden beds, curved paths, lawns and shady arbours. In the 1890s structures added to the gardens included a pavilion overlooking the lake a conservatory in the south-eastern corner and a permanent rowing clubhouse on the edge of the lake joining the existing structures of piers, baths and a boat shed. Most of these structures have been removed.

In 1910 William Guilfoyle, Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, prepared a plan and a '*Report on the remodelling and development of the Colac Botanic Gardens*', which are extant, suggesting some improvements and remodelling to take advantage of the slope and vistas across over the lake which he considered had been ignored. This included simplifying the existing path system within the circular drive, and removal of borders and crowded areas in favour of larger trees and clumps of shrubs and a palm and cordyline bed all of which were implemented. Curators Archibald Campbell (1911-40) and Dugald Leitch (1940-55) were responsible for implementation of part of the Guilfoyle plan and maintaining the maturing Gardens but, with Guilfoyle's death in 1912, any further influence ended. The last resident curator Donald Greenwood (1955-65) was responsible for the addition of many native plants and in more recent times the gardens have more simplified planting and a park-like character.

The Colac Botanic Gardens contains many rare plant species only found in historic gardens and several significant and uncommon trees including four *Cupressus forbesii* (Tecate Cypress), a very large *Sophora japonica* (Pagoda Tree), a *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Eila Keightley' (Kohuhu), a large *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya Bunya Pine) and an outstanding *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Vegeta' (Huntington Elm). In March 1996, James Guilfoyle, grandson of William Guilfoyle, planted an *Arbutus canariensis* (Canary Island Strawberry Tree). In 2004 the Australian Plant Society planted an Otway Flora Bed on the eastern side of the Gardens.

This site is on the land of the traditional owners.

How is it significant?

Colac Botanic Gardens are of historical, aesthetic, and scientific (botanical) significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Colac Botanic Gardens are of historical significance as an important example of a regional botanical garden, established in the nineteenth century in response to the increased wealth of Victoria with the discovery of gold

and the desire to provide a place for recreation and education in keeping with European trends.

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of historical importance through the association with Daniel Bunce and William Guilfoyle, two pioneers of botanic gardens and garden design in Victoria

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of aesthetic significance due to their park - like character and elevated location immediately above the southern shore of Lake Colac, providing vistas across the lake. The gardens are of aesthetic significance for the sub-tropical plant groups supported by Guilfoyle together with his gardenesque style. They are of aesthetic significance for the contrasting form and variety of trees and plants which includes conifers, evergreen and deciduous plantings, together with the leaf shapes, colours and flowers, also contribute to the Garden's aesthetic quality and appeal

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of scientific (botanical) significance for a number of rare plants and trees including four *Cupressus forbesii* (Tecate Cypress), the only known examples in Victoria, a large *Sophora japonica* (Pagoda Tree), *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Eila Keightley' (Kohuhu), and large *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya Bunya Pine) and an outstanding *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Vegeta' (Huntington Elm) .

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.

General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.

General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

Minor Works: Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Landscape:

The process of gardening, mowing, hedge clipping, bedding displays, removal of dead plants and weed control, emergency and safety work and landscaping in accordance with the original concept.

The planting of plant species to conserve the landscape character, rare and unusual species, exotic and native plants, planted in beds, shrubberies and as specimen trees in lawns.

Management and maintenance of trees including formative and remedial pruning, removal of deadwood, pest and disease control, cabling, mowing, weed control and mulching.

In the event of loss or removal of trees, replanting with the same species to maintain the landscape character identified in the statement of significance. Removal of tree seedlings and suckers but excluding herbicide use.

Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard: Pruning of amenity trees AS 4373.

Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard: Protection of trees on development sites AS 4970.

Removal of plants listed as Prohibited and Controlled Weeds in the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

Repairs, conservation and maintenance to structures and hard landscape elements, memorial plaques, asphalt and gravel roads and paths, stone and concrete edging, fences and gates.

Installation, removal or replacement of garden watering and drainage systems beyond the canopy edge of mature trees.

Construction dates	1868, 1875, 1955,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	BOTANICAL GARDENS,
Hermes Number	147162
Property Number	

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## History

### HISTORY:

For history refer to:

References:

Register of the National Estate

Historic Gardens in Victoria, R. Aitken, 1998;

Colac Botanic Gardens: a conservation study, Patrick and Wallace, 1993

National Trust Classification Report 'Colac Botanic Gardens' File No G13085 on Hermes70203

*The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens*, Richard Aitken and Michael Looker, Australian Garden History Society Oxford University Press : Australian Garden History Society, South Melbourne, Vic., 2002.

This history is an extract from the DSE Heritage Place Report 'Colac Botanic Gardens' on Hermes 81314.

*"An area of about 38 acres was reserved temporarily on 23 May 1865 for Botanical and Recreational purposes after a request from local residents at Colac. This area was bounded to the north by Lake Colac and to the east by the Barongarook Creek. Five trustees were appointed to manage the gardens, gazetted on 19 December 1865.*

*Early enthusiasm for the gardens apparently waned after reservation as little work was carried out. Perhaps to stimulate interest and action, the curator of Geelong Botanic Gardens, Daniel Bunce, was approached for a plan for the gardens. The gardens were to be planned in a 'proper and scientific manner'. Bunce visited Colac in 1868 and supplied some trees. No details are known of Bunce's plan except that it incorporated a carriageway within the reserve. A picket fence to keep out stock was subsequently established.*

*Progress on implementing the plan was slow. A curator was appointed in 1870 but laboured under inconsistent direction and lack of finances. In 1874 a local committee was established to assist the trustees. The Committee set about raising funds for the gardens but this was a slow process. Meanwhile the debts accumulated.*

