

**BLOOMING TASMANIA FLOWER AND GARDEN FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL OPENING SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
ALBERT HALL, LAUNCESTON, 21 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Good evening everyone. I am delighted to have been invited to open the 2018 Blooming Tasmania Flower and Garden Festival. With more than 60 exhibitors and a full speaker programme, this third festival promises to be enormously successful, building and growing its reputation as a not-to-be-missed event on the gardening calendar.

When I was asked to speak at the southern launch of the 2016 Festival, I talked about my personal gardening experience and I spoke about the garden of my childhood home and the garden at Valleyfield, New Norfolk where I lived for 40 years. Jane has suggested that on this occasion I give you Part 2 of my gardening experience, namely living in the beautiful Government House garden.

As it happens, I have been doing some work on the history of the Government House garden and so I will try and give you some idea of how the garden has evolved to the very beautiful garden we see today. Like so many historic gardens it has experienced some highs and some lows, depending on the state of the economy and as a consequence the number of gardening staff but also on the interests of the Governor of the day and the management of garden staff.

As all gardeners know, it takes only 1 to 2 years of neglect for a garden to be infested with weeds and overgrown with blackberries or ivy, for perennials to be smothered to death or to die from lack of water, for hedges and shrubs to become bedraggled and untidy. To my surprise, parts of our Government House garden have suffered such a fate.

We do not know who is responsible for the original design of the garden. While the earliest plan, dated 1856, bears the signature of the architect of the house, William Porden Kay, it is possible that William Thomas, the landscape gardener employed to lay out the grounds in 1856, also designed them. The 1856 plan shows the South Terrace and the north courtyard (today we call the courtyard 'Lions Court'). A plan of the following year includes the East Terrace.

The terraces and courtyard are a major part of the landscaping of the Government House garden and today their boundaries remain as constructed, with the quatrefoil wing walls and patterned iron fences on the South and East Terraces. From the Terraces there are steps leading to shrubberies and lawn and, below that, paddocks. This layout shows the influence of John Claudius Loudon, an influential garden designer in Victorian Britain, whose style departed from that of Capability Brown by separating the house from grasslands and grazing animals with formal terraces, gravelled paths and forecourts.

Originally, the grounds of Government House extended unimpeded to the foreshore. However in the 1870s a railway line was constructed separating the house and grounds from the indigenous vegetation at the water's edge. And then in the later 1930s and early 1940s a road and pontoon bridge were constructed connecting the Eastern Shore with the city. Fortunately, the elevation of the site prevents the railway line and road from being a visual intrusion.

In accordance with the early plans, we still have a pond in the middle of the South Terrace with a central fountain and this is matched by a pond and fountain in Lion's Court. However, over the years the planting around the ponds has varied. Cordylines flanking the fountains and a central clump of planting shown in painting and photographs between 1881 and 1926 have disappeared.

Neither is there a trace of the elaborate parterre arrangement cut into the grass on the terraces shown in an 1866 plan, nor the striking star-shaped bed, circular bed and two cross-shaped beds shown on an aerial photograph of c 1921. Bedding out was fashionable in Victorian public and private gardens and the fashion continued into the twentieth century.

Descriptions of Government House garden parties as late in the 1938 suggest that beds of massed petunias, dahlias and phlox were flowering on the terraces. Today the terrace lawns are unbroken by flower beds. The problem with annual bedding plants is, of course, that there are long periods when the beds are empty. Whether to revive any of these beds is something we have been pondering.

There is so much more to tell about our garden but I am going to focus on the Japanese garden, the vineyard and the Lahaye vegetable garden (in case Jane should ask me for Part 3!)

Both the Japanese Garden and the Quarry Pond, obviously in the case of the latter, were stone quarries. The existence of the large quarry with good quality sandstone was one of the reasons for choosing Regatta Point as the site for Government House.

