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The Cave Garden of Mount Gambier: the development of a garden within the city by the crater

David Jones *

The Cave Garden has long been the focus of community activities in Mount Gambier. Since first European settlement, when the cave (or sinkhole) was the principal source of fresh water, the Cave Garden has been the venue for community institutions, activities and celebrations. A special place for this community, it is its 'civic square' and a continual source of pride.

The landscape design of the Cave Garden has undergone three main phases. The first, under Honorary Curator Paul Frederick Krummel (1875-1948) in the 1900s-1920s, developed the original structure of the garden and established the community plantings and rosary without any plan or clear design. The second, under Curator William Denham Robinson (1868-1945) in the 1920s-1940s, established a garden embracing a mixture of informal Edwardian/Gardenesque and Mount Gambier planting styles, using a landscape design plan that established the present atmosphere and character of the garden. The third, under Curator Robert William Robinson in the 1940s-1960s, continued and nurtured the design established by his father, replacing species as they aged and adding species fashionable to the time. Each is important as a particular design phase, but it is the design of William Robinson for the Cave Garden that remains the dominant landscape style and source of its cultural significance.

The following article reviews the history of the design and planting activities in the Cave Garden during William Denham Robinson's curatorship in the 1920s-1940s. Robinson's initiatives need to be seen in the context of the historical and cultural development of the site, and so it is necessary to sketch out the reasons for his engagement to design and plant the Garden, together with the historical setting of the cave garden.

* Dr David Jones is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Adelaide. He dedicates this article to local historian, Les Hill, whose efforts to ensure the recording of the past, and his remarkable collection of memorabilia, written and photographic, are the source of much of what is today known about the settlement and development of Mount Gambier. Mr Hill, whose untiring efforts contributed significantly to this paper, died this year.

Introduction: Early Settlement and Occupancy

In the years before Stephen Henty arrived in the locality the landscape was inhabited by the Buandik clan of people.¹ Their country 'was handed down from father to son and its boundaries properly marked out'.² The actual relationship of the cave to the Buandik, other than references in myths, is unclear. In some stories it is represented as a refuge for spirits, as well as a reliable source of fresh water, the fact which became its principal attraction for European settlement and occupancy.

Before 1840, the vegetation of the landscape surrounding the cave was open forest land. The area consisted of an open stringybark forest referred to in one newspaper, with some exaggeration, as light vegetation scattered amongst rich grasses 'of almost unparalleled luxuriance ... said to resemble a nobleman's park'.³ In the Spring of 1841 Stephen Henty arrived with cattle and men, and erected two huts, one on the edge of Valley Lake and the other close to the cave edge. Both were important points of water supply, essential to secure occupancy rights and to supply cattle and sheep.⁴ Henty's occupancy of the land without licence, however, was jeopardised when, on 6 March 1844, Evelyn Sturt, brother of explorer Charles Sturt, secured an Occupation Licence for the area.⁵

A police station was established in the abandoned hut on the edge of the cave soon after, and in 1947 Evelyn Sturt purchased at auction in Adelaide the four town Sections that comprise land around the cave. Part of this land was leased to John Byng, to erect the first hotel, and to 'Paddy' Moore for a store. Sturt himself was commissioned to erect a new police barracks in 1847.

On 21 October 1853 Hastings Cunningham purchased the four town Sections from Sturt. Cunningham engaged surveyor William Murray in July 1854 to re-survey part Section 1103 into 123 allotments for private sale and to allocate a 'Reserve' on 3 acres. This Government Reserve, the present Cave Garden, was not vested in Council until 1870.⁶

1 The Buandik is the contemporary variant of several versions of the name of the local indigenous people.

2 C. Smith, *The Booandik Tribes of South Australian Aborigines*, Government Printer, Adelaide, 1880, p xi.

3 *Portland Mercury & Normanby Advertiser*, 7 September 1842.

4 J.H. Sheppard, 'Minutes of the Old Residents Association, March 28, 1917', History of the S.E., unpublished, nd.

5 *South Australian Government Gazette* (hereafter SAGG), 6 March 1844, p 62.

6 R. Cockburn, *Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia*, Vol. II, Publishers Limited, Adelaide, 1927, pp 96-97; H.C. Talbot, *The Early History of the South East District of South Australia*, Adelaide, 1921, pp 120-121; Pam O'Connor & Jan Mayell, *A Most Suitable Place, Mount Gambier: from crater and cave*, the authors, Mount Gambier, 1997, pp 46-47; Les R. Hill, *Mount Gambier: the city around a cave*, Investigator Press, Leabrook SA, 1972, pp 15-16.