*A new curator, Charles Reeves, was appointed in 1874. He soon proposed a modification of the design incorporating a serpentine carriageway through the gardens and establishment of various features in the garden. His departure from Bunce's plan generated some opposition probably due to the cost of implementing the design. Reeves was given one year to carry out his plan. It is not clear whether the present oval carriageway is part of Bunce's original layout that was retained.*

*In January 1877, the trustees resigned in favour of the Shire of Colac. A new curator was appointed. John McDonald from Daylesford, amply qualified was appointed in June 1877. It would appear that the circular drive dates from this period as modifications to its layout are described as are the apparent transformation of wilderness to garden beds, sinuous paths, lawns and shady arbours. These improvements were funded by the Shire and good deal of money was spent at the direction of the Gardens Committee.*

*In 1879, the Council requested the reservation of additional land along Barongarook Creek. Two portions of land making up approximately 8.5 ha were reserved permanently for public purposes in October 1881. A large number of trees and shrubs were planted after the area was fenced.*

*J. Oliphant took over as curator in the 1890s. A number of new features were incorporated in the gardens after this time. A pavilion was built on the terraces overlooking the lake. This was a substantial building, partly enclosed to provide protection from the north winds and with an appended room providing simple cooking facilities. The pavilion was demolished in the 1950s.*

*The conservatory formed a focus to the south-eastern corner of the gardens. This structure was built as an elongated octagon with clerestory windows. Ferns were apparently a major feature of the conservatory. The conservatory fell into disrepair and was rebuilt in the 1930s. This structure was demolished in the 1960s.*

*Lake Colac Rowing Club was able to lease an area at peppercorn rental for premises on the edge of the lake. Apparently piers, baths and a boat shed were already existed on the lake shores.*

*The gardens were given a new stimulus in 1910 after William Guilfoyle visited and prepared a report recommending remodelling of the gardens. He recognised the natural advantages of the site and criticised the formal layout which ignored the slopes and views of the lake. He also considered that the space within the circular drive had become too fussy with paths and features. His solution was to delete some of the existing paths and supplement where necessary the existing system. He also recommended the elimination of the 'mean little borders running parallel to paths' and their replacement with clumps of shrubs, thereby saving on labour and opening up vistas. Larger trees were to be retained while some overcrowded areas were to be thinned. Three new features proposed by Guilfoyle were a 'tropical dell' along Barongarook Creek, a lily pond and landscaping of the slopes leading to Lake Colac. A lengthy list of plants, with an emphasis for coloured foliage, trees imparting a tropical effect. Acacias and Eucalypts were recommended to replace ageing pines. Guilfoyle was paid £50 for his report and design.*

*It is not known to what extent Guilfoyle's plan was implemented. Guilfoyle died in 1912, depriving the project of his further involvement. Aitken suggests that little of Guilfoyle's plans were implemented. Although the design of the Colac Gardens is attributed to Guilfoyle, Aitken argues that the layout is based largely on the work done by curators Reeves and McDonald between 1875 and 1880. Guilfoyle's report suggests that much of the existing landscaping should be retained with only some remodelling. New features proposed by Guilfoyle appear not have been implemented.*

*In 1984/85, a number of projects were undertaken as part of a program for the rejuvenation of Victoria's provincial botanic gardens. Tree identification, assessment of condition, tree surgery and labelling were carried out.*

*Recently there have been moves to improve the lake shore area. The land has been cleared up and replanted. New paths have installed. There are plans to reinstate a pavilion on the terraces."*

## **Assessment Against Criteria**

### **ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

#### **a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history**

Colac Botanic Gardens are an important example of a regional botanical garden, established in the nineteenth century in response to the increased wealth of Victoria with the discovery of gold and the desire to provide a place for recreation and education in keeping with European trends.

#### **b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.**

**The Colac Botanic Gardens are of scientific (botanical) significance for the rare collection of plants and trees characteristic of late nineteenth century gardens including several uncommon species only found in historic gardens.**

#### **c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.**

#### **d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.**

Colac Botanic Gardens display the typical characteristics of the regional botanic gardens with design elements such as serpentine paths meandering through gardens beds of flowers and shrubberies of various colours and textures set into lawn against a backdrop of trees and built elements.

#### **e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.**

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of aesthetic significance due to their park - like character and elevated location immediately above the southern shore of Lake Colac, providing vistas across the lake.

#### **f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.**

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

The Colac Botanic Gardens are of social significance to local residents and visitors due to the long and continuing association with lake - side recreational activities of the community demonstrated by the continuing presence of facilities such as the rowing club, the angling club, boat ramp and pier, playground and caravan park. The Gardens are also important for education, botany and plant cultivation providing a centre of horticultural excellence for the local and broader community and visitors.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

The gardens are also historically important for the association with two of Victoria's most prominent garden designers and botanic gardens curators/directors, Daniel Bunce of Geelong and William Guilfoyle of Melbourne.

## Plaque Citation

Colac Botanic Gardens

The design of the gardens evolved from the late 1870s, incorporating advice from William Guilfoyle in 1910. It retains a formal entry, carriage driveway, and an informal park layout with specimen trees in a picturesque setting.

36 words/228 characters with spacing

## Extent of Registration

1. All the buildings marked as follows on Diagram 2259 held by the Executive Director.

B1 Former curator's residence (now cafe)

B2 Old brick toilet block

2. All the features marked as follows on Diagram 2259 held by the Executive Director.

F1 Bilson gates at Gellibrand Street entrance

F2 Terraces

F3 Lily pond

F4 Cannon

3. The circular driveway and paths marked P1 on Diagram 2259 held by the Executive Director.

4. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2259 held by the Executive Director being parts of Crown Allotment 25B and 25C, Township of Colac, and part of Crown Allotment 62A, Parish of Colac.

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*