



FRIENDS OF VICTORIA GARDENS

Newsletter July 2025

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Dear Member,

Welcome to the July Newsletter which includes information on the Gardens 140th anniversary, Garden Inspection Walk, Garden Volunteer program and the Sunken Oval.

Gardens 140th anniversary

In a few weeks on the 7 August 2025 Victoria Gardens will be 140 years old. The garden was officially opened on Friday 7 August 1885 by Lady Elizabeth Loch, wife of Henry Brougham Loch the Governor of Victoria 1884 – 1889.

The site was purchased by Council at public auction on 22 June 1884 for £5,660. The garden was named after Victoria, wife of Mayor Cr George Taylor. The Mayor had led the campaign to provide public reserves, but there was strong opposition to the scheme by several councillors. The City of Prahran had to take out a substantial loan of £12,500 for recreational use by its 30,000 inhabitants.

The report on the opening in the Argus on 8 August said¹:

Three reserves have been acquired by the city council for the use of the residents. They consist of an area of two acres near the Prahran station to be called the Prahran reserve, about four acres in the centre of the city to be called Victoria gardens and seven acres in Armidale which will be styled Toorak Park.

The official portion of the proceedings began at noon in Victoria Gardens with the formal dedication of the three grounds for the public use and enjoyment. The mayor, city councillor's, members of Parliament and other representative persons invited to assist, met at the town hall and were driven to the city boundary at the junction of Punt Road with Toorak Road to meet His Excellency the Governor and Lady Loch.

After accepting the address by the Town Clerk, Lady Loch said I have now to declare the lands of the City of Prahran known as the Toorak park, the Victoria gardens, and the Prahran reserve dedicated to public use and enjoyment as pleasure grounds and places of recreation. Renewed cheers followed this announcement.

His Excellency the Governor and Lady Loch subsequently went through the ranks of the school children assembled, and asked a number of questions regarding them. Some of the Blind School pupils, who were also present, were especially brought under His Excellency's kindly notice. Hearty cheers for the distinguished visitors, and a strain of the National Anthem from a band stationed in the gardens, brought the ceremony to a conclusion. In the afternoon an attractive event for the juvenile public was in progress

¹ Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957), Saturday 8 August 1885, page 11

on the grounds of the mayor at *Wynnstay*. All the school children in the city, numbering between 5,000 and 6,000 had been invited by Mr and Mrs. Taylor to take part in a fete, in which a luncheon and a distribution of lollies and fruit formed the leading items.

Victoria Gardens was designed by William Sangster, (1831 – 6 April 1910) a Scottish-born nurseryman and garden designer known for establishing public and private gardens in Victoria. He helped introduce the picturesque style of landscape design. He worked in the gardens at Hamilton Palace near Glasgow, which is said to have profoundly influenced his design style. He immigrated to Victoria, in December 1853, at the age of 22. He initially worked at the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne under Curator John Dallachy, whom he had worked under at Hamilton Palace. After that, he worked for nine months as a gardener for Mr. Dickenson at Mt. Pleasant near the vicinity of Kensington Road in South Yarra. In December 1855, John Brown appointed Sangster as head gardener and overseer at Como house².

His designs for public gardens include Carlton Gardens in Carlton, Daylesford Botanic Garden, and Victoria Gardens in Prahran. His notable designs for private gardens include Como House in South Yarra, Rupertswood in Sunbury, Rippon Lea Estate in Elsternwick, Stonington mansion in Malvern, Ard Choille at Mount Macedon and Wombat Park, Daylesford.

In the 1880s, Sangster wrote extensively for *The Australasian* newspaper using the pseudonym "Hortensis". A 16 May 1885 article in the *Australasian*³ by Hortensis described his plans for Victoria Gardens.

