



## case study 5: Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens

The Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens was completed in 1880 for Melbourne's first International Exhibition. The cultural, industrial and technological achievements of more than 30 nations were proudly displayed to a public thirsting for information and new ideas. The Royal Exhibition Building with its surrounding gardens has maintained their original function to the present day, hosting exhibitions and displays. The Carlton Gardens are in two parts: an axial garden layout in the southern part of the site, and a northern garden landscaped after the close of the two great 19th century exhibitions. Bound by Victoria, Rathdowne, Carlton and Nicholson Streets at the edge of Melbourne's city centre, the entire block remains intact as originally designated by the Victorian Parliament in 1878. The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens was listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2004.

This case study shows how themes can be used to draw out the many-layered stories of this place.

### A public park and setting for the Exhibition Building – 1850s to the present

Originally set aside for public purposes in the 1850s, the first design for the Carlton Gardens was prepared by Edward La Trobe Bateman in 1856. The Carlton Gardens were later improved and remodelled by Clement Hodgkinson and William Sangster prior to the 1880s, in preparation for the construction of the Exhibition Building, by Reed and Barnes.

The garden setting of the Exhibition Building features earlier 19th century 'Gardenesque' style elements and later more classical features, particularly in the south garden.

Since they were first reserved for public purposes, the gardens have continued to be used as a public park, primarily for passive recreation. Carlton Gardens, with Treasury, Fitzroy, Flagstaff, Alexandra and Queen Victoria Gardens, the Royal Botanic Gardens and Kings Domain, forms part of Melbourne's early planning when large tracts of land were set aside for parkland, as part of a 'green belt' around the city which would cater for passive and active recreation.

#### Victoria's themes and sub-themes

- 6. Building towns, cities and the garden state
- 6.2 *Creating Marvellous Melbourne*
- 9. Shaping cultural and creative life
- 9.1 *Participating in sport and recreation*

### A meeting place and play setting – 1900s to the present

Before the establishment of organisations like the Aborigines Advancement League, the main meeting and gathering places for the local Aboriginal community in Fitzroy and inner Melbourne were the parks around Fitzroy and Carlton, in particular the Carlton Gardens.



The Moreton Bay Fig tree in the South Garden, near the intersection of Nicholson and Gertrude Streets, was one such meeting and gathering place before and during the Second World War. The Moreton Bay Fig tree and surrounds has been the source of creative inspiration, featuring in the opening scenes of 'The Dirty Mile', a play performed by the Ilbiggerri Street Theatre Company in 2006.

The gardens have a continued use as a meeting and gathering place from the 1900s to the present, as well as being an important place of gathering and meeting for local Aboriginal people from the 1900s to c1968. This aspect of the gardens is also associated with Pastor Doug Nicholls, who used to preach there.

**Victoria's themes and sub-themes**

- 6. Building towns, cities and the garden state
- 6.3 *Shaping the suburbs*
- 8. Building community life
- 8.1 *Maintaining spiritual life*
- 8.4 *Forming community organisations*

**A place for recreation and leisure – 1839 to the present**

The north garden includes the curator's lodge, Bhutan Cypress row, avenue plantings, specimen trees, which date from the 1890s, when the north garden was redesigned by Clement Hodgkinson after the 1888 exhibition.

Added later were a tennis court and dressing pavilion, constructed in 1924, and a works depot and west playground, constructed in the 1960s. The west playground replaced an ornamental lake which formed part of Hodgkinson's 1880s alterations to the La Trobe Bateman plan for the Carlton Gardens.

The North Garden contributes to the 19th century character of the setting. From the

early 20th century until the present, it has been a popular recreational facility valued by the community.

**Victoria's themes and sub-themes**

- 9. Shaping cultural and creative life
- 9.1 *Participating in sport and recreation*

**Exhibiting Victoria's innovation**

The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens is a tangible expression of the country's pride in its technological and cultural achievements in the latter part of the 19th century.

**Location of state parliament – 1901-1927**

Constructed in 1879-1880, the Exhibition Building was designed by Reed and Barnes, who were also responsible for the formal pathway layout of the gardens.

From 1901, the new Federal Parliament occupied the Victorian state Parliament House in Spring Street, until the provisional Parliament House was opened in 1927 in Canberra as the home of Federal Parliament (until 1988). As a result, the Victorian state Parliament was housed in the Western Annexe of the Exhibition Building, from 1901 to 1927.

**The inauguration of Federation – 1901**

The venue for the grand opening of the first Australian Parliament in 1901, the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens has outstanding historical value for its role in the defining event of Federation. It is the place where the Commonwealth of Australia's first Parliament was commissioned and sworn in on 9 May 1901.

**Victoria's themes and sub-themes**

- 5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce
- 5.4 *Exhibiting Victoria's innovation and products*
- 7. Governing Victorians
- 7.1 *Developing institutions of self-government and democracy*

**Continuing involvement in the lives of Victorians – 1880s to the present**

The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens is a tangible expression of the country's pride in its technological and cultural achievements in the latter part of the 19th century.

The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens are of social significance for their continuing involvement in the lives of Victorians. The buildings and gardens have hosted countless major exhibitions and displays.

The building has also been used at various times as an influenza hospital, for wartime military use, as a migrant reception centre, a venue for concerts, balls and live music, a venue for events during the 1956 Olympic Games, as an examination venue for VCE and University of Melbourne students, and for trade fairs and home shows.

The gardens have been enjoyed by visitors for passive recreation, entertainment and social interaction, and continue to be used for examinations, exhibitions and events, including the successful Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show.

**Victoria's themes and sub-themes**

- 7. Governing Victorians
- 7.4 *Defending Victoria and Australia*
- 8. Building community life
- 8.2 *Educating people*
- 9. Shaping cultural and creative and life
- 9.3 *Achieving distinction in the arts*
- 9.4 *Creating popular culture*
- 9.5 *Advancing knowledge*