

AUSTRALIA'S TIMELESS GARDENS

Written by
Judith Baskin
with
Trisha Dixon

National Library of Australia
Canberra
1996

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Cover: Augustus Earle, 1793–1838
Government House and Part of the Town of Sidney [sic] N.S. Wales, 1828
watercolour; 18.1 x 31.1 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection; Pictorial Collection

Inset: One of the most ancient of plants, the King protea (*Protea cynaroides*) dates back 300 million years to the super continent of Gondwana before it broke up to form Australia, Africa, South America, New Zealand and New Guinea
Photograph by Trisha Dixon

Endpapers: *Angophora costata*, Smooth-barked Apple, Donald Boden's garden, Maianbar, NSW. Photograph by Robert Boden.

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	vii
Note on Plant Names	viii
Chapter 1 The First Garden	1
Chapter 2 The Garden Grows	15
Chapter 3 Through the Artist's Eye	25
Chapter 4 Back to Basics	59
Chapter 5 The Garden Designer	49
Chapter 6 An Evolution	67
Select Bibliography	82
Glossary	84
Index	85

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Many people have been of great assistance to us in producing *Australia's Timeless Gardens*. In particular, we would like to thank Kate Fortune, formerly of the National Library of Australia. Her coordinating role and support were much appreciated. Also, we would like to thank the staff of the Pictorial section whose love of the collection is reflected in their helpful and interested attitude.

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Judith Baskin and Trisha Dixon
Canberra

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Looking at other people's gardens is an Australian national pastime. For many, it takes the form of a stroll through the neighbourhood on a Sunday afternoon. For others, it is a more serious, organised passion. Horticultural societies, garden clubs, the Australian Garden History Society, Australia's Open Garden Scheme, charities and municipalities all conduct garden visits, like those of the embassy gardens in the national capital. The aim of this book is to offer a very different garden tour, one that provides a picture of Australia's private gardens as they have developed over more than 200 years.

It draws on images selected from the Pictorial Collection of the National Library of Australia—a collection rich in images from private and public gardens, botanical gardens, nurseries, reserves and national parks. Our concentration is on the private gardens, but our story begins with a public one: the garden of the first Government House in Sydney. From there, we follow the development of private gardens from white settlement to the present day. The sketches, paintings, engravings and photographs chosen reflect the rich and varied history of gardens in Australia, their evolution and their timelessness.

N O T E O N P L A N T N A M E S

In general, common names of plants are followed by their botanical names in brackets, for example Swan River cypress (*Actinostrobus pyramidalis*). In some instances, where the plants are well known and it would seem pedantic to insert the botanical names, the common names only are used, for example eucalypts, roses, iris, wattle. However, if a particular species is referred to, its common name is given followed by the botanical name, for example black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) or black wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*), to avoid confusion between plants. For many Australian plants there is no generally accepted common name and the botanical name of the genus is used. In such cases the botanical name only is given, for example *Hakea* spp. All botanical names are in italics. In the index botanical names are given in full with a reference from the common name.

C H A P T E R 1
The First Garden



The grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*)
Photograph by Trisha Dixon

The First Garden

The first garden created in Australia by white settlers was at Sydney Cove in New South Wales. It was, of necessity, a vegetable garden. Convicts began digging it three days after the First Fleet arrived on 26 January 1788. Eleven ships of the First Fleet brought naval officers, marines and

voyage out. The first need upon landing at Port Jackson was shelter and the second was food. Gardens and farms were quickly established to provide food for when the stores brought on the First Fleet ships were exhausted.

The second map of the settlement shows that within three months of their arrival, the settlers had established three gardens beside Sydney Cove and a farm over the ridge on Farm Cove. The map was drawn by Francis Fowkes, a convict from the First Fleet.

The beginnings of the colony of New South Wales were synonymous with botany. Explorers, many accompanied by professional or amateur botanists and artists, had collected and drawn the unique flora of the new lands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and made them known to European and English scientists and amateur botanists.