Concern about the appearance and opportunities presented by the cave and the Reserve commenced with editorials in the local paper, the *Border Watch*. The editor made the first plea for a civic garden on the site in 1864:

*The Cave ought and would be regarded as one of the most interesting natural objects of the place, but now it is shunned as would be a plague spot. And why is this? Not from any want to taste in the public here; not from any carelessness in reference to it, but simply from the fact that it is nobody's business to see that it is kept in a state fit to be seen.*⁷

In August 1866 the Gambier West District Council, responding to a community petition, proposed the construction of a 'footpath' around the cave. Council approved a plan and specification for a fence around the cave in April 1869, and resolved to call tenders for its erection.⁸ These were the first Council initiated works associated with the Cave Garden. After several requests, the Crown Lands Department proclaimed the Cave Reserve as a 'Public Reserve', in 1870, placing it under 'the care control and management of the District Council of Mount Gambier West'.⁹ In 1876 Mount Gambier was gazetted as a municipality.

Establishing a City: 1880s-1890s

The 1880s marked a maturation of civic pride in many Australian cities and regional towns and Mount Gambier saw itself as one of these prosperous communities. The travelling reporter of the *Register*, Mr C. Proud, noted otherwise, remarking on its 'three disadvantages'. It had 'no gas ... no water supply ... and no system of drainage, beyond the natural flow into the caves and subterranean watercourses that exist below the town'.¹⁰

Civic pride was heightened in 1883 with the bequest of £700 by Captain Robert Gardiner to permit the erection of a 'handsome rotunda and water fountain' in the city. Designs were called for, and Messrs A.A. Sleight & Co. of the Victorian Monumental Works in Carlton, Melbourne, were successful, with a bid of £500. The fountain, claimed by Mr Sleight to be the 'first large marble fountain ever manufactured in Victoria', was opened on 18 June 1884 in the north-eastern corner of the Reserve.¹¹

7 *Border Watch*, 24 February 1866, p 34a.

8 *Border Watch*, 29 August 1866, p 218d; 3 April 1869, p 103e.

9 *Mount Gambier Standard*, 15 November 1870, p 373d.

10 C. Proud, 'The Southeastern District of South Australia in 1880', *Register*, Adelaide, 1881, p 33.

11 *Border Watch*, 17 February 1883, p 62c.e; 21 February 1883, p 68c-d; 15 March 1884, p 106f; 24 May 1884, p 206c; 21 June 1884, p 246c.

During the 1890s Council gardeners started formal planting and maintenance works in the Reserve. Acting on instructions from Council's Public Works Committee, gardener Frederick Henstridge obtained 'about 50 flowering shrubs and trees from the Mount Gambier Forest Nursery and [from] Mr. J. Earl, of the Model Garden' at Leg of Mutton Lake and Allandale respectively, in August 1893. These were 'planted ... in a line just inside the fence along the pathway and in two clumps on the other side of the cave.'¹² Council Gardeners Henstridge and W.C.J. Lockwood also planted a large tree fern in the cave in September 1896.¹³ These are the first records of planting activities in the Cave Garden.

The garden in 1896 consisted of an open field of lawn, ornamental trees around the edges, a series of gravel paths and a cluster of pines on the southern edge between the Terrace and the cave. The cavern was defined by a double railed timber fence surrounding stringybark Eucalypt growth of some 20-30 years within the enclosure.¹⁴

A Rose Garden - The Krummel Period: 1900s-1925

The turn of the century saw new attempts to improve the appearance of the Cave Reserve, and to resolve its despoliation by previous actions and its use as a drain. This was also a period when Paul Krummel led community initiatives in developing a garden around and within the cave enclosure. He was rewarded by Council in 1907 with the title of 'Honorary Curator of Parks & Gardens', and the ability to directly influence and steer the design and planting of the garden. His interest in flowering perennials, annuals, roses, and typical species advocated in the Adelaide newspapers of the 1890s-1900s, ensured an eclectic landscape style dominated by roses.

