

Werribee Park Gardens

European horticultural history

In keeping with the theme of their elaborate Mansion, Thomas and Andrew Chirnside created an equally stunning garden in a distinctly European style. The majestic gardens feature a colourful parterre, ornamental lake and grotto, glasshouses, heritage-listed trees, expansive lawns and are home to the Victoria State Rose Garden.

Gardens

History

The Chirnside Family's contribution to Victoria's pastoral and agricultural growth is notable as leaders and pioneers of the colony's pastoral industry. Their vast land holdings in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland made them one of the wealthiest families in the colony. The grandeur of their influence and wealth is reflected in their opulent Italianate Renaissance Revival style mansion at Werribee Park and its stately garden.

Like many notable early settlers, the Chirnsides were members of the Acclimatisation Society, an organisation which introduced several European flora and fauna species to the Australian landscape. As such, the ten hectares of Werribee Park's manicured landscape contains a variety of exotic species alongside Australian natives. The specific designer of the garden is unknown, the role is often credited to William Robert Guilfoyle, who was Curator of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens and a prolific designer around Melbourne and Regional Victoria from 1873 to 1909.

Today the gardens are a great place to relax with a picnic or explore with enthusiasm, the formal gardens are a secret oasis awaiting discovery.

Parterre

A 'parterre', French for 'on the ground', is a formal garden constructed of level garden beds with dividing pathways and was a style common in early 17th century. This year the display consists of a two-colour combination of flowers radiating from the original Fountain. The geometrically designed floral display is best viewed from the Mansion balcony and contains approximately 4000 plants using a mix of seedlings and mature plants.

Lake and grotto

Located within an ornamental lake, the grotto is a traditional component of 18th century European garden design and one of few examples known in Australia. The Chirnside family richly adorned the interior with an elaborate design of seashells, sheep knuckles, animal teeth and pebbles, which can still be seen today.

Afternoon tea was frequently served within the grotto during warm summer months, with family members and guests

enjoying the cooler temperatures inside. Cross the walking bridge and explore this rare beauty.

Glasshouses

The Chirnside family established six glasshouses behind the parterre, which formed part of the service area, including a vegetable and picking garden. At present there are only two remaining. The glasshouse at ground level is an early 20th century adaptation of a late 19th century structure, which incorporates the original iron brackets to the roof. The sunken glasshouse is essentially a 1976 interpretation of the original design. This sunken structure was first built in conjunction with an adjoining hothouse equipped with a boiler. Heritage Victoria supported a refurbishment of the glasshouses by providing a grant in 1997.

Annual highlights

The formal gardens have been designed to maximise feature plants and trees all year round. The stunning parterre has two flowering displays, in Summer/Autumn and Winter/Spring. The grotto comes to life in Summer as its spectacular pink flowering groundcover, the Rosea Ice Plant, moves into full bloom. Flowering trees situated throughout the garden inject a new dimension of colour and height in Spring/Summer, with striking shades of mauve, yellow, pink and red in bloom at varying times.

Victoria State Rose Garden

The Victoria State Rose Garden is one of the remarkable features of Werribee Park. Rich in colour and fragrance, over 5,000 rose bushes are displayed to perfection within four uniquely shaped designs.

Designed in the shape of a Tudor rose, the main display features hybrid tea, floribunda bush and standard roses within the five petal structure.

Recent developments have added to the original design and variety of roses on display. A 400-metre heritage rose border, which separates the Victoria State Rose Garden from the magnificent formal gardens of Werribee Park, contains a selection of 250 types of heritage roses.

An Australian Federation Leaf display celebrates the horticultural achievements of Australian rose-growers since

Australia's Federation. The colourful 'Leaf' comprises 50 beds of rose bushes especially bred for Australia's sunny conditions in the last hundred years. The David Austin Bud showcases David Austin roses of 46 cultivars within a fragrant 'Bud' shaped formation.

The Victoria State Rose Garden is proudly managed by Parks Victoria and lovingly tended by the Victoria State Rose Garden Supporters, a dedicated group of over 100 volunteers.

International recognition was bestowed upon the Victoria State Rose Garden in July 2003 at the World Federation of Rose Societies Convention in Glasgow, Scotland. The Federation awarded the Rose Garden its highest Award of Merit, which considers historical, educational and visual elements in its recognition of exceptional gardens.

Heritage trees

Thirteen trees proudly displayed within the garden are listed on the National Trust Significant Trees Register. These trees are important because of their age, excellent condition, rarity and/or perfect form.

While enjoying the gardens at your leisure, look out for the following trees as marked on the maps and labelled throughout the garden.

1. Ombu tree - *Phytolacca dioica*

A South American tree of unusual shape, the Ombu is rarely seen in cultivation in Victoria. An evergreen tree, its trunk is stout and swollen at the base from which upright limbs originate with a densely textured, spreading crown. The large poplar like leaves are up to 18cm long and the branches are light in weight. The leaves are green and elliptical.

