
Aradale Mental Hospital Garden

Location

McLellan Street, ARARAT VIC 3377 - Property No G13052

Municipality

ARARAT RURAL CITY

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 29, 2005

Aradale, erected as a lunatic asylum in 1864-67, its accommodation augmented in the late 1880s by the erection of detached cottages and hospitals, the institution further enlarged during the twentieth century, and used for its original purpose until its closure in 1994. of State cultural significance: - for its retention of early design elements typical of mid-nineteenth century asylum planning; these include remnants of ha-ha or sunk walls, gate lodge, axially planned buildings, wards with airing courts and towers, main drives, and an extensive area for the farm and vegetable garden, plus farm buildings; - for its retention of buildings from the period 1864-67 which demonstrate the earliest phase of development on the site; these include the gate lodge and fencing, administration and kitchen block, wards, verandahs and covered ways, and sunk wall; - for its retention of buildings from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century which demonstrate the continuing development of this site and shifts in attitudes to the treatment of psychiatric illness; these include the convalescent cottages and detached male and female hospital wards, the sunshades and fever tent, and the links with the former Ararat gaol (used as a criminal ward); - for its collection of mature trees and plants some dating from the mid-late nineteenth century and others from the 1916 work of Hugh Linaker and later curators; these include a large collection of conifers and other mature exotic trees; - for its considerable aesthetic qualities principally derived from the mature planting, distant views of the site, views from the site to surrounding land, the impressive scale and detailing of the early buildings; -for its representation of the after effects of the gold era, a period of paramount importance in development of the Colony; - for its close links with the township of Ararat; this aspect is manifest in both historical and social importance (Ararat's economy relied on institutions such as the gaol, railway depot, asylum and hospital) and the visual prominence of the institution located on a hill to the east of the township; - for its long continuity of use as a psychiatric institution.

Land in Ararat for a 'Lunatic Asylum' was set aside as early as 1860 but the 250 acre reserve east of the township was formally reserved (albeit only temporarily) in July 1864 as a 'Site for an Asylum for the Insane'.

Early photographs show the ground as relatively bare with only scattered eucalypts on the site. During 1870, Inspector E Paley reported: "Farm and garden operations have been carried on vigorously, and have afforded means of occupation to a large number of patients. Considerable progress has been made in the planting of fruit and ornamental trees. A great quantity of firewood has been gathered in, and a good piece of road has been constructed." Paley again reported on the landscaping in 1876: "On account of the exposed aspect of the building it was found necessary to make an extensive plantation of quickly growing forest trees around the outside of the boundary wall. The work done has been under the direction of the Inspector of State Forests, and I was glad to observe on the occasion of my visits that the work was being vigorously carried on. There can be no doubt that great improvement will be effected by it in the course of a few years." On Paley's visits in 1879 he commented that "some of the airing courts have been improved by planting trees, and a sunshade has been erected in the female refractory airing court (still surviving). This court and the corresponding one on the male side require considerable improvements." He also recorded the erection of a picket fence in the female airing yard and the appointment of a new gardener (Clarke). Plans for farm buildings were prepared by PWD architect Henry A Williams in 1872 and in the following year, although the buildings were still incomplete, the Board of Official Visitors reported that: "Great attention has been bestowed on the farm, and it now returns a fair amount of produce for the use of the establishment. The soil is generally of a very inferior character, and the produce returns of the farm and garden do not therefore bear favourable comparison with those of other asylums." The principal products from the farm were barley, carrots, green feed, hay, lucerne, milk, pork and straw, while the garden produced beans, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, marrows, onions, peas, radish and turnips although no fruit. Many of the buildings constructed for this activity survive. The Zox Commission of 1884-86, acting on repeated urgings of Inspector Paley, recommended the construction of convalescent cottages and detached cottage hospitals at Ararat to supplement the inadequate accommodation provided by the main blocks. Plans were prepared by the Public Works Department during 1886-89 and these new cottages provided much needed accommodation as well as further opportunities for landscaping. A residence for the Medical Superintendent (demolished) was also constructed during 1886 and this was suitably landscaped with gardens overlooking a pond (survives).