Sir Joseph Banks and his botanical artists accompanied Captain Cook on his first voyage of exploration. Banks was a wealthy young man, a Fellow of the Royal Society, with connections to the politicians of Britain, who had a deep interest in botany and had already undertaken a voyage to



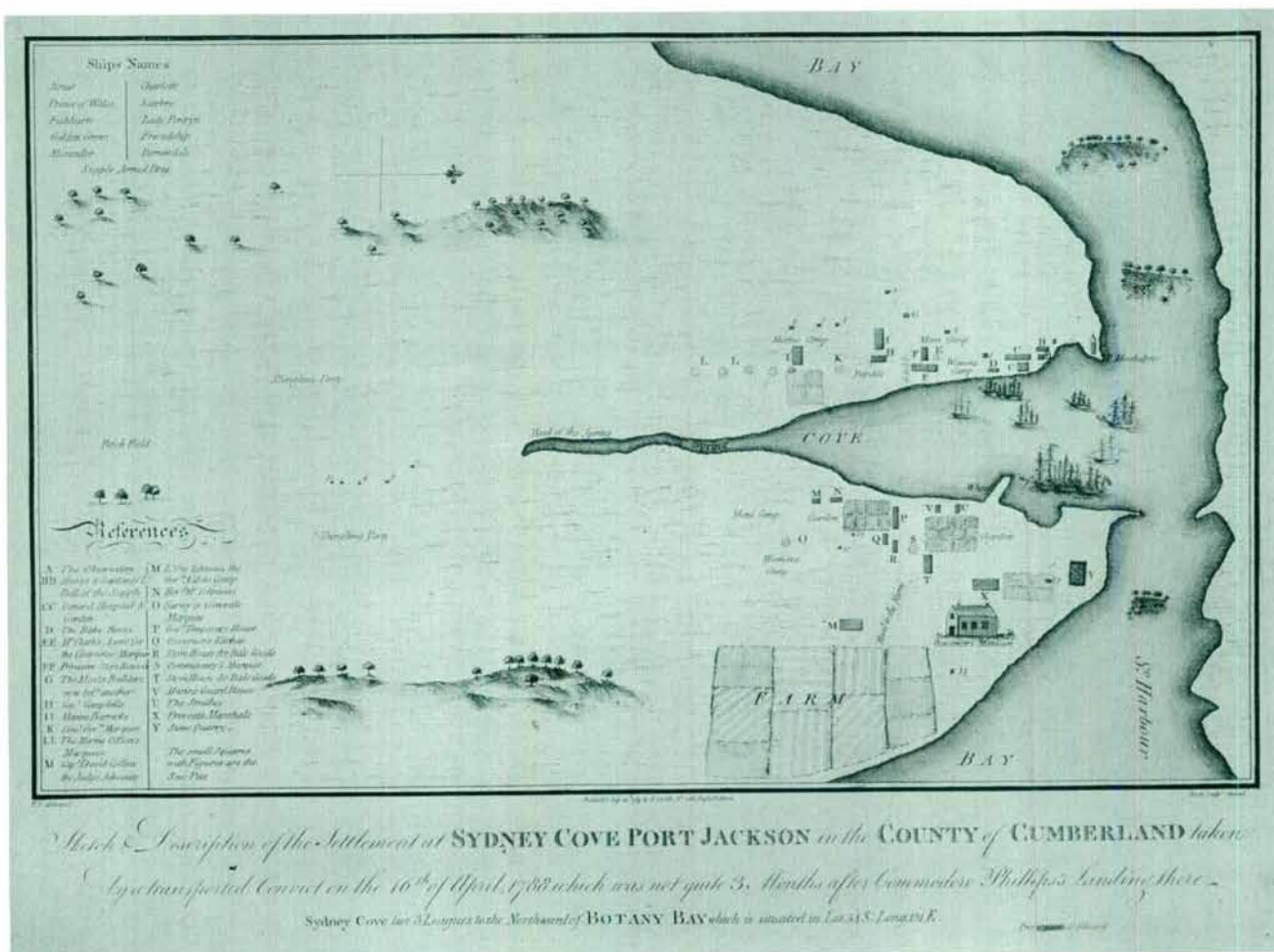
The first garden established by the new settlers at Sydney Cove in 1788

John Carmichael,
1803–1857
Detail from *Sydney*
N.S. Wales, 1788
etching; 7.7 x 16.6 cm
From the Pictorial
Collection

convicts to establish a settlement in New South Wales for strategic reasons and to help relieve the prisons of England of their excess of convicts. The Fleet brought with it stores, plants and seeds from England, supplemented by more plants and seeds collected at Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro on the