The Ombu produces white flowers in pendant racemes (drooping spikes), after which come fleshy, yellow berries. The berry juice is used as a colouring substance in some wines and liquors.

2. Bunya Bunya pine - *Araucaria bidwillii*

The mature Bunya Bunya pine displays branches almost in whorls around a large erect trunk. These trees are two very fine specimens of *Araucaria bidwillii*, commonly planted in the late 1800s and representing an important feature in this historic garden. The species was selected for their structural effect in the landscape, large size and dark green foliage.

The Bunya Bunya pine is found in coastal ranges in two widely separated localities in south-eastern Queensland and north of Cairns. It grows as individuals scattered through rainforests. The tree bears large cones almost the size of a pineapple and produces tasty and highly nutritious seeds, which were either eaten raw or roasted by Aboriginal people from the trees endemic region.

Both trees are in excellent condition and have developed the characteristic branching habit of mature Bunya Bunya Pines.

3. Canary Island pine - *Pinus Canariensis*

Widely planted throughout the grounds of Werribee Park, this unusual tree is a native of the Canary Islands. The Canary Island pine is distinguished from the other three leaved pines by its yellow shoots, fringed bud scales and long slender leaves. The drooping branchlets give the tree a weeping form.

This tree is one of the largest of its type in Australia. Due to the size of its branches it was found necessary to reinforce it with steel cables.

4. African holly – *Elaeodendron croceum*

African holly is listed as one of the world's rare and endangered plants. A medium sized spreading tree, rare in cultivation in Victoria, this species has a compact, dense canopy of dark green foliage. The cream flowers are small and the fruits are not edible. The trees are often multi-stemmed and the trunks stout and gnarled. This tree occurs naturally along the east coast of Southern Africa.

5. Bhutan cypress – *Cupressus torulosa*

The Bhutan cypress is found in the outer ranges of the western Himalaya and in western Sichuan, China. This tree with its characteristic pyramidal shaped crown and dangling branchlets displays almost perfect form, being the best specimen known in Victoria. A fast grower, it prefers mild, moist climates. The leaves are bright green, soft and scale like pressed to the stem and overlapping. It produces catkin like flowers and small purple cones which turn brown with maturity.

