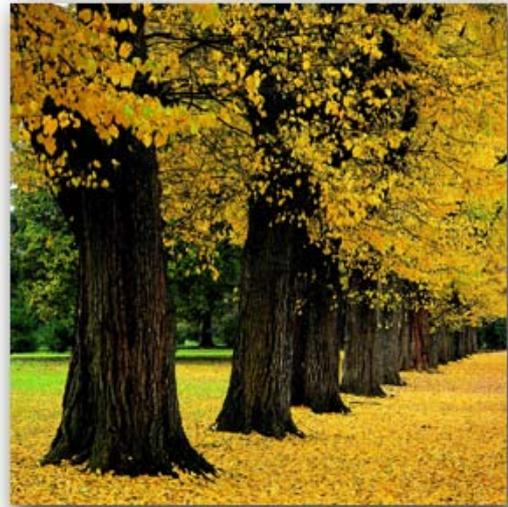


ALBURY'S BOTANICAL GARDENS

[THE ALBURY BOTANIC GARDENS HISTORY - Follow This Link](#)

Edited talk by Ray Gear (presented at A&DHS General Meeting, April 2006 and reprinted from A&DHS Bulletin No 457)

Albury's Botanical Gardens evolved out of the 'Botanic Garden and Recreation Ground' dedicated in 1864, which became known generally as the 'Botanical Reserve.' This area itself evolved from a council resolution of April 22, 1861 that sought from the State Government, 'a place of public recreation on the bank of the Hume River west of Albury.' This siting of a recreation area was not favoured by all because of the areas flood nature. However on May 4, 1864, an area of 44 acres 2 rods was dedicated, with Council appointed trustee in 1820.



In 1877 the Reserve was fenced in by Robert Carlisle who was awarded the contract for the work on a quote of 16 shillings 6 pence per rod. At that time the *Border Post* of August 4 referred to the area being, 'a barren walk' although from the early 1870s a cricket ground existed on the south side of Smollett Street.

Preparation of a plan for the future Botanical Garden was originally called for in 1866, in 1877 and in early 1878. No action appears to have been taken until July 1878 when the Mayor, William John Jones at a Council Meeting of July 17, 1878 reported, 'that he had arranged with Mr John Howard of Lavington for the laying out of the Botanical Reserve.' With funds limited there were calls for donations of trees including advertisements in the local papers for the people of Albury and District to assist in the Reserve's beautification. Donors responding to the appeal included: 'C Mooier, Director of Sydney Botanic Garden, W R Guilfoyle of Melbourne Botanic Garden, William Huon, T Colls, R O'Keefe, George Allen, H Jacobs, Joseph Box, John Howard and Mr Alkemade.'

The work on the Reserve was, according to the *Albury Banner* of August 1878, carried out in accordance with an overall plan. This plan 'provided for avenues of trees on the Dean Street, Wodonga Place and Hume Street sides of the reserve. Within the reserve centre the plan proposed for the planting of trees and evergreens shrubs on a geometrical design with a circular opening in the centre to be filled by a statue or fountain surrounded by rustic seats.'

The first major planting within the Reserve was an avenue of Scotch Pine of four to five years growth, planted along the Wodonga Place frontage. Between the trees were set 'ornamental evergreen shrubs including the laurel, juniper, holly, box, veronica and oleander.' On the north (Dean Street side), elms 3 to 4 metres high were planted, beginning what is known today as, Elm Avenue. These plantings can be seen in Clarkson's etching of Albury, done in April 1879 and published in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in January 1881.

Lack of funds saw work in the reserve cease until August 1879 when John Howard's services were again secured, and further tree avenue plantings were undertaken including three avenues running south and west. Other work later supervised by John Howard was the installation in 1880 of a lake within the Gardens. This lake was constructed by Watson Brothers at a cost of £30, and received its water from Burrows Mill that had been erected in 1870 at 665 Dean Street. Three walks were laid out which lead from different points on the outer side of the garden to the lake. In the north east corner of the garden, a Bunya Bunya was planted.

Arising from concern about the breaking up of the garden into small beds, Council passed a motion put by Alderman George Henry Billson at its meeting of 9 August 1882 *'that a premium of £5 be offered for the best plan for laying out of Botanic Gardens.'* A tender advertisement calling for a plan or design for laying out the Gardens attracted four entries: from Matthew Peasely the then gardener, John Howard, a former gardener and curator, Mr P Mudge, the son of a former town clerk and a Mr J Wade. The plan proposed by Matthew Peasely was accepted.

Was this plan implemented? Unfortunately I cannot say. However, for those interested to research this question, I recommend as a starting point the *Albury Banner* of October 6, 1882 (p10) or the *Border Post* of October 7, 1882 (p3). Matthew Peasely was to remain gardener of the reserve for another twenty-two months.