C H A P T E R I

The First Garden



A map of the new settlement
at Sydney Cove

Francis Fowkes

*Sketch and Description of the Settlement
at Sydney Cove, Port Jackson in
the County of Cumberland Taken by a
Transported Convict, 1788*

hand coloured engraving; 19.5 x 31.6 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection;
from the Pictorial Collection

The First Garden

Newfoundland and South Labrador. His reports of the land Cook named New South Wales were influential in the decision to establish the colony. Also of interest to a sea-going nation whose naval supplies of mast timbers and materials for sails were threatened by international

crises were the reports of the strategic value of New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*) and the Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*).

because of the great distances separating the settlement from even the nearest Dutch colonies in the East Indies that alternative sources of supplies were so difficult to get.

The settlers depended on the stores they brought with them, the food they could grow and, until their stock of cattle increased, on hunting and fishing. But it wasn't long before they had fished out the harbour waters near them and lost some of their cattle in the bush. They supplemented what food they had by gathering indigenous plants, such as the native currant and leaves of seashore plants such as sea celery and New Zealand spinach (despite its name, an Australian plant), which Captain Cook had used to help prevent scurvy among his crews. Although the diversity of Australia's flora had created enormous interest in Europe, its usefulness, outside these examples, was still largely unknown.

Because the Aboriginal Australians were seen only as hunter gatherers, their knowledge of plants was discounted. However evidence is mounting that they did manage plants. Fire was used for a variety of purposes. In Cape York, for example, one use of fire is thought to have been to clear competing

On arrival at Botany Bay, so-named by Cook in recognition of the botanical richness he and Banks discovered in 1770, Commodore Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, found it unsuitable as a place to settle and chose instead the huge harbour, Port Jackson, immediately to the north.

In those first years supplies were limited; the colony almost starved. Supply ships were sent infrequently from Britain and some of them sank on the voyage out. It was the historian Geoffrey Blainey who noted that distance was as characteristic of Australia as mountains are of Switzerland and it was

Watkin Tench, an officer in the marines, describes the difficulties in obtaining supplies

Lines reproduced from
A Complete Account of the Settlement
by Watkin Tench
(London: G. Nicol, 1793)

The First Garden

vegetation away from the cycads whose seeds were a staple food (although poisonous until treated). Fire also stimulated seed production. The Aborigines of Cape York limited the exploitation of yams such as ka-aatha and thampu and replanted the productive top of the tuber. Aborigines were also thought to plant seeds of wattles and other plants used for food along the trails they followed. Despite all this, their knowledge of plants was not understood or put to general use by the new settlers.

Among the problems confronting the settlers were the relative poorness of the soil compared to that in their home countries and the confounding climate. Further, much of the seed deteriorated on

the long voyage out and unfortunately, no-one thought to provide Governor Phillip with gardeners. This seems almost inexplicable, particularly as Banks had employed a gardener and an assistant to sail in the HMS *Bounty* to collect bread fruit from Tahiti at about the time the First Fleet was being assembled.

In May 1788, HMS *Supply* was despatched to get turtles from Lord Howe Island for the colony which was already running out of supplies. And in 1790, HMS *Sirius*, together with HMS *Supply*, was sent to Norfolk Island with marines and more than 200 convicts to reduce the strain on the starving colony. According to Watkin Tench, an invitation from a 'lucky man who had knocked down a dinner with his gun, or caught a fish by angling from the rocks, [and] invited a neighbour to dine with him, always ran "Bring your own bread"'.

In a letter to Lord Sydney, Secretary of the Home Department, in November 1788, Governor Phillip writes that the oranges, figs, apples and vines he had brought from Brazil were thriving and in his garden, vegetables were plentiful including cauliflowers and French beans, and strawberries from the Cape of Good Hope. But the fruit trees were some years off



Extensive vegetable gardens of the first Government House
William Bradley, c.1757–1833
View of the Governor's House at Sydney in Port Jackson, New South Wales, 1791
watercolour; 21.6 x 36 cm
From the Pictorial Collection

The First Garden

Productive gardens
surround the
houses on
Sydney Cove

Edward Dayes,
1765–1804
*South View of the
Town of Sydney*,
1797
watercolour;
17.5 x 24.2 cm
From the Pictorial
Collection



bearing and there were not enough vegetables to feed the colony.

