

GARDEN NOTES

CORIYULE

Coriyule is the oldest residence on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula and dates to 1848. A series of story boards located at specific points around the property will provide you with greater detail on the history, work undertaken and future vision for sections of the house and garden.

The stately house was originally surrounded by 1000 acres (about 400 hectares) of farmland and was established by Miss Anne Drysdale and her companion Miss Caroline Newcomb. After securing the property, plans for a new sheep farm and the construction of a stately residence progressed quickly. Built from local sandstone, their home was designed by celebrated colonial architect Charles Laing in the Gothic Revival Style.

The unexpected death of Miss Drysdale in the winter of 1853 at the age of 60 meant the property passed to Caroline Newcomb who continued to live at the residence for a further eight years until her marriage to Rev. James D. Dodgson. In time it was purchased by a variety of owners, each possessing a diminishing capacity to maintain the residence, surrounding garden and farmland. The restored house, remnants of the original Gardener's Cottage and the surrounding 40 hectares are what now remains of the original estate.

Garden and surrounds

The current owners have spent the past 10 years restoring the house at Coriyule from a near ruinous condition and re-invigorating the garden and its surrounding landscape.

At the time of purchase the garden was dominated by dead and dying trees, rabbit burrows, piles of rubbish, weeds and overgrown grass. With advice from Heritage Victoria more than 100 large trees were removed. New planting commenced quickly and includes hedging and over 7,000 trees. The emerging vegetation now assists to moderate drying winds that are a continuing challenge to garden establishment on this elevated site.

The house sits on a graveled court and is surrounded by large trees, sweeping lawns and various garden areas. These include the **Kitchen Potager** with raised beds, **Sculptural Bronze Ibis** (commissioned from Melbourne artist Ivana Perkins) that perch above the **Original Stone Well** and nearby the **Guava Garden** that over time will produce a variety of tasty fruits. On the western boundary the **Arboretum** features various species of oak including a circle of *Quercus suber* (Cork Oak). An **Elm Tree Woodland** is developing from a thicket of remnant trees and leads to the **Glasshouse** and **Productive Vegetable Garden** (at its peak in summer and autumn). A **Games Lawn** for tennis, picnicking and family fun also offers room for large trees to gracefully spread.

The character and form of the garden is defined by the stately trees that have withstood the ravages of time. Of particular note are specimens of *Ficus rubiginosa* (Port Jackson Fig), *Podocarpus elatus* (Plum Pine) and *Brachychiton populneus* (Kurrajong). Remarkably each has survived heavy pruning and long periods of neglect. The Plum Pine has an unusual spreading form as it has endured lightning strike during its life. These particular trees are of special interest as the same species also grow at Geelong Botanical Garden, this was established during the same era as Coriyule when an interest in new and useful species together with species 'acclimatisation' was at its height.

'Traces' of past activities also inform the garden. Excavation around the rear of the residence was undertaken to prevent flooding of the now restored cellar. These level changes provided an opportunity for construction of a long retaining wall built from sandstone that links the house to the garden and creates a natural edge that defines the Kitchen Potager. Images exist of a conservatory that once formed part of the original features of the residence on the northeast corner, and plans are being discussed for its reinstatement. Footings and traces of the roofline of the conservatory can be clearly seen from this section of the garden.

New plantings such as the dwarf pomegranate hedge are emerging and the structure of the garden is being informed by plants trialled and selected to cope with 'farm garden' conditions. Tough plants (such as pelargoniums) were no doubt grown by the original owners.

There are some new challenges, such as the Cypress Canker that is now attacking a number of the large coniferous trees. This will impact on the character of the garden, as affected species will require removal and replacement.

With the most important and difficult task of restoring the stately residence almost complete, the next challenge is the remaking of the Gardener's Cottage. This can be viewed from a distance but is currently 'out of bounds' while walls are stabilised in preparation for new building works. The state of this building is a window into time and evidence of the state of the residence some 10 years ago.

More history

To understand the history of Coriyule it is valuable to learn a few details of Miss Drysdale and Miss Newcomb's early settlement in Australia. Their story is not well known and deserves more attention as it highlights the important role that many women played in the founding of the early Colony of Victoria.

Anne Drysdale sailed to Melbourne from Scotland at the age of 47 as an independent 'heiress', landing in the autumn of 1840. Prior to arrival she had a stated desire to establish her own farm and through a family connection requested the purchase of suitable land and sheep. To her dismay this had not been undertaken but shortly after landing her enquiries were met by an offer of property along the Barwon River on the outskirts of Geelong. Dr Alexander Thomson made this offer and as one of the Geelong region's prominent early settlers Miss Drysdale was indeed fortunate, well guided and supported. It is through the Thompsons that Miss Drysdale was introduced to their children's governess, Miss Caroline Newcomb in 1840. At the time of Anne Drysdale's settlement in the Geelong region the population numbered just 454 people, a third of which were women.

Miss Drysdale kept diaries and these short 'jottings' detail her sea journey, arrival and early years in the colony and of life at her first home at Boronggoop (meaning turf). The diaries note the purchase of Coriyule and excitement at its establishment. Unfortunately the final diary is missing. Its unlikely discovery would complete the story of the partnership between these two remarkable women.

The diaries are a social history of the time and list visitors, social interactions, the meals shared, church activities and the challenges of managing farm workers. Daily tasks are noted as 'jobbing', domestic routines described, supplies and vegetables grown bought and sold are listed. Most importantly farm progress and stock management is noted. With the establishment of a significant flock, including merino, sheep breeding and wool production formed the core of the farming activities at Boronggoop.

Miss Drysdale and Miss Newcomb experienced considerable resistance in their bid to expand activities through the purchase of a larger property. This was despite holding a squatters licence, the right to run 10,000 acres and a demonstrated ability to farm successfully. Evidence of their success can be found in an excerpt from the diaries written in August 1844:

"We have now spent three years at Boronggoop. Our sheep have increased from 800 to 6,000. From 3 to 17 horses besides 2 sold and one dead. From 3 cows to 10. We certainly have not made any money but we keep out of debt & have much cause for gratitude to the Almighty who has furnished us with all things needful & enables us to be useful to many of our fellow creatures. We live very happily & have no wish except to have a piece of land & a stone cottage..." Drysdale & Newcomb.

It was only after a number of years that Coriyule was secured – and the magnificent residence and surrounds that we see today were created.