By 1905 a poultry farm had been added to the farm, although Inspector Jones reported that "the supply of eggs has been very deficient". During 1906 two officers from the Agriculture Department made an assessment of all the hospital farms and commented that 'with the exception of bread and butter, practically the whole of the foodstuffs required, and on an improved dietary scale, may be raised on the farms'. With regard to the landscaping Jones reported that "the ornamental gardens are being extended wherever possible." The institution was the subject of comprehensive photographic coverage in 1907 and an album of 48 photographs survives. Drought years in 1912-15 hampered the gardening operations and in 1912 the Medical Superintendent commented that "the ornamental grounds are steadily retrogressing; as the present needs cannot be met it is useless to increase them." During the following year "the outer boundaries on the south and west were planted with trees" yet after a promising start, stray goats maddeningly destroyed the lot. Buckets were also "requisitioned to keep the plants alive." By the end of 1914 the Medical Superintendent spoke despairingly of the ornamental grounds "which, as such, cease to be" and of the "killing effect" of the prolonged drought on the farm and garden. A new water main was commissioned in 1916 and this greatly assisted the farm and garden operations. In this year also, the new Departmental Landscape Gardener, Hugh Linaker, visited Ararat and prepared a plan for the hospital grounds. The back avenue was planted and the trees were reported to be making steady growth. The grounds about the wards and the front entrance were "steadily being laid out after the killing drought", doubtless utilising some of the 10,700 plants forwarded to institutions during 1916 by Linaker from his stock at the Mont Park Nursery. During 1917 the pines, planted four decades earlier were removed and the Medical Superintendent commented: It is intended to plant the areas denuded by the removal of the pines, and also that part which being overrun with onion weed is useless for cultivation. As this flat was the home of the eucalyptus rostrata in years gone by, it was suggested that this most valuable timber be planted rather than the common pine, the value of which, even at the present inflated price, was incomparably less than that of the gum at any time. The front grounds were laid out in lawns and ornamental flower beds "according to a plan [presumably Linaker's] approved by you [i.e. W Ernest Jones, Inspector-General of the Insane], and its present appearance does great credit to Attendant McSwan, who carried out the work." Replanting of areas where pines were removed continued in 1919 and in 1923 the Medical Superintendent observed that 'the pine and shrub plantations are responding well to the attention bestowed upon them'. Some elements of this conifer plantation survive on the south of the complex. A Fordson tractor was acquired for the farm during 1927 although horse power was still utilised for some time after. In recent years the landscaping in front of the administrative building has been renewed, although many elements of the early landscaping survive elsewhere.

Aradale is approached from the south along a long drive which passes a handsome and notable 'villa-rustica' Italianate gate lodge before entering a pine plantation. The drive trifurcates; a main drive leads through a pine plantation, a western drive skirts the plantation and leads to the rear of the walled complex, and an eastern drive leads to the farm complex and circuitously to the rear. The plantation on the main drive opens to reveal the imposing bulk of the main administrative block with flanking wards.

Airing courts are contained by the buildings and the high perimeter wall. This wall was in part designed as a ha-ha or sunk wall, permitting extensive views from the elevated site, eastward to Mount Langi Ghiran and westward to Ararat. The male airing yard retains one sun-shade from early this century (another collapsed) and the female yard has a notable rustic two-roof sun-shade with bush pole construction and a shingled roof, presumably from the 1870s. The fever tent from early this century is nearby and had a similar open-air design which is now rare in the State's large hospital complexes.

The walled enclosure, with its gate houses and workshops on the north, is now breached in several parts and some newer buildings have been erected in the original compound but the remaining sections are notable, particularly on the south-east of the main block where the wall profile and plan are both curved. On the west side of the wall is an opening (since closed in) which served the morgue (1879) which itself is also of note.

