
Alexandra Gardens

Location

70 Cotham Road KEW, BOROONDARA CITY

Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

Level of significance

Incl in HO area indiv sig

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO523

Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

Alexandra Gardens, Kew is sited on the south side of Cotham Road. The gardens are rectilinear in plan form, extend for approximately 1.5 hectares, and are sited below road level which in turn lends the gardens a sheltered and secluded character. Contributory elements include the three entrances, with the main entry in the form of a basalt lych gate with associated stone walls, splayed to the corner of Gellibrand Street and Cotham Road; an ornamental pond traversed by a small bridge, as the centrepiece of the gardens; low stone walls and basalt pitcher edges to paths; an ornamental metal fence on a basalt plinth to the Gellibrand Street boundary; and sculptural elements within the gardens including the Queen Victoria Jubilee drinking fountain, installed in 1924 after its relocation from the corner of Cotham Road and High Streets. The Victorian-style band rotunda which is thought to be either a major reworking of the original 1910 structure, or a relocation and reconstruction of an early rotunda located elsewhere in the municipality, is sympathetic to the character of the Gardens. Other later elements include a series of small bronze relief plaques and elements of statuary made by local sculptor Leopoldine Mimovich and presented to the City of Kew in 1990.

Soft landscape elements include densely planted garden beds; herbaceous borders; open areas of lawn; specimen trees; and a serpentine network of paths bordered by basalt pitchers. The gardens' Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Study Lovell Chen 2011 Alexandra Gardens, Property Citation 91

large specimen trees include Plane trees (*Platanus* sp.), White Poplar (*Populus alba*) and a number of mature Canary Island palms (*Phoenix canariensis*).

How is it Significant

Alexandra Gardens, Kew, is of historical, social and aesthetic significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it Significant

Alexandra Gardens, Kew, established in 1908 is of local historical and social significance, as a substantially intact park of the Edwardian period, and as one of few formally landscaped parks and public gardens in Kew. The gardens have their origin in the nineteenth century public parks and 'pocket' gardens movement in England, when such gardens were seen as important 'breathing spaces' in increasingly industrialised and crowded urban environments. The founders of Melbourne also embraced the idea of public gardens, and made provision for public parks when laying out subdivisions and town plans. Alexandra Gardens are among the smaller 'pocket' parks and gardens which were also established in Melbourne into the early twentieth century, including small municipal gardens. The gardens are additionally significant for being purchased and established by the (then) Borough of Kew, on land formerly associated with the property known as Madford; and for their association with curator George Pockett, brother of the more renowned curator and garden designer Thomas Pockett, who was known as the 'chrysanthemum' man. The latter Pockett is also believed to have collaborated in the design of Alexandra Gardens.

With regard to their social significance, Alexandra Gardens are valued by the community for their picturesque form and character, and for the respite they offer from the busy Kew Junction area. The gardens have also been well used by the community over a long period, including hosting concerts, picnics, fetes, community festivals, and even anti-war demonstrations.

Alexandra Gardens, Kew, are also of local aesthetic significance. The Edwardian era gardens are an example of a 'Gardenesque' aesthetic, with expanses of lawn (albeit of a relatively modest scale), specimen tree plantings, massed herbaceous garden beds and a picturesque arrangement of serpentine paths bordered by trees. Within the municipality, the gardens are unusual in retaining their comparatively dense plantings. The inclusion (and survival) of the contemplative pond also emphasises the original garden intent of providing an oasis of calm near busy Kew Junction. The 'sunken' character of the gardens, combined with the shrubberies and density of the planting, and the formalised stone gate and walled entrances additionally reinforce the gardens' sense of enclosure and 'separateness'.

Heritage Study/Consultant Boroondara - Kew Junction Commercial Heritage Study, Lovell Chen, 2012;

Hermes Number 192801

Property Number

Physical Conditions

Alexandra Gardens are sited on the south side of Cotham Road, east of the intersection with High Street. The gardens are rectilinear in plan form and are approximately 1.5 hectares in extent. The west side of the gardens abuts Gellibrand Street and the east side abuts the former Council Offices, now the Kew Library. To the south the gardens abut private property.

In grade, the gardens are below road level and in this way they create a sheltered, secluded space, in accordance with their original purpose - providing a 'green' respite from the busy Kew Junction.

