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# Colac Botanic Gardens



G13085 Colac Botanical Gardens

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## Location

Fyans Street, COLAC VIC 3250 - Property No G13085

## Municipality

COLAC OTWAY SHIRE

## Level of significance

State

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2259

## Heritage Listing

National Trust

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 30, 2004

Colac Botanic Gardens, set aside in 1865, developed in the late 1870s and possibly enhanced by William Guilfoyle early in the twentieth century, is significant:

- as a fine example of a nineteenth century provincial botanic garden, a garden type best exemplified by the collection of such gardens created in colonial Victoria. Typical characteristics of provincial botanic gardens found at Colac include a formal entry, carriage drive, informal park layout, picturesque setting with distant vistas, contrast between open lawns planted with specimen trees and areas of more intensive horticulture, and a

location in proximity to a township developed during the late nineteenth century;

- for its collection of plants, characteristic of late nineteenth century gardens as well as the sub-tropical plant groups favoured by William Guilfoyle from the 1870s to the first decade of the twentieth century;

- for the survival of Guilfoyle's plan and report, which in conjunction with the present garden illustrate the design process of one of Australia's major garden designers.

#### ANALYSIS

Colac Botanic Gardens has been viewed by many authors as a 'Guilfoyle garden' and at first glance this attribution appears sound.<sup>(21)</sup> A Guilfoyle plan exists along with a detailed report and the present garden largely conforms with Guilfoyle's plan. A close examination of the plan in conjunction with the report, however, gives a slightly different emphasis. Guilfoyle's report acknowledges that much of the existing landscape should be retained and his report concentrated on improvements and remodelling. His plan, far from being a new design, largely records the existing layout with indications of paths to be removed; only the 'tropical dell' and suggested treatment of the northern slope appear to have been major new additions to the pre-1910 layout.

The layout that Guilfoyle encountered is likely to date from c.1875-1880, the work of curators Reeves and more importantly John McDonald. Their layout was itself a reworking of Bunce's original plan and coincided with a period of ferment in local garden design. By c.1875-1880 Guilfoyle had convincingly demonstrated to the Melbourne public the attractiveness of his picturesque reworking of Mueller's layout of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. At Geelong Botanic Gardens John Raddenberry had succeeded Bunce in July 1872 and by May 1875 the Geelong Advertiser could report on the softening of Bunce's rigid landscaping, where trees had been thinned, path layouts altered and an introduction of more English trees at the expense of Blue Gums.<sup>(22)</sup> Even in private gardens, major changes were taking place to such estates as Ripponlea, where during 1880-82 the early formal layout was replaced by the sweeping lawns, paths and lake that remain today. In this light, it is perhaps more accurate to consider Colac Botanic Gardens as an accomplished design of the late 1870s, with an overlay of planting by Guilfoyle during the Edwardian period. Even the extent of Guilfoyle's planting is not known; a c.1910 photograph shows the garden with very similar planting to that which still survives. Certainly his 'tropical dell' and suggested landscaping of the northern slope were never implemented.<sup>(23)</sup>

Hermes Number 70203

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

### DESCRIPTION

Colac Botanic Gardens sit on an elevated site on the southern shore of Lake Colac. The garden is north-east of the town centre and provides a mature landscape setting from which the town visitor gains their first view of the lake. The landscape is mainly confined to the flat elevated portion of the site; the shoreline and Guilfoyle's 'tropical dell' having never been fully developed as once intended.

The main portion of the garden is approached from the south-west entrance gates at the corner of Fyans Street and Gellibrand Street and the carriage drive forms a loop around the perimeter of the garden. Access is also possible from Queen Street. The space enclosed by the drive is predominantly open lawn with specimen trees while the drive itself is lined by an avenue of trees. A network of winding paths criss crosses the lawn which also contains several clumped shrubberies.

The boundaries of the landscaped section are lined by tree planting, comprising *Quercus robur* on the southern side, *Syzygium paniculatum* on the west, *Pinus radiata* along the north (lake edge), while the carriage drive is flanked by an avenue of *Quercus robur* (English Oak). Specimen trees, notably *Cupressus macrocarpa*, *Cupressus torulosa*, *Cupressus sempervirens*, *Ulmus x hollandica*, *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Vegeta', *Araucaria bidwillii*, *Araucaria heterophylla*, *Ficus macrophylla*, *Quercus cerris* and *Agathis robusta* dot the lawn. The clumps

are composed of palms and Cordylines, favourites of William Guilfoyle and recommended in his 1910 report.

There are also several flower beds on the lawns.

A curator's cottage, glasshouse and tearooms have now been demolished but the following structures are still located in the gardens: residence, entrance gates (1965), two cannons, rose arbor (c.1960s), playground equipment, barbecue shelter and public toilets (c.1945-60). Remnants of an early fountain have been converted into a flower bed. A fitness training track with pine log structures has also been incorporated into the gardens. A fire training track and yacht club are located between the gardens and the lake foreshore. The garden is now enclosed on the south by a modern cyclone fence and on the west by a timber paling fence.

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