Robert Bruce,
c.1855–1908
Detail from
*The Norfolk Pines
in the Botanical
Gardens, Sydney*
in *Illustrated Sydney
News*, 1872
wood engraving;
19 x 11.2 cm
From the Pictorial
Collection

William Bradley, first officer of the *Sirius*, produced one of the first watercolour paintings of the settlement. His *View of the Governor's House*, painted in 1791, shows the rectangular and square beds of a utilitarian garden where vegetables are the prime produce. The symmetrical central path is edged with what might be shrubs or food plants. The terrace is also utilitarian, a place for the marine guards and for guns pointing at the Cove. By 1792 elements of decoration had crept in showing that

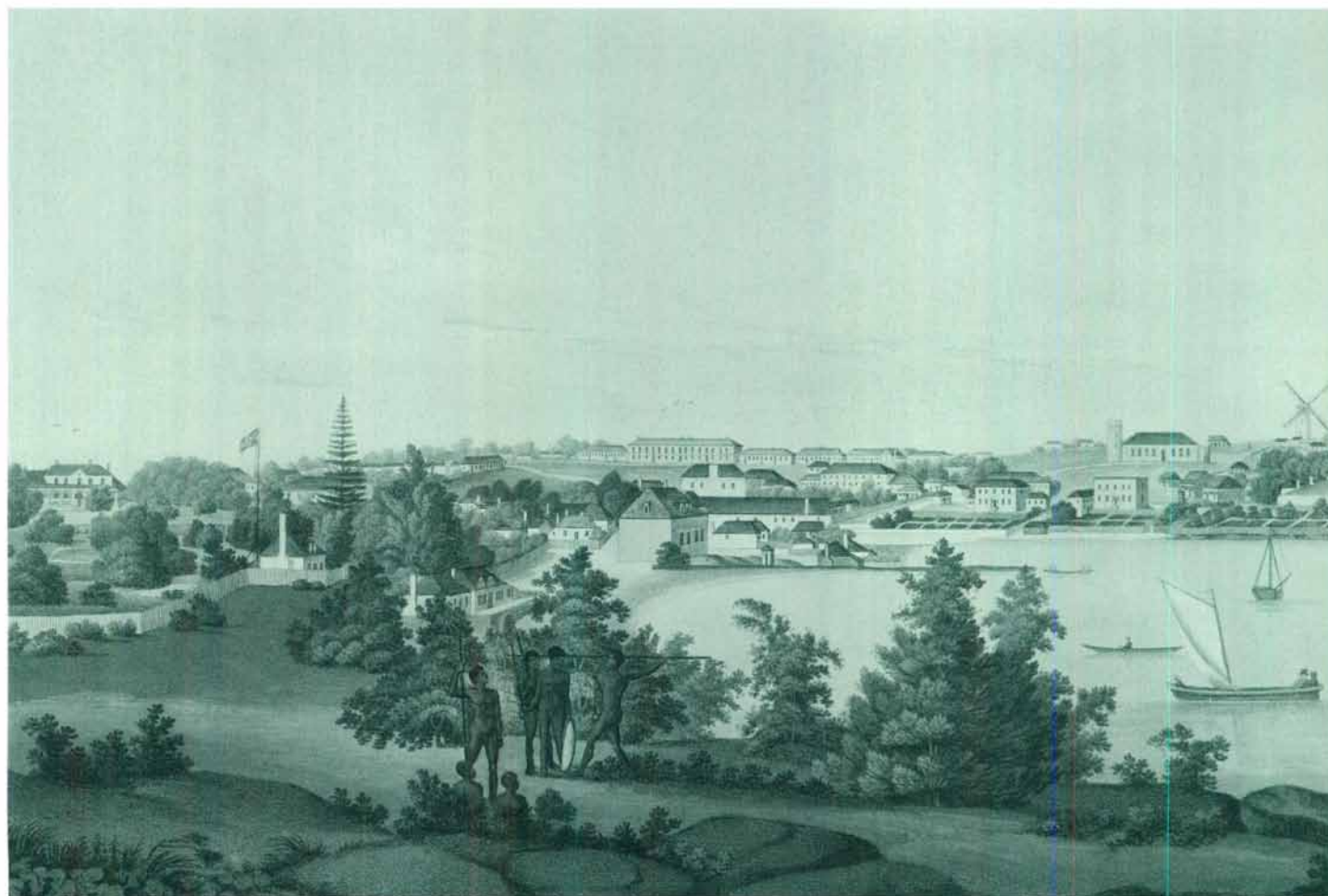
conditions were easing. There are two round planted beds on the terrace, and round beds interrupt the ordered vegetable garden. Young trees, possibly fruit trees, are growing in the centre of each bed. A Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*), with its distinctive silhouette, is planted to one side of the garden. It had been brought back for the Governor by one of the ships visiting Norfolk Island.