Gardening activities at the Cave Garden began in 1906. Local contractor Harry Scott recalls walking home in June 1906 and coming across the Council Overseer, Mr M.C. Wilson, and his niece planting 'an Erica shrub ... at the back of the Town Hall'. Having just dug a hole for them, 'Mr. Krummel came along and we discussed starting a garden'.¹⁵ Before long, numerous members of the community were either directly involved in creating the garden, or were donating plants and materials to it. These works resulted in a parterre-style cottage, flower and shrub garden on the northern flank of the Garden. Importantly, this garden was a community initiative and apparently looked after with assistance from Council gardeners and Krummel.¹⁶

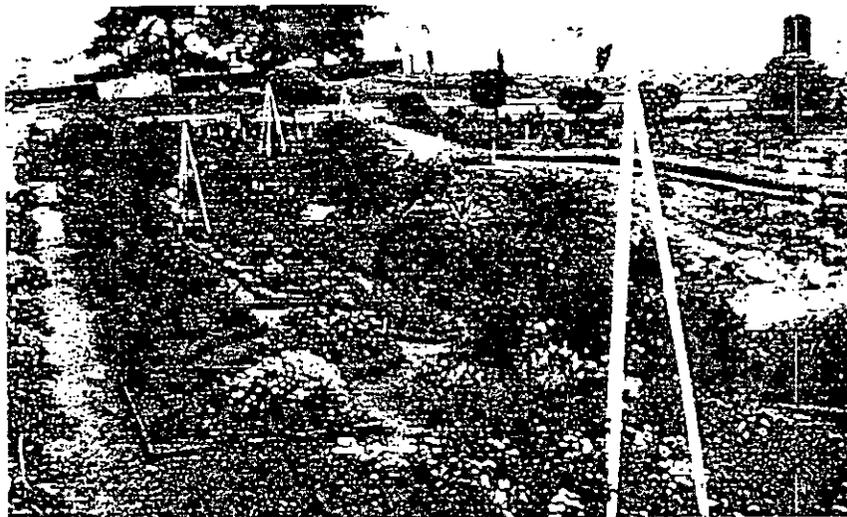
¹² *Border Watch*, 2 January 1892, p 2e; 19 August 1893, p 296d.

¹³ *Border Watch*, 19 September 1896, p 376h.

¹⁴ R.W. Robinson collection photograph.

¹⁵ *Border Watch*, 29 September 1945, p 119e; 28 October 1948, p 284c.

¹⁶ *Border Watch*, 22 November 1910, p 573c; LHC [Les Hill Collection of photographs] 293021.



Cave Garden in 1909 (Les Hill Collection)

Locally born, Paul Frederick Krummel (1875-1948) was the youngest son of pioneers Mr and Mrs Charles Krummel. After an apprenticeship as a compositor with the *South Eastern Star* he was appointed Assistant Manager of the Mount Gambier Gas Works in 1898, and served as Manager from 1908 to 1929. He was elected a Councillor in 1920-29, and chaired the Council's Parks & Gardens Committee, before departing for South Africa. Although he had no horticultural training, he was an acknowledged regional floriculture and rose expert and judge. He died in Melbourne in 1948.¹⁷

The *Border Watch* reported in 1907 that after some 10 months

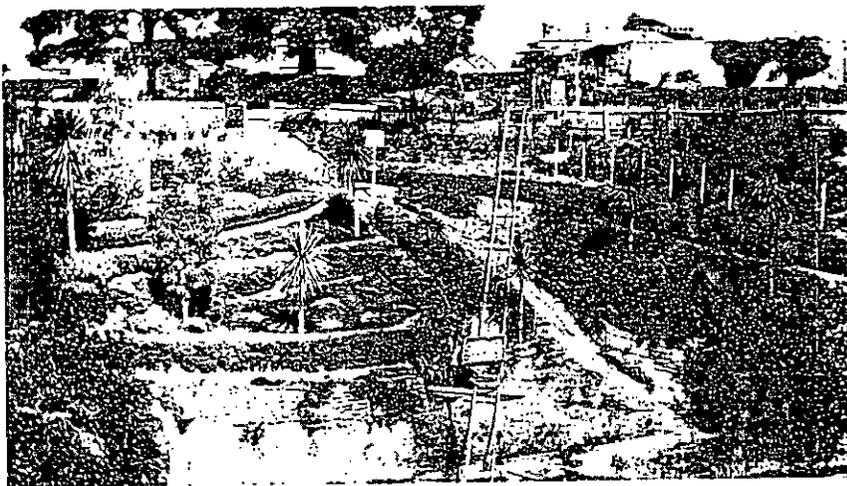
*... the Corporation flower garden ... is always a beautiful picture. It is ... gay with the blooms of dahlias, chrysanthemums, cosmos, and other autumn blooming plants ... At the start they had the rough ground cleared of pine stumps, levelled, and dug in the first place. They had the ground laid out, paths made, and edgings of planks put down. Then they had water laid on, and all through the dry summer, with the assistance of abundance of water, the garden looked very charming and was the admiration of all beholders.*¹⁸

¹⁷ *Border Watch*, 29 October 1904, p 431b; 1 June 1948, pp165d-e, 168c, 173c-d, 175e; 30 January 1951, p 177b-c.