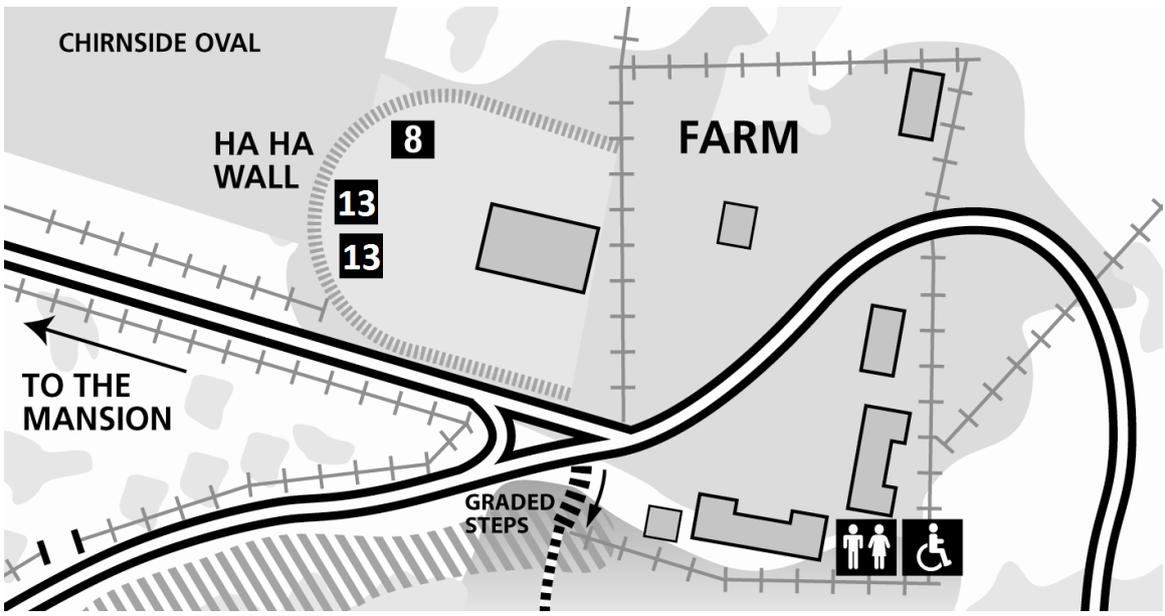
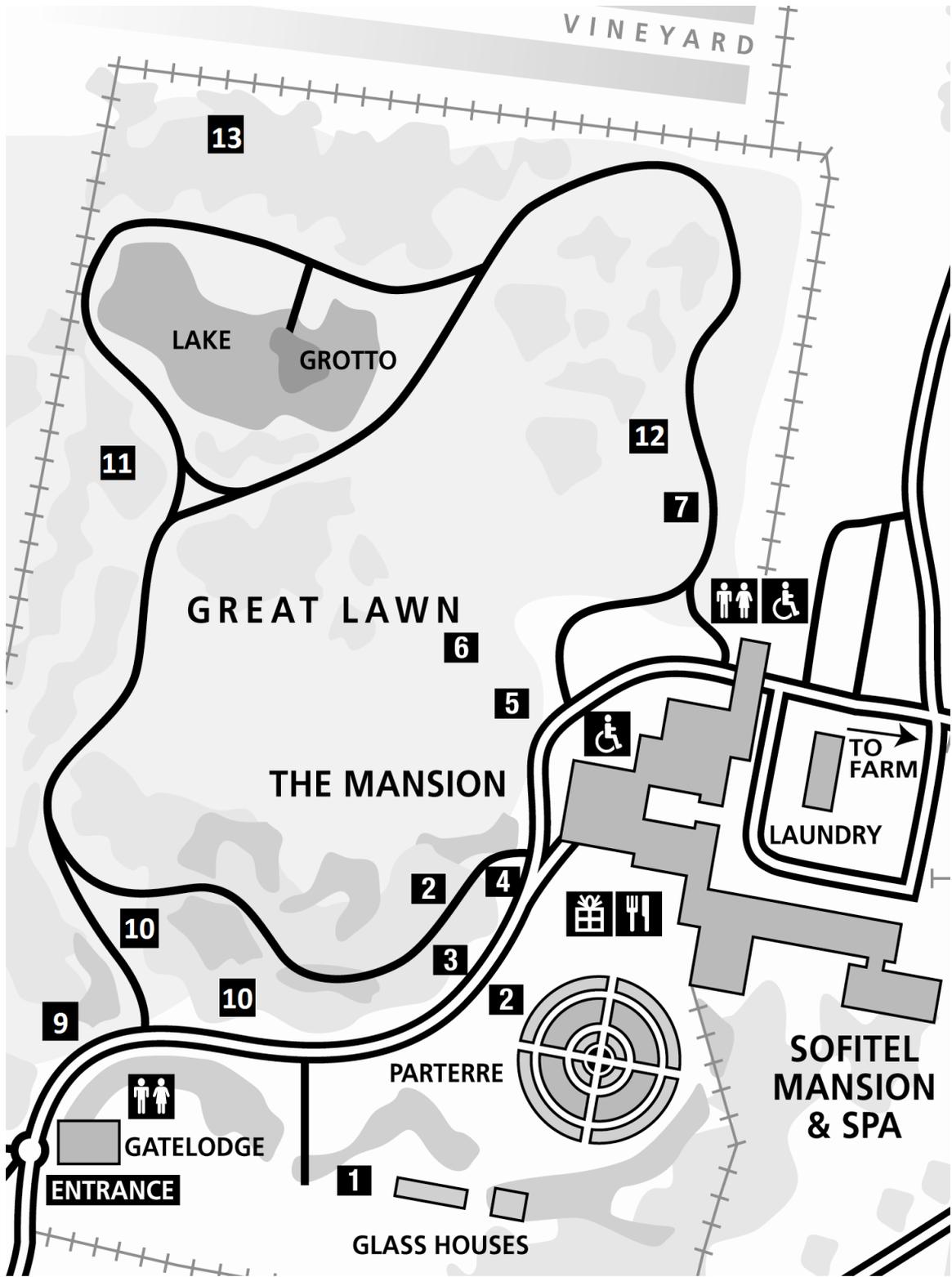
6. Swamp White oak – *Quercus bicolor*

Unusual in cultivation in Victoria, the Swamp White oak is a native of the north central and north eastern United States of America. The deciduous tree forms a rounded crown with leaves 10-25cm long which have a shiny dark green upper surface and often slippery white underneath. Acorns appear in pairs. As suggested by the name, this drought tender oak grows well under swampy conditions, so it was planted in a naturally low area of the gardens where water commonly gathered.

Rare in cultivation in Victoria, the other known examples occur in Hamilton, Kyneton and the Royal Botanic Gardens. This tree has developed an outstanding spreading canopy and is in excellent condition. First classified by the National Trust as Regionally significant in 1985, the oak has since grown to large proportions and is a very significant landmark at Werribee Park.

7. Variegated smooth leaved elm - *Ulmus minor*

Possible one of the earliest plantings of this fine cultivar, it is usually located at a focal point in the landscape because of its form and particularly attractive variegated creamy leaves. It is native of western central Europe, and unlike most elms, it does not have fine hairs covering the underside of the leaf.