There are three entrances - the main entry is in the form of a basalt lych gate, splayed to the corner of Gellibrand Street and Cotham Road. The side walls support a timber pergola which in turn supports an ornamental grape vine. There is a 'crazy' paving entry apron and a central stone half-height pillar framed by a pair of ornamental metal gates, featuring strapwork, opening to an asphalt path to the south-east. The pillar has an inset panel with relief metal lettering reading 'CITY OF KEW' and a roundel reading 'ALEXANDRA GARDENS' and '1908' at its centre. A bronze-finish plaque lists the Mayors and Chairmen of the municipality from its inception in 1860 until its amalgamation to form the City of Boroondara in 1994.

Stone walls to either side of the entrance form low retaining walls for flanking garden beds to both streets, with the walls continuing down into the gardens proper. A similar lych gate form entry is located in Gellibrand Street where the gardens adjoin the north boundary of 22-4 Gellibrand Street; and a further entrance adjoins the Library to Cotham Road. There is an ornamental openwork metal fence along the boundary of the gardens to Gellibrand Street, atop a plinth of bluestone pitchers. A timber paling fence, largely obscured by vegetation borders screens the properties to the south boundary.

The remainder of the gardens is formed of densely planted garden beds to Cotham Road, and an open area of lawn to the centre of the Cotham Road frontage. The density of the garden bed plantings gives way to specimen trees in a lawn setting as one nears the Library building.

The gardens have a serpentine network of paths - a characteristic of Pickett's garden designs - bordered by bluestone pitchers, and finished with asphalt. These also border the east and west garden areas and intersect a diagonal pathway system running from the south-west to the north-east corner of the gardens. Island garden beds, set at path junctions and surrounding several of the palms, and beds bordering paths are also edged in bluestone pitchers. Herbaceous and mixed shrub borders line the pathways, with a sub-tropical border featuring palms and strelitzia along the southern border of the gardens.

An ornamental pond, traversed by a small bridge forms the centrepiece of the gardens. The bridge has a decorative iron rail, formed of curved metal blades, reminiscent of nineteenth century 'spike' fencing. The pond is bordered with narrow bluestone pitchers, and there are several palms flanking the bridge approaches.

The gardens also house a small Victorian-style band rotunda, sited in the south-west quadrant. The design of this structure differs markedly from the style of rotunda shown in historic photographs, and it is thought that it is either a major reworking of the original structure, or a reconstruction of an early rotunda, located elsewhere in the municipality. The structure is supported on a graduated brickwork plinth to three sides, with access directly from the pathway adjoining to the west. The original structure was erected in c. 1910, and refurbished in 1988 and again in 2000.

The gardens' large specimen trees include conifers and plane trees, as well as areas of lawn, particularly in the surroundings to the band rotunda. Mature trees are located through the gardens and also form avenues; several are labelled. Specimens include Plane trees (*Platanus sp.*), White Poplar (*Populus alba*) and a number of mature Canary Island palms (*Phoenix canariensis*).

There is a small picnic area and bbq diagonally opposite the rotunda. Children's play equipment is located in the south-west quadrant, close to the Library building, in a setting of tan bark.

The gardens are lit by a series of metal lamp standards, which are a hybrid design, with a Victorian style lamp post, capped by a lantern modelled on the City of Melbourne lamp posts, which were installed throughout the municipality from the 1920s. Reproduction timber and iron seats are placed throughout the gardens.

There are a number of sculptural elements sited within the gardens including the Queen Victoria Jubilee drinking fountain, installed in 1924 after its relocation from the corner of Cotham Road and High Streets. The fountain is sited on axis with the corner entrance from Gellibrand Street and Cotham Road and has been modified to support a single lamp standard, in place of its original five-branched gas fitting.¹¹ As well, there is a series of ten small bronze relief plaques and elements of statuary made by local sculptor Leopoldine Mimovich and presented to the City of Kew in 1990. Typically placed in small clusters, and set atop stone plinths, these are designed to appeal particularly to children.

It is noted that, with regard to original and altered elements, including the overall garden layout, planning, and hard and soft landscape features, the scope of this assessment did not provide for a detailed physical investigation and documentation/identification of these elements. It is known that individual elements within the garden vary in date and origin. Accepting this, further detailed investigation would assist in establishing the

relative heritage significance or importance of specific garden elements. It is also the case that the gardens as a whole are significant.

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/>