¹⁸ *Border Watch*, 8 May 1907, p 182f.

Krummel encouraged the creation of a rose and eclectic-styled garden around the sides of the escarpment. In late 1906 he began 'wholesale cutting down of trees' within the cave enclosure to open up the garden, to some community 'dissatisfaction'.¹⁹

The use of the cavern as a drainage pit continued to be a concern of Council, which finally decided in 1914 to remove the accumulated silt. Over 500 cubic yards of refuse and silt were removed with the aid of a steam-tractor engine on a temporary tramline with carts, ladders and barrows.²⁰



Removing silt from Cave in 1914 (Les Hill Collection)

By 1919 the Reserve, surrounding the cave, was a visual delight to all who passed by, with the ubiquitous phlox, a favourite of the period, dominating the flower display. The *Border Watch* reported on the endeavours of gardener Henstridge and his success in cultivating various flower displays:

¹⁹ *Border Watch*, 25 August 1906, p 336c.

²⁰ *Border Watch*, 7 October 1914, p 380f; 2 December 1914, p 458f-g; 5 December 1914, p 462e.

*The display of phlox drummondii in the Cave Reserve rosery is just now a delight to all beholders. Mr. Henstridge, the gardener, has planted four or five plants of phlox around every rose, and with abundant watering and careful mulching with farmyard manure they have grown splendidly, and are now in full bloom. The size and perfection of the flowers, the variety of color, and the abundance of the trusses are equally remarkable and charming. Unfortunately, while visitors to the town inspect and enjoy the flowers, many of the townspeople never think of entering the garden. Although the glory of the roses has declined for the season, there are many other flowers as well as phlox that are well worth refreshing one's sense of the beautiful by a view.*²¹

Colour tinted photographs by photographer B. Kannenberg depicting the southern flank of the garden in about 1920, reinforce this observation. The rosary is beautifully laid out in rigid lines, each rose supported by a metre high white-painted timber stake with a mass of petunias at the base, marching across the trimmed lawn. Another photograph displays the colourful blooms of roses, carnations, chrysanthemums, petunias and dahlias within the cave enclosure.²²

While Krummel and Henstridge were concentrating their activities on the garden itself, the cave escarpment was left neglected between 1906 and 1910. An undated photograph from this period shows the escarpment near the water drain cloaked in fennel, English ivy, and low tea-tree. A cabbage tree appears in one corner, with a dirt track weaving downwards through the fennel. This image indicates that the cabbage tree plantings occurred prior to or at the same time as Krummel's first planting initiatives.²³

In recognition of this deficiency, Krummel and Henstridge started planting within the enclosure around 1910. The cabbage trees were kept, a mass of flowering shrubs including dahlias introduced, plantings of silver wormwood established along the upper sides of the inner gravel-surfaced walking tracks, and lengths of propped corrugated iron used to stabilise several of the new plantings and introduced soil. Roses were also introduced as single plantings or on white-painted timber tripods. The enclosure garden appears as a jumble of shapes, forms, plantings and materials, with a sign in several period photographs warning visitors of the treacherous pathways. Krummel and Henstridge also established a geometric rosary around the Gardiner Fountain

21 *Border Watch*, 17 January 1919, p 18e.

22 B. Kannenberg, *Coloured Views of Mount Gambier*, B. Kannenberg, Mount Gambier, c.1920, unpaginated.

23 Undated photograph, c.1905, from the R.W. Robinson collection; B. Kannenberg, *Coloured Views of Mount Gambier*, B. Kannenberg, Mount Gambier, c.1925, unpaginated.

where previously it had been a grassed area enclosed by a white-painted picket fence on red dolomite granite foundations.²⁴



Cave Garden about 1922 (Les Hill Collection)

Re-Designing the Garden - The William Robinson Period: 1925-1945

By 1925 Council recognised that the Cave Garden was an asset. It was viewed as an important venue for the forthcoming 'Back to Mount Gambier' celebrations, planned for 1926, to record Mount Gambier's 50 years as a Municipal Corporation. But the Garden was also seen as a drain on Council resources and a continuing safety hazard. A Council initiative to call for a landscape design for the Cave Garden resulted in the production of a plan in July 1925 by William Denham Robinson, and his appointment as Honorary Curator of Gardens in May 1928.