The Japanese Garden has an interesting history. Today it a much-loved part of the garden. Situated just inside the front gate it is hidden from sight by shrubs under a canopy of conifers and eucalypts. Its central feature is a pond with a small waterfall and a Japanese stone lantern perched on a rock, with gravel paths interspersed with paving stones and cobblestones, thanks to the hard work of Niki Lytton, one of our gardeners.

The Japanese Garden is always green and lush with ferns, acanthus and bamboo and there is always something of interest flowering. All winter the masses of daphne have provided light and scent followed by colour from the many camellias. At the moment, as the camellias are dotting the paths with colour and the magnolias and hellebores are past their best but the clivias are beginning to flower, splashes of white azaleas stand out against the green and the Japanese iris in the pond suggest a lovely display to come in summer.

On Sunday afternoon I was wandering there to see what was happening and to my delight saw a wood duck swimming past the Japanese lantern with the first brood of new ducklings for the Spring. But the Japanese Garden area of the garden has had a chequered history.

It seems it was first landscaped as a fernery and rockery at the instigation of Governor Frederick Weld in the late 1870s, and that then it also featured flowering plants. However, a description of the preparations for the arrival of Viscount Gormanston in 1893 mentioned a 'ridding' of the small quarry. There are a number of undated photographs showing a rather dilapidated rockery with a small puddle of water with a few lily pads.

By 1919 a scathing letter to the Mercury criticising the state of the garden described the rockery as 'simply a tip for refuse'. It was apparently re-landscaped in the 1920s or 1930s but continued to be a bit of a problem area. Sometime later, one of Governors, a keen gardener and a collector of conifers planted many of these in the rockery. However, its proximity to the front fence meant that they were very vulnerable to theft. After yet another few conifers disappeared in the dead of night, His Excellency is said to have personally filled the rockery with water in frustration. I am guessing this was Sir Charles Gairdner, who used to personally work in the garden in weekends. So it seems that in the mid-1960s the rockery became a pond and the Japanese Garden developed around it.

In my term as Governor, there have been two significant additions to the grounds. The first is the vineyard. Work on the vineyard commenced in early 2014 in what is known as the Golf Paddock and the planting of 1800 vines which include Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot was completed in September 2015. This piece of land adjoins the Botanical Gardens and gently slopes down towards the Derwent and the Tasman Highway. We had the first harvest last Autumn with a good crop of Riesling and we are anxiously awaiting tasting it later in the year.

At the western end of the Golf Paddock, overlooking the vineyard is the Lahaye Garden. This garden purports to be a replica of the vegetable garden that was developed in 1792 at Recherche Bay in southern Tasmania, by Felix Lahaye, the botanist-gardener of the Bruni D'Entrecasteaux expedition.

Research shows Felix Lahaye had taken with him some £1000 worth of seeds and fruit stones from the Paris seed shop Vilmorin-Andrieux, which is still trading and we sourced the seeds for our replica garden from this same supplier. According to Lahaye's journal, during a stay of more than four weeks he established the garden, planting chicory, cabbages, sorrel, radishes, cress, white onions, grey romaine lettuce and potatoes.

Planting gardens was a common practice of early expeditions and was done with the intention of providing food for other maritime adventurers. When Lahaye returned with the expedition some nine months later, the results were disappointing; little had survived the lack of water and depredations of wildlife.

A layout of mossy stones, approximately matching the dimensions of the garden described in Lahaye's journal, was discovered in 2003 by bushwalkers. However, a later archaeological study claimed this site was unlikely to be a remnant of the French garden. Whether it is or is not, our gardener, Tara Edmondson has created a vegetable garden in the French potager style which matches the dimensions described in Lahaye's journal (namely 9m x 7.7m and divided into four rectangles and including a stone plinth for a water barrel). It is blissfully free of the oxalis which plagues the kitchen garden over the fence.

Thank you again for inviting me to open your Festival, I am looking forward to returning in the morning and if my diary will allow, to hearing at least the first of speakers.

I now have much pleasure in launching the 2018 Blooming Tasmania Flower and Garden Festival.

Thank you.