There are extensive grounds outside of the wall, containing the ornamental dam, pine plantations, sports oval, recently established golf course, farm buildings and extensive farm area. Some newer buildings dot the grounds but the overall character is remarkably intact to the three major development eras (1860s, 1870s, 1880s).

ANALYSIS

The planning of Ararat is similar to Beechworth and Kew, with the Sunbury asylum showing a change in concept with its detached pavilion style development. Hence Ararat is of a small group of large lunatic asylums which took so many resources to establish and although quickly outmoded in their planning could not be disposed of until recently because of the huge public investment in their construction. Ararat is now the most complete of these three complexes and was the first to open.

The landscaping of Aradale is typical for a Victorian psychiatric institution with plantings of conifers, areas set aside for farm activities (including vegetable growing), ornamental gardens in conspicuous public areas and specimen trees and sunshades in the airing courts. The large extant sunshade of rustic construction is now a rare survivor, not only amongst former psychiatric institutions but also for a garden building of the 1870s. The landscaping is now poorly maintained but essential elements are retained.

A major boost to the landscaping of Aradale came in 1916 following the appointment three years earlier of Hugh Linaker as landscape gardener for the Lunacy Department.⁽¹⁷⁾ Linaker was born in the late nineteenth century and the first known reference to his career indicates he was working at Ballarat. He was appointed Curator of Parks and Gardens for the municipality of Ararat in August 1901 and set about landscaping the area later known as Alexandra Park. His chance for promotion came in January 1912 when the Victorian government advertised for an 'Ornamental Gardener' for the Mont Park Hospital for the Insane. Hugh Linaker was appointed 'landscape gardener, Hospital for the Insane, on probation for twelve months' in April 1912. Importantly the position required Linaker 'to give his expert advice at any of the other Hospitals for the Insane should he be required to do so'. In this way he produced designs for government sites such as the asylum grounds at Mont Park, Sunbury, Ararat, Beechworth and Ballarat, and other government reserves such as Yarra Bend National Park, Domain, Shrine of Remembrance and Buchan Caves, and private clients such as the gardens of Alfred Nicholas at Carn Brea and Burnham Beeches. In one sense Linaker was the successor to Ferdinand Mueller and William Guilfoyle. Just as Mueller, as Government Botanist and Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, had controlled a huge nursery distributing plants throughout Victoria (and indeed the world) and Guilfoyle, Director of the Botanic Gardens, was extensively consulted on garden design matters by clients, both public and private, so Linaker was the senior public servant in Victoria with responsibility for matters embracing horticulture and landscape design. Apart from the foregoing, little else is known of his career and at present his reputation rests upon a relatively small number of documented works. Linaker's main hallmark was his bold landscape schemes and his contribution to Victorian history is as a pioneering landscape architect in a period before that profession was given due regard. Linaker's involvement at Aradale is best demonstrated by the large quantities of plants he forwarded from Mont Park, many of which form the backbone of the landscaping we see today.

Existing Designations:

Listed on the Register of Significant Trees of Victoria:
Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata' (Irish Yew)

Crataegus coccinea (Pink Hawthorn)

Australian Heritage Commission:

Aradale Mental Hospital and Gate Lodge listed on the Register of the National Estate.

File note 18/06/2012: G13052 amalgamated with 2122

Hermes Number 70188

Property Number

Physical Description 1

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To the north-east, north-west, south-east and south-west are the cottage male and female hospital wards and convalescent cottages, used in part for the farm worker patients. These follow a typical suburban verandahed Italianate villa style externally but their layout still evokes their markedly different use and they represent the change in approach to lunatic accommodation, allowing particular types of patients to be located apart from the major body of lunatics. This type of accommodation has been demolished at Kew

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Buildings which do not fit this character but are of individual note, are the nurses home of the 1930s and the nearby converted mental defectives hospital from the same period. The 1950s, although a major era of 'improvement' under the new Mental Health Authority, has left no architecturally notable structures but instead

many alterations to the ward interiors. The administration wing interior still has some notable original elements.

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/>