After several years of dispute regarding the fencing in of Smollett Street in 1883, Smollett Street was extended through the Botanical Reserve in July 1883 which created the boundaries of the present Botanical Gardens in an area of slightly less than ten acres (4 ha), the ten acre section that was normal in the town's layout being reduced in 1880 when the Bungambrawatha Creek was relocated. On September 17, 1888, the wrought iron bridge over the creek in Smollett Street west (designed by John A McDonald and built by Mr F Romero) was opened.

Matthew Peasely resigned from Council in July 1884. According to an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of February 7, 1885 *'the park and recreation ground with their surrounding garden plots, lawns, avenues of elms, figs, and poplars and the artificial pool with its ornamental foliage were a great credit to the town.'*

With Matthew Peasely's resignation, tender advertisements for the position of 'gardener and caretaker of the Botanical Gardens' attracted some ten applicants. Following a ballot of three preferred applicants, John Howard (whose tender included providing a labourer to do the work under his supervision) was chosen at a salary of £156 per annum or £3 per week.

John Howard, a pioneer sericulturist from Lavington, was born in Chelmsford England in 1831. His father George Howard had been a well known nursery man in Chamstool, Sussex. He arrived in Australia in 1852 and according to the *Border Post* of September 22, 1893 *'followed the occupation of digging until 1873 when he turned his attention to sericulture.'* In 1878 he was engaged by the Council to lay out the Botanical Reserve and from that time was further engaged by council on temporary bases to carry out work within the Botanical Gardens, and the laying out in the last week of August 1878, of the first street tree planting in Dean Street. In 1883 he was advertising himself as a 'Nurseryman and Florist.' While cripple from the waist down, he was, according to the *Albury Banner* of March 22, 1901, *'very hands on in the development of the beauty of the garden.'*

Work within the Botanical Gardens to the end of the nineteenth century included the laying in of water in late 1886, the erection of a bandstand in 1890, by W Bodgie at a cost of £80 10s, the placement of the *Statue of Melpomene* in the gardens in 1892, and the erection of a fernery in 1899. The fernery constructed around the lake, was built in stages and completed in 1900.

In May 1901 John Howard, Curator of the Gardens resigned. In June 1901 James Edward Richards Fellowes was appointed his successor. Under the curatorship of J E R Fellowes the gardens were significantly remodelled. In the meantime, for anyone interested in a description of the Gardens as they were in 1924, I recommend an article in the *Albury Daily News* of November 18, 1924 by Mr Fellowes himself. John Howard passed away on 26 May 1903 at Parramatta at the age of seventy two years.

Principal Bibliography Sources: *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express, Albury Border Post.*

THE ALBURY BOTANIC GARDENS HISTORY

From a talk by Dr David Lawrence (presented at A&DHS General Meeting, November 2012 and reprinted from A&DHS Bulletin No 529)

The arrival of Hume and Hovell at the Murray River in November 1824 was a good beginning because it marked the genesis of the town. The Hume Monument was an early icon in the Gardens.



The earliest maps show the present four hectare Gardens as the northern portion of a much larger Recreation Reserve bounded by Wodonga Place, the Murray River and Bungambrawatha Creek. Later maps showed Smollett Street extended west from Wodonga Place to cross the creek and link up with the Riverina Highway. The creek was spanned by the unique 'through-type arch bridge' one of only two of the type still in service in Australia.

The initial layout of the Gardens was to a 'Union Jack' plan of straight pathways and formal garden plots. The Elm Avenue is a vestige of the initial plan. The western boundary was defined when the Bungambrawatha Creek was channelled.

In 1901 a new curator, Mr James Edward Richard Fellowes, was appointed. This active and visionary man was to have a profound effect in developing the Gardens we see today. The landscape plan he produced in 1906 showing a new design based on the 'English picturesque garden' drawn by Fellowes is held in the AlburyCity collection. It uses curved paths and a series of vistas which maximizes the variety and interest which can be achieved in a relatively small area.

Fellowes used a thematic approach to his selection of trees and plants. He experimented with species which would not normally be expected to survive in Albury's dry climate with its extremes of temperature, and he was successful in establishing sub-tropical trees and palms which are now features of the Gardens.

When J E R Fellowes arrived, the curator's residence was a small timber cottage. This was dismantled and removed in 1907 and a start made on the brick cottage which remains in the south-west corner of the Gardens. Construction took two years during which time the curator with his wife and five children lived in the tool store and potting shed. Such was his devotion to the task. [And we should add the support his wife, Mrs Fellowes, gave to him. Ed.]

The Botanic Gardens obviously aroused an interest in gardening among the citizens of the town. When the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney sent down a large consignment of plants, the Gardens had to be fenced to prevent them being stolen.

Photographs taken in the 1920s show the trees of the Gardens as a large block of mature greenery against an urban setting of immature trees and small private gardens.

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