8. Moreton Bay fig - *Ficus macrophylla*

The Moreton Bay fig tree produces an abundance of figs that turn reddish brown when ripe. They provide a prolific food source for native fauna such as fruit bats and possums. This tree, which shows excellent form, is notable for its large spreading canopy reaching to the ground. It is a remnant planting of the early Homestead garden in the Farm area.

The Moreton Bay fig is common in Victoria and was described by Baron Von Mueller as "the grandest of the Australian avenue trees". A fast-growing tree, it develops a thick smooth trunk strongly buttressed, with an open wide spreading crown. The leaves are thick, leathery and dark green.

The specimen is growing close to the edge of a particularly fine example of a bluestone HaHa Wall, a semi-circular structure located in front of an old cottage to the rear of the Mansion. First classified by the National Trust as Regionally significant in 1985, its proportions and aesthetic beauty make it of State significance.

9. Ribbonwood Tree - *Plagianthus betulinus*

Ribbonwood is rare in cultivation in Victoria and is a fine addition to an extensive plant collection in this historic garden. Although in good condition, the tree contains deadwood and is overcrowded by a Cape Chestnut (*Calodendrum capense*) on the north side. The tree is located at the end of main entry in shrubbery. In 2011 a neighbouring tree was trimmed to allow specimen canopy to grow and branch rigging undertaken to brace a weak point.

10. Lemon Scented Gums - *Corymbia citriodora*

The three Lemon-scented Gums located along the Main Carriage Drive, are relatively young at 52 years of age but exhibit the mature size and silhouette that specimens elsewhere have taken up to 100 years to attain. Their mature silhouettes can truly be appreciated by their significant size and bright exfoliating bark texture.

Planted in 1960 to serve as focal points when people drove up the new driveway entrance of Corpus Christi College, the Church was advised in this planting by the famous Melbourne garden designer, Edna Margaret Walling (1895 - 1973). Their selection and planting reflected the growing interest of Australian gardeners and landscape designers in native trees and plants. By the mid-1940s Edna Walling had developed a focused interest in native plants even though she had used them since the 1920s.

These specimens embody a distinctive cultural shift in Melbourne society in regards to native flora and are significant as a compliment and contrast to the Chirnside era of the garden at Werribee Park in the nineteenth century. Even though the original garden design used large native trees like *Ficus*, *Araucaria* and *Lagunaria* there was a strong essence of trying to replicate the large estate gardens in Europe, creating an "ordered Eden" in harsh and intimidating Australian surrounds.

11. Aleppo Pine - *Pinus halepensis*

An outstanding example of species, this Aleppo Pine, located north-west of the ornamental lake at Werribee Park Mansion garden, represents one of the three species of pine planted throughout the property. This specimen has developed on a tall leader trunk and spreads its vast canopy outwards. It is typical of the type of foliage and architectural form that nineteenth century garden enthusiasts with large rural estates collected and introduced to give their new homeland a 'European essence' and feel.

The specimen was selected and planted circa 1877 by the gardeners employed by Thomas Chirnside at Werribee Park. It typifies the botanical material available in the nineteenth century and pine species were commonly used in the layout of botanic gardens, large private estates and arboretums alike. Its use highlights a historic planting style for large gardens and estates. Planted north-west of the ornamental lake and across the expanse of the Great Lawn in front of the mansion its function was not only ornamental, but as a windbreak, privacy screen and as a landmark in the distance of the European essence of the garden.

12. Weeping Golden Monterey Cypress - *Hesperocyparis macrocarpa* 'Saligna Aurea'

The Weeping Golden Monterey Cypress located along the Main Carriage Drive from the historic Gatehouse of Werribee Park Mansion, represents the extreme genetic and botanical variability of the Monterey Cypress species. This early twentieth century specimen was selected and planted circa 1920s by the Roman Catholic Church. This tree makes a significant aesthetic contribution to the immediate landscape of Werribee Park Mansion and is a prime example of this cultivar of the species. However, it does not exhibit the usual weeping canopy so commonly seen in other specimens of this cultivar. This golden-green foliage and variant growth form highlights how genetically variable this New World cypress can be in its foliage colour and growth habit.

13. The Norfolk Island Hibiscus (Cow Itch Tree) - *Lagunaria patersonia* subsp. *patersonia*

This Norfolk Hibiscus represents a typical 1860's style of planting which used this native evergreen tree. Evidence of this style is found around the original Chirnside homestead on the Werribee River bank. This specimen was selected and planted circa 1877 by the gardeners employed by Thomas Chirnside at Werribee Park.

This specimen's outstanding size is notable. It has a height above the botanically described height for the species of 15 metres and has developed five tall leader trunks. Even though a native tree, it is typical of the type of silhouette and architectural form that nineteenth century garden enthusiasts with large rural estates collected and introduced to make their estate gardens feel more 'European' in design.