Krummel and Henstridge continued to enjoy a positive press about their planting approach on the Reserve during the early 1920s:

²⁴ Photo. funeral of J.M. Jens on 30 January 1915, LHC 293027.

*Dahlias, big glorious blooms, of all colours and classes, abound in the enclosure with a wide variety of shades, ranging from a pure white to a rich dark red. Along Bay Road there is a long line of salvias, whose pretty red flowers and green foliage make a fine and attractive border, and fade out in a bed of multi-coloured petunias. Roses are still blooming well, but, though making a grand show, are on the down grade.*²⁵

Silt accumulation in the cave was a major concern of the Council in the 1920s, despite the 1914 removal operation. Mayor R.M. Haig remarked in 1925 that 'there was too much silt going down the cave', but Council was reluctant to proceed with any works, as the real problem was the 'whole question of drainage' in the town.²⁶ A heavy downpour in February again raised the water level in the cavern, and the Council engineer reported that approximately two feet of silt had accumulated in the bottom since the 1914 works. Not until 1930 were further silt removal works undertaken.²⁷

Instead, Council was more inspired to consider ideas for the forthcoming Jubilee celebrations. Krummel proposed a viola parterre inscribed with six foot long letters, announcing 'Welcome back to Mount Gambier', located near the flagstaff. Council happily approved the idea, but criticised the current state of timber-bedding borders, observing that funds should be allocated for a permanent improvement and not a for a temporary display.²⁸

Clearly, the imminent Jubilee was forcing Council to consider aesthetic improvements to venues that would form part of the celebrations. While a 'Welcome Home' message was a quick solution, Council sought advice on 23 June 1925 from its Parks & Gardens Committee on the 'cost and necessary renovations to the Cave garden'. In debating the issue, Councillor H.C. LeLievre requested that 'designs for the lay-out of the garden be called ... [and] a prize offered for the best'. With some reservations from Councillor and solicitor Carl Louis Spehr (1869-1941) about the use of limestone, the Committee 'decided to offer a prize of £3/3/- for the best design received for the lay out of the gardens'.²⁹

Despite the inducement, only one plan or proposal was received. The lack of responses was probably due to the short submission time and because the competition was not reported in the Adelaide newspapers. The sole plan was submitted by local landscape designer and floriculturist, William Denham Robinson.

25 *Border Watch*, 7 April 1925, p 112a.

26 *Border Watch*, 6 June 1925, p 178e-f.

27 *Border Watch*, 10 February 1925, p 48a-b; 17 February 1925, p 17h; 25 February 1925, p 54c; 29 April 1930, p 295c.

28 *Border Watch*, 6 June 1925, p 178e-f; 25 June 1925, p 194g.

29 *Border Watch*, 7 July 1925, p 210g.

Robinson was born in the English village of Pickering in 1868 to a middle class family. He gained an apprenticeship in a nursery while studying landscape gardening at night. In 1890 he migrated to Melbourne, moving to Adelaide in 1892. After settling in the Adelaide Hills at Stirling, he gained a reputation for skill as a rose cultivator and propagator, and established a plant nursery in Fullarton that specialised in roses and landscape design proposals. With this reputation in mind, Councillor Arthur C.F. Rook (1881-1919) approached Robinson, ostensibly to design a garden suburb on the slope of the Blue Lakes. His commission was most likely, however, to design and lay out the garden for Rook's new residence 'Camelot', at 91 Bay Road. Robinson enjoyed his visit to Mount Gambier, and in 1919 shifted his family and nursery operations to the town, acquiring the 'Sunnyside' property in August 1920. 'Sunnyside' is associated with the Gardiner family and Sir Robert Helpmann.³⁰

It is known that prior to undertaking any works for a landscape design proposal Robinson prepared an extensive water-coloured ink plan in his copper-plate lettering. A plan was prepared for the Cave Gardens competition, and Council determined to place it on public display.³¹ In presenting the plan to Council in late July 1925 Robinson exclaimed, 'this is the first scratching of the piece of ground called the Cave Garden'.³²

While seeking to confine his remarks to his design within the old picket fence, he pointed out that the fence was an eyesore.