While most of the plants and seeds brought to New South Wales in the First Fleet were for food production, some decorative plants were also brought out. For example, Surgeon Bowes Smyth brought the hardy geranium (*Pelargonium* spp.), together with grape vines. They prospered in the poor and arid soil.

The droughts of the 1790s and the long periods between supply ships from Britain and India meant that supplies were almost at zero on a number of occasions, but gradually matters improved. By the time the watercolour *South View of the Town of Sydney* was painted in 1797 the colony was no longer in desperate straits. The ordered garden beds in front of many of the houses are still mainly planted with

C H A P T E R 1

The First Garden



Lawns, shrubs and trees make a decorative garden at Government House. This aquatint has been engraved by John Heaviside Clark from an original work by John Eyre

John Heaviside Clark, c.1770–1863
New South Wales, View of Sydney from the East Side of the Cove, 1810
hand coloured aquatint; 41.2 x 55.2 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection;
from the Pictorial Collection

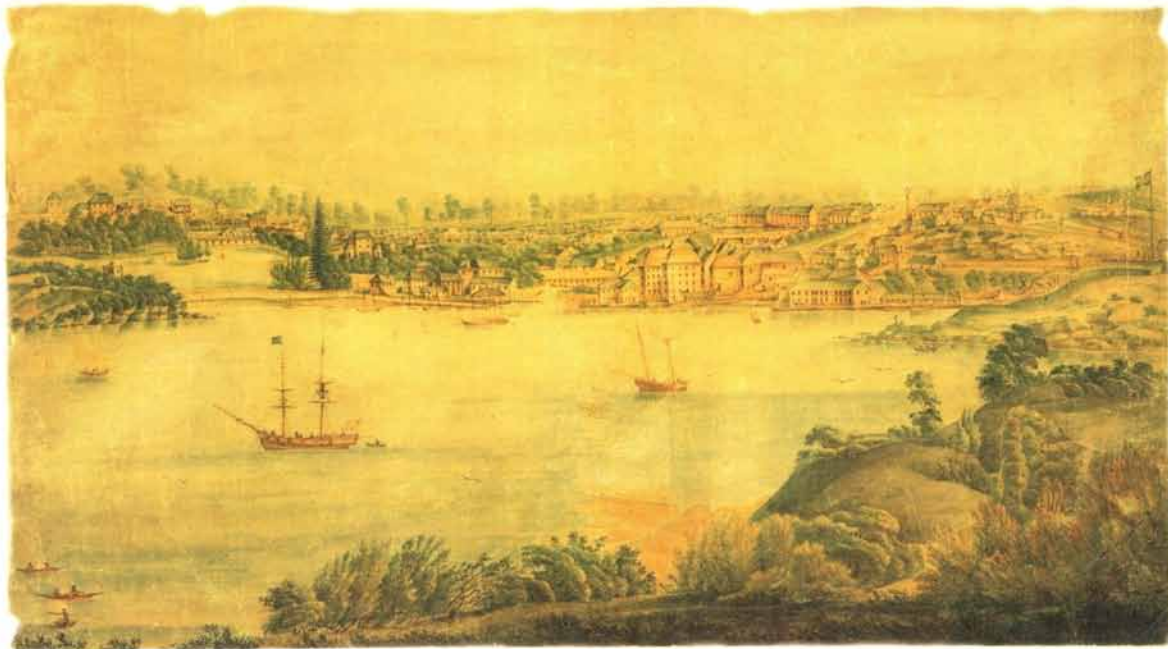
The First Garden

vegetables, but the garden of Government House was becoming more decorative than productive.

The first gardens of the settlers were very plain and laid out in geometric order. They were at one with the unadorned Georgian architecture of the first houses. Vines, though grown for the grapes,

introduced a decorative element as they clothed the walls of the houses.

