

BOLINDA VALE GARDEN NOTES

The original land acquisition Special Survey of 31,375 acres which now contains the house and garden was initiated and paid for in 1850 before gold was discovered and Victoria became a colony. Additional land, not necessarily contiguous, had been and was subsequently purchased until W.J.T. Clarke's holdings north of Melbourne approximated 100,000 acres with its operating hub, including the large slab sided woolshed then shearing more than 80,000 sheep, being located here.

The property was managed by Robert Clarke who worked for the family (W.J.T. Clarke, Sir William Clarke and Sir Rupert T.H. Clarke) for more than 50 years. The bluestone homestead was built for Robert Clarke in 1878 as the manager's residence with the Clarke family living in Sunbury at Rupertswood. The first member of the family to live at Bolinda Vale was Sir Rupert W.J. Clarke who returned here after the war with his wife Kathleen. His father RTHC had died in Monte Carlo in 1926 when RWJC was 7 years old. RWJC subsequently grew up in England and spent much of the war as ADC to Field Marshal Alexander in the Burma, North Africa, Sicily and Italian campaigns.

The original property was much reduced in size by sale of subdivisions before the First World War and soldier settlement acquisitions after it. It now comprises about 1,900 hectares of mixed farming with an emphasis on prime lambs, cereal and oilseed crops. The average rainfall is around 610 millimeters (24") with variance between 270 and 960. Frosts, winter waterlogging and strong northerly winds in Spring can impact adversely on the growing season.

The garden has gone through a number of iterations. Initially it would have been developed as a pastoral station homestead complex with an emphasis on functionality. A tack room was located in the rear of the house, which also then contained an open courtyard, well and kitchen. The flat below the homestead was developed with an irrigation system comprising a weir on the creek feeding an aqueduct to a water wheel coupled to a Kelly & Lewis piston pump which lifted water to a "high" tank as well as a large, in ground, bluestone tank. This water was available for stock watering, the garden and also a chinese gardener who grew vegetables on much of the flat.

Some idea of the actual house garden can be obtained from the accompanying lithographs/photos. It would be fair to say that the garden was probably not enclosed by much in the way of visual barriers as the initial tree cover would have been very modest and the occupants were interested in looking outwards, notwithstanding the considerable number of workers employed on the Estate. From plantings established over the first fifty years there could well have been a slow decline from the retirement of Robert Clarke at the beginning of the 20th century up until 1927 when RTHC died and the property was leased to a livestock trader.

By 1947 the garden was very run down but over the course of the next half-century became the focus for a great deal of work, including cypress hedges and stone and brick walls for privacy and protection from wind. A walled kitchen garden, an ivy then wisteria covered large pergola, swimming pool, wire house, rose garden and beds dominated by annuals were all constructed and maintained by a full-time gardener. Numerous buildings and additions to the homestead were also built. An idea of the result can be obtained from the accompanying aerial photo.

In 2005 a major restoration and interior modernisation of the homestead, begun by Sir Rupert W.J. Clarke was completed. At the same time the garden was substantially

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modified with the emphasis once again being outward looking and at ease with its surroundings. Most of the walls and hedges were removed, the tennis court torn up and a start made on incorporating the lower eastern area with its eucalyptus plantings into the vista.

Further oak and eucalyptus plantings took place at this time and the rose garden was extended and altered. David Austin roses predominate with Graham Thomas backing onto the cypress hedge. The sundial was a gift from friends on the occasion of the centenary of the baronetcy in 1982. The magnolia trees on the front lawns include a number planted by notable visitors to Bolinda Vale, including Crown Prince Hirohito, now Emperor of Japan, Prince Reza Pahlavi, the eldest son of the Shah of Iran and HSH Prince Albert of Monaco.

The garden beds surrounding the house retain annuals to give a more intense reflection of the seasons and to compensate to some extent for the very young nature of the replanted garden. Solomon's seal and hostas are planted in the shady areas with iris, cactus roses and echiums on the northern side. An olive hedge has done very well around the paved courtyard to the south both breaking the wind and softening the brick wall which provided initial protection.

Most recently, Phillip Johnson has designed and constructed a striking landscaped water feature for the previously empty paddock east of the lower garden. Great use has been made of the naturally occurring basalt rocks which, over the years, have been cleared from potentially arable paddocks. A design feature has been the emphasis on plants able to survive dry periods without watering and sustainable pond and wetlands management. During periods of heavy rain the dry creek beds cater for run-off from the various driveways and overflow from domestic rainwater harvesting is directed into the billabongs. Solar powered pumping for streams and waterfalls is also an important and very functional element of the feature's operation.

In years past the Bolinda Creek which runs below the homestead was a permanent creek with reliable summer flows. However, increased drawing both for towns and riparian homes has substantially reduced the ability to extract garden water over much of the year. Water is now supplied to the garden from a nearby dam but annual run-off to keep it full is quite uncertain. In addition summer algae is an issue for the automatic watering systems which were implemented in 2005.

Naturally a green garden in summer is greatly appreciated on a dry land farm for both its spiritually uplifting qualities and fire protection potential. However it is important to reflect the reality of the environment so new plantings are made with the thought of being able to do well in both dry summer conditions and frosty autumn/winters. The Memorial garden and new "rock" areas reflect this philosophy.