*It was obsolete, a disgrace to the town, and should be got rid of. Its removal would give place for a modern plan with the formerly enclosed area, which would be made, with minor adjustments, to merge in with the existing lawns and paths without the old fence. In fact, the whole area would be united in producing a single effect, instead of giving the impression of two distinct apartments as it did at present.*³³

Robinson proposed the opening up of the area to the rear of the Town Hall and the erection of a cyclone-wire fence around the edge of the cave. The cave walls were to be 'restored as near as possible as to [their] natural state, and be made as near as nature as could possibly be by growing some beautiful plants as present not seen in Mount Gambier'. The plan also included provision for the removal of 'the mess of petty beds, with six-foot paths winding in graceful and easy curves from Bay-road to the main path, leading to the gates in Commercial-street or Watson-terrace'. The winter planting strategy of roses and flower beds of cinerarias, salvias, dahlias, phlox and petunias would be

³⁰ *Border Watch*, 18 July 1919, p 223c; 22 July 1919, p 227c; 17 November 1945, p 341a; 22 November 1945, p 365c-d; R.W. Robinson, personal communication, 1998.

³¹ *Border Watch*, 24 July 1925, p 232c-d; R.W. Robinson, pers. comm. 1998.

³² *Border Watch*, 24 July 1925, p 232c-d.

³³ *loc cit.*

maintained. A screened garden 'tidy' was also proposed near the existing public toilets, to enable proper maintenance of the Reserve.³⁴

In proposing the design, Robinson stressed its aesthetic qualities, adding:

*It will be an everlasting job ... the garden hurts the eyes of a gardener to look upon it. From a gardener's point of view the garden is unworkable in its existing state. It wants remodelling along modern lines.*³⁵

Krummel's proposal for a set of timber-edged viola-planted letters also drew his criticism. He claimed that the timber-edging would be a 'needless expense', and that 'the idea of planting violas was absurd, because in March they would be out of season and if there were a hot January the violas would all be dead'. The harshness of this criticism was indicative of the antipathy between the two in their ideas about gardening and landscape design: 'they didn't see eye to eye', although their 'children were the best of friends'.³⁶

In taking the proposal to task, Robinson proposed that

*he would undertake the work himself if the carpet bedding was procured, the cost of which would be about £10. His idea was to have a scroll formed on a portion of the lawn, so that it would be a permanent job. After the celebrations the space could be sown with phlox.*³⁷

Krummel, when asked for his opinion of the plan at the Council meeting, ventured an observation that 'he had been fighting for an improvement for some time ... but had not been able to have his plans adopted'.³⁸

Council considered Robinson's plan at a special meeting in August 1925. They resolved, on Councillor Spehr and Alderman J. Keegan's motion, that he proceed with 'remodelling the garden on the north of the main path' at a cost not to exceed £105. It was proposed to place the plan on public exhibition. Councillor W. Hay offered to motor Robinson to the Mount Schank quarries to select the desired rock. This budget included all the rockwork in the cavern walls, cyclone fencing, plants, and other fixtures. While several Councillors expressed apprehension about the use of stone on the escarpment and as walling, Spehr, who had previously contracted Robinson to lay out his own garden, supported its use, commenting that 'the scheme was thoroughly investigated, that the designer had given the garden very careful thought'.³⁹

³⁴ *loc cit.*

³⁵ *loc cit.*

³⁶ *loc cit.*

³⁷ *Border Watch*, 24 July 1925, p 232c-d; LHC 295010; R.W. Robinson, pers. comm., 1998.

³⁸ *Border Watch*, 24 July 1925, p 232c-d.

³⁹ *Border Watch*, 7 August 1925, p 247a.

Robinson, speaking at the meeting, stated that the work would take four weeks, with the lawns reinstated by the sixth week. To reduce costs, he proposed that 'Council would supply gravel for the paths and rocks, while the two gardeners would assist him, and he would provide the necessary plants. He had no intention of making anything out of the work'. The real debate on the proposal centred on the rosary and community fears about its removal. 'That was entirely wrong,' said Alderman H. Lawrence. While Robinson had proposed a more efficient maintenance approach for the roses, the Councillors agreed that 'the rosary was not going to be touched under the improvement scheme'.⁴⁰

With these approvals, Robinson immediately proceeded with the works, giving instructions to gardeners Henstridge and Lockwood. Councillor Hay fulfilled his offer to transport Robinson to the quarries, and a selection was made of 'pretty ... red and reddish brown' toned rocks. Robinson was observed as personally 'forming the rock work' and re-shaping the south-eastern walls and pathway. At the same time a simple cream-painted, woven wire-fabric cyclone fence, on jarrah posts with gates, was erected around the cave enclosure. The rough sandstone edges to the paths were also progressively replaced by timber plinths.⁴¹