By early in the new century, the garden of Government House showed that subsistence was no longer the sole preoccupation of the people living in the colony. In *New South Wales, View of Sydney from*



A Norfolk Island pine
marks the site of
Government House

J.W. Lewin, 1770–1819
*View of Sydney Looking
South, c.1811*
watercolour;
32.4 x 58.5 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection;
from the Pictorial
Collection

The First Garden

the East Side of the Cove, the artist shows how the grounds of Government House have developed. The vegetable gardens have given way to shrubs and grass. A garden bed is surrounded by a path. The Norfolk Island pine is already a stately height. In the background houses can be seen still surrounded by geometric beds of vegetables.

Governor Bligh, in his brief and troubled term of office, contributed to a transition in style that became evident elsewhere in the colony. He redesigned the ordered garden of Government House to one in the picturesque style. John Lewin's watercolour shows lawns sweeping down to the water, native trees on the left of the house providing a park-like setting, and a decorative stand of trees in the middle of the lawn. The distinctive outline of the Norfolk Island pine marks the site. The picket fence is no longer visible and a stone or cement wall runs along the Cove's edge.

Less than twenty years after the settlement was established in Sydney there was leisure time and more freedom from the demands of food production to think about the decorative design of gardens. Admittedly, the Governor's residence would have the trappings of a decorative garden before other houses, but as one of

the most painted and drawn sites it gives us an indication of the progress of the new colony.

In England, the picturesque style which Governor Bligh adopted succeeded the landscape style. Though both styles appear somewhat similar to us, they differed from each other in detail. Indeed, the picturesque is regarded by some as more an intellectual concept than a style. However, both styles were in opposition to the formal garden—the artificial, the straight line, the parterre and topiary—and both styles imitated nature. They were informal, 'natural' and curvilinear, though classical 'incidents' such as temples were allowed. They were more suited to large and medium-sized gardens rather than small gardens, though a clever designer could adapt them to a smaller space.

The picturesque differed from the landscape style in that more formality was allowed close to the house and in wilder elements such as grottoes, waterfalls and chasms. Both styles were, of course, contrived. In England, whole villages were moved by some designers to create the effect they wanted; the art was in making them seem natural. Both styles were described by Nan Fairbrother as 'the simple life in satin slippers'. Possibly

C H A P T E R I

The First Garden

Major James Taylor drew the productive cottage garden beside the Military Hospital, Sydney. Later in London the engraver, Robert Havell, added the foreground flowers

Robert Havell,
1769–1832
Detail from

The Entrance of Port Jackson and Part of the Town of Sydney, 1825
hand coloured aquatint;
47.8 x 65 cm

Rex Nan Kivell Collection;
from the Pictorial
Collection



One of the larger houses built in the new colony with a garden in the picturesque style. This engraving is based on an original work by John Eyre

W. Preston
View of the Seat of Woolloomoola [sic], near Sydney in New South Wales, 1813
engraving; 29.1 x 42 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection;
from the Pictorial
Collection



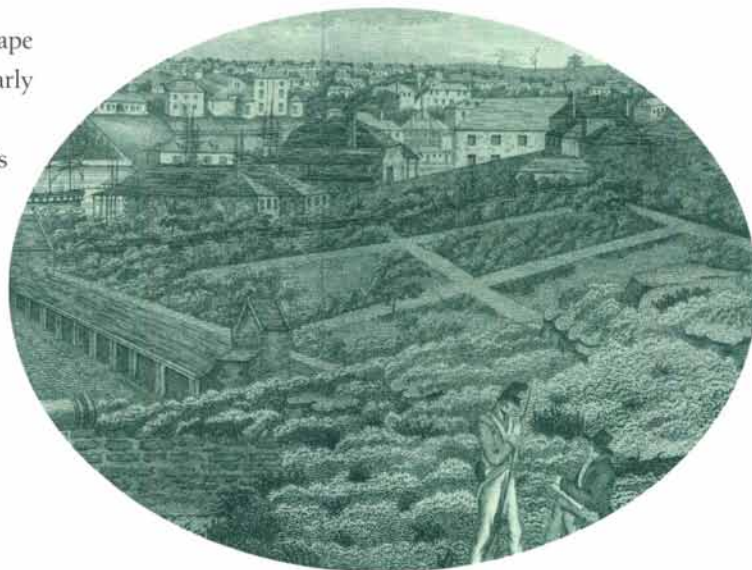
the artists' impressions of Australia's natural landscape contributed more to the picturesque style in the early paintings than did the actual design.