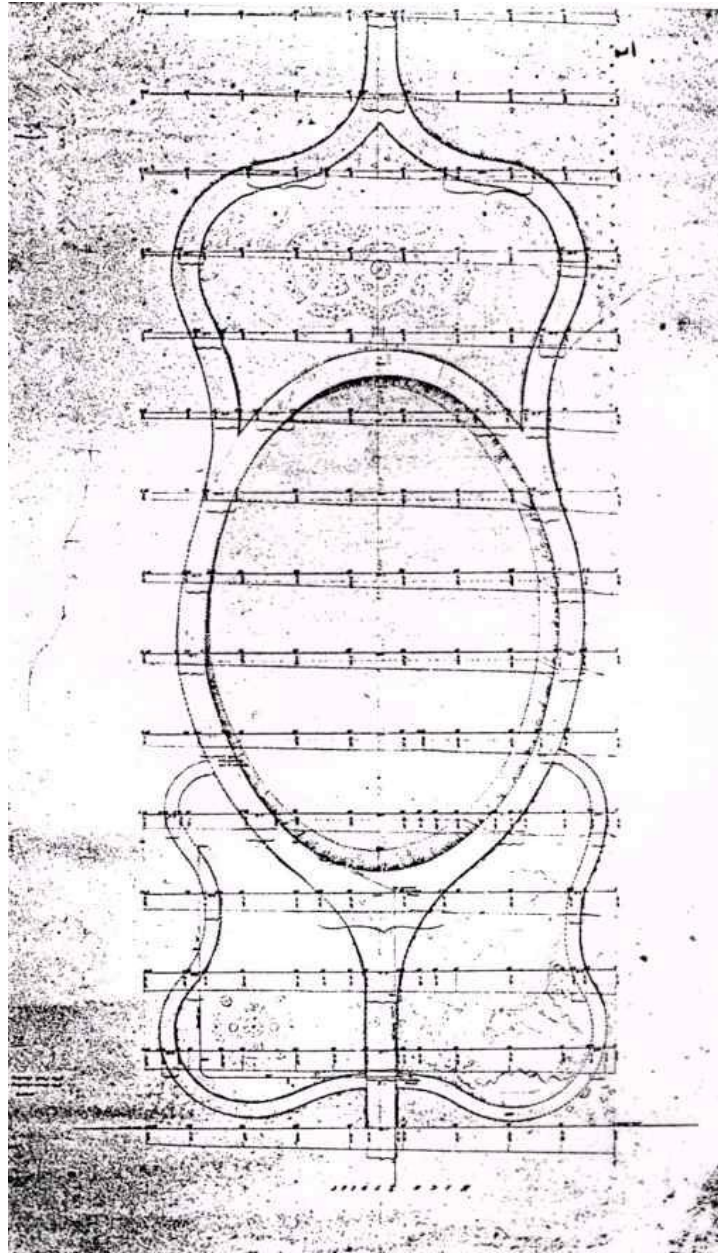
Having secured the land [*three fine blocks of land*], no time has been lost in preparing for its utilisation. Plans for the arrangement of the ground were invited, and prepared by a well-known landscape gardener, and fencing and trenching are now in full swing.

The second and largest site [Victoria Gardens] is on rising ground, near the heart of the city, about a quarter of a mile due east from the town-hall, and has a frontage to two streets, with an area of nearly four acres, and sloping gently to the north and west. As the back yards of two lines of building abut on the ground on the east and west sides, they are to be shut out by a 7ft fence, and due care will be taken to prevent any offensive drainage percolating through from the upper side. Nearly half the area is to be devoted to a large green for recreative purposes, which will be sunk 30in. below the level of the surrounding path, which is to be 16ft wide, with shade trees on each side. At the south end, and sheltered by a surrounding belt of shrubbery, is to be a rosery, in beds cut out of the grass; pillar roses will be freely introduced to break the monotony of the dwarf varieties. At the lower end of the ground a parterre for a display of bright, snowy flowers is to be arranged in a sunk panel with beds and grass.

The subsoil obtained from the sunk recreation green and parterre is to be utilised in forming a hill near the upper end of the ground, the summit of which will command a view over great part of the city and the bay and shipping. It is also proposed to erect an ornamental kiosk with seats on the top of the hill; the sides and slopes are to be densely covered with evergreens, so as to form a wilderness with winding paths ; the south eastern slope is to be planted with shade trees on tall stems to admit of an undergrowth of tree ferns; this side will be made more precipitous, and will be supported by rockeries with a pool of water fringed with ferns at the bottom. The hill and its surroundings will form an interesting feature, and will add greatly to the apparent extent of the grounds. Archways covered with flowering climbers will be freely introduced on the subsidiary winding walks, and all the boundaries will be concealed by a dense belt of evergreens.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Sangster

³ *Australasian* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1864 - 1946), Saturday 16 May 1885, page 13



Victoria Gardens Plan, 8 June 1885



Tree Ferns on the Mount c1905

Garden Inspection Walk:

The annual Garden inspection walk was held on Tuesday 10 June with Council staff Dominic Mazza, Adam De Zoete, David Edwards (arborist) and Devon (apprentice). Attending from the Friends were John Hawker, Sarah Jardine, Maureen Costigan, Ian Amess, and Jenny Chapman. The main matters discussed included:

High Street Fence & Beds

1. Celtis (Hackberry): Prune, lift canopy and remove deadwood.
2. Remove Chinese elm sapling beside west gate pillar
3. Variegated Ligustrum: Shape for form and health.
4. Drainage: Review and address any drainage issues. Drainage map (copy held by Marella Stow, Open Space Planner)
5. New pit constructed in brick drain near bins
6. Clean out pit (now raised due to Chinese Elm roots) and understand function of PVC pipe entering from the east
7. Plant Tristaniopsis laurina to fill existing gap (formerly Blackwood which died)
8. New Quercus sp. (Q. dentata hybrid, not Q. cerris, Turkey Oak) planted in bed 2024
9. Cut back overcrowding vegetation, formative prune to a single straight trunk

East Shrubbery

1. Remove privet seedlings (Ligustrum lucidum)
2. Address graffiti on shelter
3. Remove Celtis Seedlings
4. Review extent of Celtis tree pruning overhanging brick fence (Legge boundary)
5. Consider Brick edging near Lilly Pilly.
6. Increase planting of Ruscus (all species) and Danae in east bed and around shelters
7. Plant new ferns, Fatsia and Cordyline in SE corner to screen new paling fence

North East

1. Remove Phoenix palms, Privet and Celtis Seedlings and Elm suckers
2. Probably remove young Flame tree, Brachychiton acerifolius due to overcrowding
3. Infill Planting: Complete around Ian's palms.
4. Circle Seat Area:
 - Consider sowing grass seed near the seat.
 - Apply mulch around the circle seat.
5. Remove Elm Sucker and Celtis seedlings
6. Remove Ilex Stump.
7. Viburnum odoratissimum: Plant hedge as replacement to screen fence and flats

North / Murray Street

1. Plant Tristaniopsis in NW corner and Magnolia grandiflora (midway) on Murray St bed
2. Remove Maple next to Prunus.
3. Reduce height of Plane Trees

West

1. Plant Alpinia in area where Pampas was removed.
2. Mulch around existing trees in lawn area.
 - Remove low Melaleuca styphelioides branch
 - Formative prune Combretum caffrum, cut back overhanging vegetation
 - Remove damaged Bottlebrush
 - Remove Celtis seedling. Plant Pittosporum to screen large window
3. Prune around Noticeboard

RSL Memorial Area

1. Rosemary: Prune and plant as needed.
2. Prune standard roses, reduce weight and stake where required
3. Buddleja davidii: Reduce in size.
4. Remove/coppice Buddleja madagascariensis in SW corner, Remove from Photinia
5. Remove vegetation around Gallipoli Oak, formative prune, and mulch

Playground

1. Prune and thin/formative prune Zelkova
2. Remove Variegated Elm stump beside the Quercus douglasii
3. Remove dead Pistachio tree and plant new Crepe Myrtle,
4. Prune/hedge Hibbertia scandens to fence
5. Install low Federation fence to protect new planting in west bed
6. Prune/hedge Bougainvillea to fence line

General

1. Damaged seat in SW corner
2. Damaged seats will be repaired in the short term, then replaced later in the calendar year with Albert Park seats. Any plaques will be removed from old seats and placed on new.
3. Shelters to be cleaned and gutters cleared
4. Replace light globe on High Street west gate pillar

Victoria Gardens Volunteers:

Since the last April Newsletter there have been 2 Volunteer days, 10 May and 14 June. Gardening tasks completed have included seedling planting, weeding, and pruning of garden beds. We now have eight inducted Volunteers who have been regular attendees.

The next Garden Volunteer Day is Saturday 6 September, then 4 October, 8 November and 6 December. The session starts at 9.00 am and finish at 11.30am. Morning tea is provided. Deb Neumann from the City of Stonnington Sustainable Environment Unit has placed the following information on the Stonnington Community news which has been helpful in attracting new volunteers.

Live in or around Prahran? Come along to a Victoria Gardens Volunteers (VGV) working bee at Victoria Gardens, Prahran Volunteers supported by Friends of Victoria Gardens. [Email](#) Friends of Victoria Gardens to find out about upcoming dates.



10 May 2025



14 June 2025

Sunken Oval:

During September - October 2023 Council undertook sunken oval works to repair and improve the grass cover prior to the Christmas holiday period. The Friends wrote to the CEO, Mr Dale Dickson complementing Council on this action but highlighting the impact by dogs on the condition of the oval and suggested limited access hours or to only have dogs on-lead.

A reply was received on 18 December 2023 from the CEO which in part said;

*In the interests of ensuring our open spaces are being effectively utilised in accordance with prevailing community expectations, **a review of the current off-leash arrangements at Victoria Gardens is intended for late 2024/ early 2025.***

There has been no contact with the Friends since late 2024 or to date in 2025. On the 22 July 2025 the Friends wrote to the CEO to find out what progress has been made regarding the Review and to indicate that the Friends are supportive of the Review.