In October 1925 Robinson reported to Council the completion of his design, and 'was warmly commended for the excellence of the work'. A photo taken at the time depicts newly-constructed layers of scoria banks and formalised pathways, including one stone-edged circuit path and a single descending path, each with a railing. The scoria stone was hand-lumbered and wheel-barrowed onto the site, the earth backed up, and a series of dry-stone walls erected. Initial foundation plantings had just commenced, and the cabbage trees had been retained.⁴² Mayor Haig noted that Robinson had planted cypress trees around a waste storage area at the rear of the Town Hall and 'removed an eyesore'. Robinson also volunteered his services free of charge, which Council accepted, to supervise further plantings in the garden leading up to the March celebrations. The Town Surveyor reported on the completion of these works to Council:

40 *loc cit.*

41 *Border Watch*, 25 August 1925, p 2d; LHC 294007.

42 *Border Watch*, 27 October 1925, p 338d; LHC 294010; R.W. Robinson, pers. comm. 1998.

The contractor for re-modelling these gardens had completed his work, and Mr Robinson did not confine himself to the plan submitted, but did a great amount of extra work, which no doubt, adds to the appearance of the cave and surroundings. Mr Robinson was good enough to remove from his own garden to the Cave Reserve some well grown cypress hedge plants for a screen for the 'tidy yard'.⁴³

With the establishment of the garden civic pride increased, and the Reserve became the centre for numerous social activities. In May 1928 Council offered Robinson an honorarium and the title of 'Honorary Curator of Gardens', in recognition of his contribution and expertise. At the same time Henstridge, who had serviced the Garden for 22 years and was then 69 years old, and fellow gardener Jack Robinson, were dismissed. Henstridge was now 'unable to handle ... a [newly purchased] lawn mower', and the Council was seeking to cut costs.⁴⁴ The garden's new role and image encouraged more donations of roses and flowering shrubs, and further additions and changes.⁴⁵

By 1932 Robinson had rationalised part of the southern and northern rosary planting geometry. He had also replaced the rough sandstone path edges with timber plinths, widened the path, and planted a line of seven redwoods along the eastern edge of the main path. The cypress hedge on the eastern alignment had also reached maturity, and was the subject of regular trimming to maintain its crisp rectilinear form.⁴⁶

In 1933 Mrs Theresa Hutton donated a pergola, constructed of old gas lamp pillars previously scrapped by the Council. Robinson purchased and planted two wisteria vines and climbing roses at the pillar bases and constructed the cross-spans of jarrah. Council kept the donation quiet until after its erection, observing that 'some people had criticised the Council for undertaking such a structure when so many other works required attention, but the pergola had not cost the town a penny, and was a fine addition to the gardens'. Perhaps it was the outcry over the cost of bitumenising the pathways in the early 1930s that made Council wary. Alderman Haig (who had completed his term as Mayor) gained Council approval for a plate to be affixed to the pergola recognising a continuing family association with the garden. Mrs Hutton *née* Krummel was sister to Paul Krummel, who 'had taken a keen interest in the town's gardens'.⁴⁷

43 *Border Watch*, 27 October 1925, p 338d.

44 *Border Watch*, 19 May 1928, p 349a-b.

45 Hill, *Mount Gambier*, p 26; *Border Watch*, 23 October 1926, p 452g; 7 December 1926, p 568d; LHC 295010.

46 LHC 294029; R.W. Robinson, pers. comm., 1998.

47 *Border Watch*, 13 May 1933, p 353e; 10 June 1933, p 433f; 23 June 1934, p 470a-c; R.W. Robinson, pers. comm., 1998.

With the completion of the Cave Garden, Robinson turned his attention to other Council projects. A postcard of the garden dating from around 1933 shows the cavern rich in flowering shrubs, the strong architectural shapes of the cabbage trees, the outer enclosure wire-mesh fence, the single pipe internal railing, concrete steps leading down to the water drain, and the rolled iron fence along the western and southern edges of the Reserve. The rockery dominates the interior of the cavern, and the ivy has been culled to the immediate cave overhang.⁴⁸

In November 1933 Council proposed the removal of a portion of the Humes rolled steel ribbon fence surrounding the Reserve on its southern and eastern edges. Council also resolved to remove the white painted picket fence, Councillor Harbison suggesting 'that the fence should be removed altogether. Fences around public gardens were not necessary in other towns, and the beauty of the gardens would be enhanced if the fence could be dispensed with'. Council, however, deferred consideration of the proposal.⁴⁹