About the same time as Lewin painted his watercolour of Government House, the *View of the Seat of Woolloomoola [sic], near Sydney in New South Wales* was engraved from an original

Robert Campbell's garden on the west side of Sydney Cove
Reproduced from
An Historical Account of the Colony of New South Wales and its Dependent Settlements
by James Wallis (London: R. Ackermann, 1821)
Plate II

work by John Eyre. It shows a developed garden with a carriage drive. Nature is tamed in that many trees have been cut and the bush has retreated behind the house. Some trees are left standing decoratively in the grass. A substantial fence and gates enclose the sides and back of the house. Lewin's engraving of 'the seat of Ultimo' also shows a garden in the picturesque style.

James Wallis's aquatint of the Cove from Dawes' Point shows the garden of Robert Campbell next to his house and behind his wharfage on the west side of Sydney Cove. The garden is shielded from the wharf buildings by a row of what appear to be stables. Earlier this garden was, like others, laid down to vegetables. But by this time the geometric beds, surrounded by paths, contain grass, shrubs and trees. It has become a 'gentleman's' garden.



C H A P T E R 1

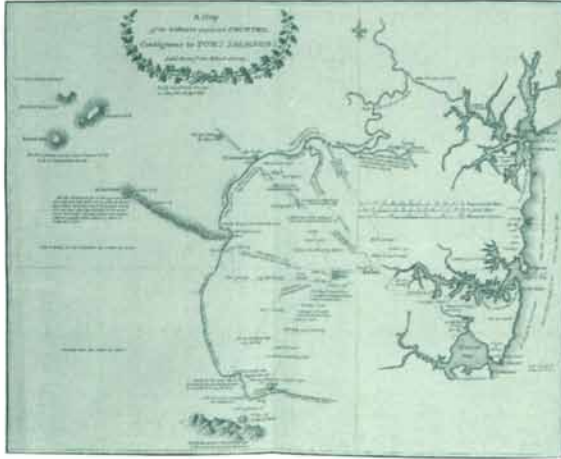
The First Garden



The First Garden

A map of the hitherto explored country, contiguous to Port Jackson: laid down from actual survey

Reproduced from
A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales
by Watkin Tench
(London: G. Nicol, 1795)



A further record of the very early gardens of Sydney comes from Major James Taylor who was posted to Sydney, arriving in 1817. His panorama of Sydney and Port Jackson appears in three published aquatints. In the grounds of the Military Hospital there is a cottage and outhouses. Vines grow on the wall of the cottage and stately flowers line the fence. A convict labours in the vegetable garden, officers chat between the cottage, kitchen and wash house, a lady, child and servant walk along the path, a kangaroo and fowls graze, and a dog supervises convicts moving wood. Labour and leisure

mix. To the right are the formal grounds of the hospital with picket fences, sentry boxes and regular plantings of trees along the fence and formal paths. In the background are the picturesque grounds of Government House. The houses on the slopes to the south of Government House show four geometric layouts.

Just how close the artists' images are to the early gardens is impossible to say. Clearly, some of the features described above have been imposed by the engraver in England, for after comparing Major Taylor's original watercolours and the engravings made from them, it is apparent that the flowers in the foreground and the layout of some of the distant gardens were added in London, perhaps to make the scene more attractive. Another indication that we should not rely on all the observations of the early artists is in the drawings of eucalypts with their leaves standing up instead of hanging down. It is possible that the picturesque aspect of paintings and engravings such as the one of Woolloomooloo may have been imposed by the painter rather than the gardener. However, the French artist Sigismond Himely's view of Woolloomooloo shows a picturesque garden too.