You will have noticed that the sunken oval turf has largely disappeared in recent weeks. Information from Head Gardener Adam De Zoete said that the lawn has been damaged by Blackheaded Pasture Cockchafer (*Aphodius tasmaniae*). The cockchafer is a native insect of south-eastern Australia. Further damage is being caused by birds who are digging up the larvae (grubs). In April to May, the very young cockchafers are found nearer the centre of the damaged area, while the more mature larvae are on the outside. In late winter, the fully fed ones stay behind while younger larvae continue to advance. Maximum larval feeding occurs in winter when the rate of pasture growth is slowing down due to the cold weather. Bare patches usually become very noticeable at this time.

Council is yet to finalise a control plan, but is likely to include spraying and resowing in Spring. For further information visit; <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/pest-insects-and-mites/priority-pest-insects-and-mites/blackheaded-pasture-cockchafer>



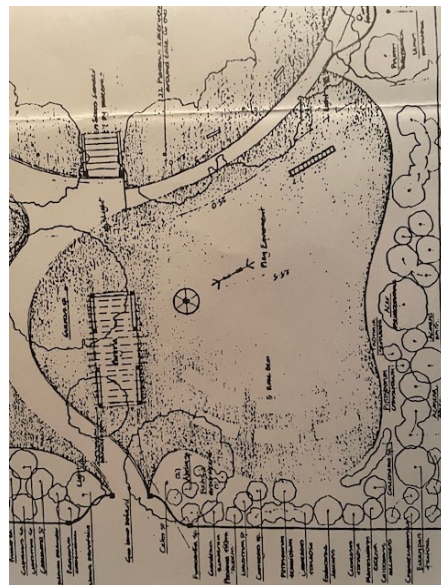
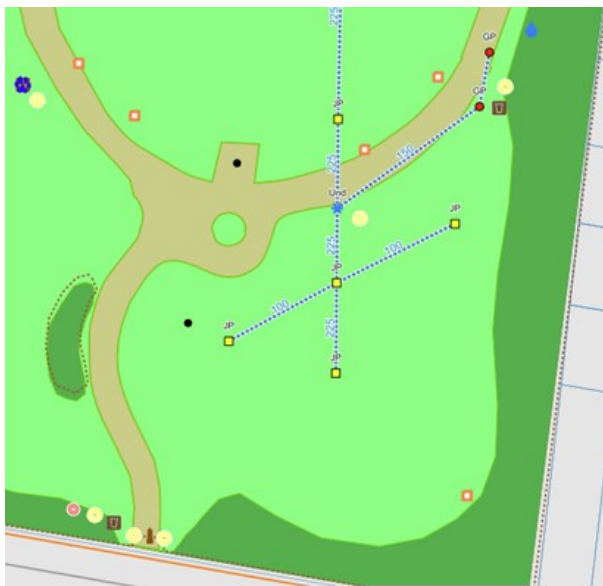
Sunken Oval looking South, 21 July 2025

Waterlogging:

For several years during the annual garden inspection waterlogging in the south east corner has been observed. It was unclear where the excess water was coming from although the properties in Trinian Street might be contributing to the problem. During the brick drain inspection on Wednesday 23 April, Marella Stow, Open Space Planner, brought along a drainage plan shown below left.

This plan shows 4 drainage pits but only the 2 central pits are visible today. The diagonal line of 3 pits coincides with play equipment shown on the 1989 Existing Conditions plan. It appears likely that when the play equipment was removed around 1990 the drainage was damaged. Council is currently investigating the drainage system in the south eastern corner.

It is interesting to note that Sangster in May 1885 commented on *offensive drainage percolating through from the upper side*. The south eastern lawn is the former site of the "Mount" created when soil was removed to form the sunken oval.



FOVG Membership

Your Membership subscription for **2025-2026** is now due as of 1st July. Your membership demonstrates the strength of community support for the Victoria Gardens.

Membership Fee: **\$10 Individual and \$15 Family.**

Payment via bank transfer as follows:

- Account name - Friends of Victoria Gardens Inc.
- BSB - 083 004.
- Bank - NAB
- Account number- 931262922.
- Write your name in the reference section so that we can acknowledge receipt of your membership.

Office bearers for 2025-2026

At the Annual General Meeting held on 20 July 2025 John Hawker was re-elected as President and Jill Hawker as Treasurer. Brendon Gray chose not seek re-election to position of Secretary. We thank Brendon for his valuable contribution since July 2023.

As there were no nominations for the position of Secretary at the meeting, the Committee is now seeking a new secretary. The position requires preparation of Minutes for 3 meetings and the AGM plus occasional correspondence. If you are interested in taking a more active role in FOVG please email the Friends info.fovq@gmail.com or contact John Hawker on 0438 510 522.