In 1934 the Parks & Gardens Committee considered the consequences of their recent action to remove the elderly cypress hedge along the eastern edge of the Reserve. The Committee was 'astounded at the aspect opened up. It was now recommended that this side of the garden be left open', notwithstanding concerns about the openness of the area, views of the hotels on Watson Terrace and their original resolution that Robinson replant another cypress hedge in this location. Alderman Haig unsuccessfully recommended, in July 1934, the demolition of the original baths located in the south-eastern corner, as they 'spoil the appearance of the Cave Garden ... were also too congested': he proposed that a better site be found.⁵⁰

The garden, in 1938, displayed a maturity of the plantings and gardening under Robinson's care. English ivy had taken hold on the baths' limestone block walls, wisteria was starting to grow up the Hutton pergola posts, and the cabbage trees and cotton palms were in full growth. The cave escarpment was full with flowering shrubs, rampant ivy, often flowing over the scoria rock banks, and a stepped concrete path edged by an open jarrah fence, constructed from a single-pipe rail and two strands of wire, led down to the lower viewing platform.⁵¹

When Robinson died in November 1945 Council paid tribute to the passing of 'a very popular figure in Mt. Gambier ... He had rendered yeoman service not only to the Council, but in a private capacity. He was a great lover of nature

48 LHC 294036. 296002.

49 *Border Watch*, 25 November 1933, p 439e-f; R.W. Robinson pers. comm., 1998.

50 *Border Watch*, 7 July 1934, p 17d.

51 The National Gas & Oil Engine Co. Ltd., *Mount Gambier's Electricity Supply*, National Gas & Oil Engine Co. Ltd., Ashton-under-Lyne, UK, 1939, p 4; LHC 295009. 294029.

and made the study of floriculture his life work'. Such a tribute was not forthcoming for Krummel when he died in 1948.⁵²

Nourishing the Design following William Denham Robinson: 1945-2000

In the post-war years Robert William Robinson took on his father's mantle as City Gardener and sought to complete many of his projects. He obtained the position of Gardener for the Cave Garden from Mr. Moulden in late 1944, and was quickly elevated into the City Gardener's position upon his father's death in November 1945. The projects included works and plantings at Vansittart Park, the Lakes Reserve, and at the Cave Garden. During this period Robinson consolidated his father's design, took select measures to efficiently manage the roses, and introduced replacement vegetation more suited to the time than the original 1920s-1930s period. While one citizen complained about the safety of the cave's internal pathways and gushing water flows, community pride remained in the Garden as designed and planted by W.D. Robinson.⁵³

Following Robinson's resignation in 1964, the garden went through a period of minor changes and maintenance procedures. In the main, there were few changes to the structure of the garden and a period of deterioration occurred, as hard fittings and plants matured and aged. In the early 1960s Robinson was forced to replace several of the trees on the eastern lawn with the species that are there today. However, there was little grand vision about what was being managed, and the alterations to the Garden arising from the new Civic Centre complex further weakened the design. It was also a phase when several memorial plaques were positioned throughout the garden. The cultural significance of the Garden was recognised in a 1986 heritage survey, and a subsequent survey in 1994 by McDougall & Vines led to the registration of the Cave Garden Reserve and environs precinct on the State Heritage Register on 12 October 1995.⁵⁴ The Garden was reviewed in 1998-1999 by Fifth Creek Studio, which prepared a conservation and management plan that undertakes to respect the Robinson philosophy in any changes and modifications proposed.⁵⁵

The Garden remains today as an exemplar of the design, planting and curatorial work of Robinson. It is also a unique example of a garden that has been in the continuous management by one family, from 1925-1965, and in which little of the plantings, structure, and infrastructure has been changed in the last 25 years.

52 *Border Watch*, 17 November 1945, p 341a; 1 June 1948, pp 165d-e, 168c, 173c-d, 175d-e; 28 October 1958, p 532c.

53 *Border Watch*, 13 March 1948, p 364d; R.W. Robinson, pers. comm., 1998.

54 McDougall & Vines, *Heritage Survey of the City of Mount Gambier*, Department of Environment & Natural Resources, Adelaide, 1994.

55 Fifth Creek Studio & D.S. Jones, *Cave Garden & Environs Conservation & Management Plan*, Heritage SA & City of Mount Gambier, Adelaide & Mount Gambier, 1999.

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