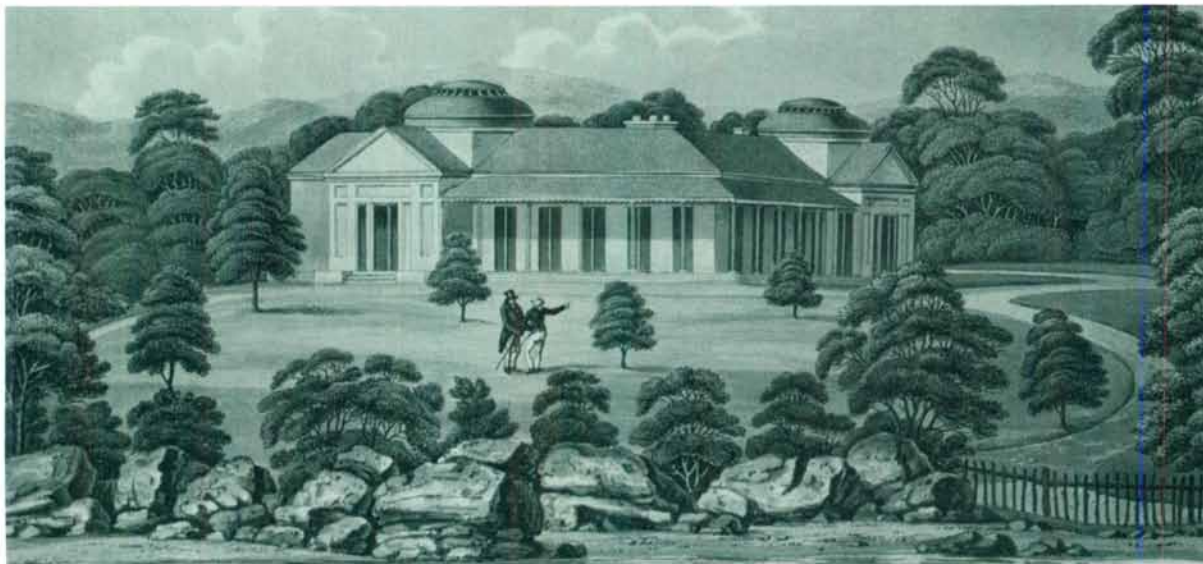
The First Garden

Joseph Lycett's views may be somewhat more reliable as he added text to support his paintings which record the colony at the end of its third decade. Lycett was a portrait and miniature painter transported for forgery. But we cannot be entirely sure that he too did not impose the English view of the landscape on the Australian setting.

By the end of the third decade the range of buildings and gardens had increased. There were

stately colonial Georgian and Regency villas scattered around the harbour, and the Governor's house at Rose Hill and the Parramatta settlement showed some signs of maturity.

Lycett's *View of Captain Piper's Naval Villa at Eliza Point near Sidney* [sic] shows a picturesque garden around a Colonial Regency house. Other views of this garden show that behind the house was a vegetable garden surrounded by a picket fence in a cruciform



Captain Piper's garden on the shores of Port Jackson is picturesque in style with a mixture of indigenous and exotic plants

Joseph Lycett,
c.1775–1828
Detail from *View of
Captain Piper's Naval
Villa at Eliza Point near
Sidney* [sic], *New South
Wales*, 1825
hand coloured aquatint;
25 x 35 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection;
from the Pictorial
Collection

The First Garden

The wilderness made picturesque. Bushland has been cleared to make a garden around Burwood Villa, which lay between Sydney Cove and Rose Hill

Joseph Lycett,
c.1775–1828
*Burwood Villa,
New South Wales,
the Property of
Alexander Riley Esqr.,
1825*

hand coloured aquatint;
25.2 x 33 cm
From the Pictorial
Collection

shape. The house was shaded by eucalypts and casuarinas, and oranges, peaches, apricots and nectarines grew behind it. The garden of Burwood Villa is in the picturesque style. But the wildness of the surrounding country, some distance from the main settlement, necessitates an inner fence around the house. The style was achieved at a price, for as Lycett notes, 'it is a remarkable instance how speedily the forest in New South Wales can be

cleared of its superfluous timber'. His description of the richness of fruits growing in these gardens is that of a person from a colder climate. Some of the fruits he is describing only grew in glass houses, if at all, in Britain.

So from a starving colony in 1788, by its third decade the colony's gardens were exciting interest because of the diversity of their plants. The first botanical garden had been established at Rose Hill, followed by the gardens which became the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. The first nursery had been established by Thomas Shepherd near the site of the future University of Sydney and its first stocks had been obtained from the gardens already established in the colony.

Though the gardens in the towns of Sydney and Parramatta were still largely geometric in layout, the English picturesque style is represented in the paintings and engravings of the larger gardens. At Government House, the vegetable garden started three days after the First Fleet arrived had become an elegant garden.

