



# Melbourne's Emerald Necklace

Melbourne's 'emerald necklace' consists of two rings of park reserves, created during the early years of settlement.

The vision of Charles La Trobe, superintendent of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales, was for a city of great beauty and function. His vision included two 'rings' of park reserves. La Trobe's foresight in protecting public open space was extraordinary, at a time when town planning was just starting to be revolutionised by progressive ideas about the value of public parks for the health of the working classes. The 'inner ring' of picturesque ornamental gardens for passive recreation included Flagstaff Gardens, Fitzroy Gardens, Treasury Gardens, Carlton Gardens, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Domain, all of which are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. By contrast, the 'outer ring' parks such as Yarra Park, Fawkner Park, Albert Park, Princes Park and Royal Park, were planned for active recreation and were less formally arranged. Of these, only Yarra Park has been listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). Now, the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria, Mr Tim Smith, has recommended that Royal Park be added to the VHR as a park of State significance, suggesting that:

'Royal Park is historically significant as an outstanding and largely intact example of the public parks set aside by Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe from the mid-1840s as part of his vision for the city of Melbourne. It retains its early use and demonstrates La Trobe's contribution to the provision of public open space in the colony and also the vision of the colonial administration for the future development of Melbourne. Largely as a result of La Trobe's vision Melbourne now has a group of spectacular parks.'

On his last day in the colony, La Trobe visited the site on horseback and personally pointed out the boundaries of Royal and Princes Parks to the surveyor-general. However, by the time Royal Park was gazetted in 1876, it had been reduced in area by one third, due to residential development at its fringes in the intervening years. The 1876 Gazette stated that Royal Park would be 'for all times hereafter maintained and used as a Public Park'.

As a public reserve, Royal Park remained largely undeveloped until the 1930s and provided informal recreation for surrounding inner suburbs. The Park now consists of large open spaces dissected by internal roadways and a tramline. It features a monument to the ill-fated Burke and Wills Expedition that departed from the Park in 1860, and the Melbourne Zoological Gardens (relocated from a site in Yarra Park in 1861). During the twentieth century Royal Park became a venue for a range of national and international sports, particularly in the wake of the 1956 Olympics. Even today, Royal Park is still one of the largest parks in the 'emerald necklace' at approximately 160 hectares (or 395 acres).

Mr Tim Smith continues: 'Royal Park is the most important of Melbourne's early outer ring of parks, and has greater historical significance than the other examples, which has partly resulted from its convenient location so close to the city... [it] is rare as a relatively intact example of a major metropolitan park, set aside in the 1840s, which retains its basic

form, its early use, remnant indigenous vegetation and important views to the city.'

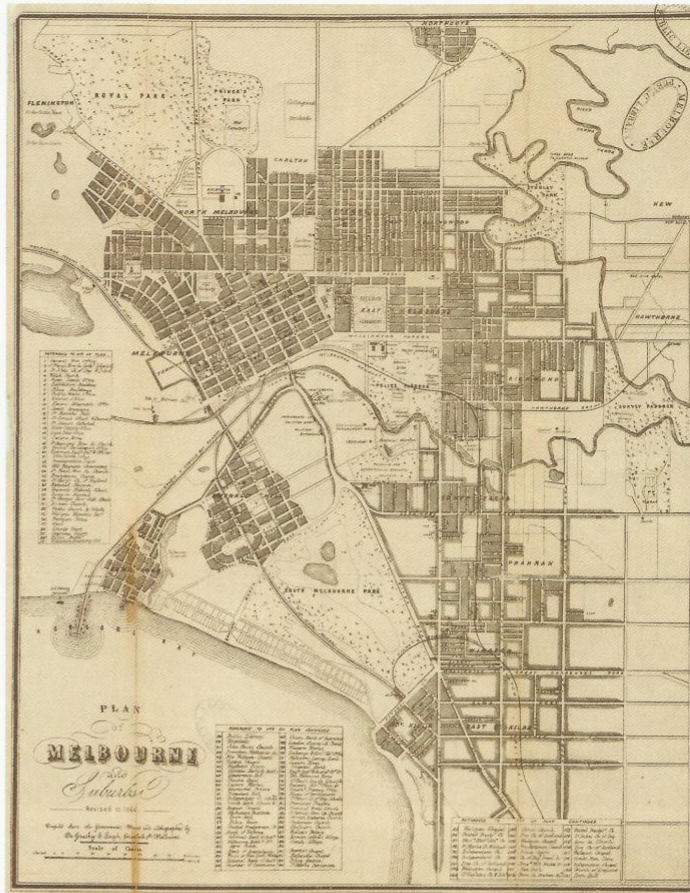
Royal Park is not the only outer ring park beloved by Victorians. Today, La Trobe's 'emerald necklace' is a varied collection of recreation spaces.

**Yarra Park** comprises 35 ha (86 acres), and is now more colloquially known as the 'MCG car park'. It combines not only well-developed sporting features, more typical of parks belonging to the 'outer ring', but also has retained its geometric path layout, elm avenues and planting created by Clement Hodgkinson in the 1870s and 1880s – a style he used so widely that it became his trademark. This style can also be seen in the 'inner ring' parks of Fitzroy, Treasury and Carlton Gardens. Following a successful appeal by the Trust, together with the East Melbourne Group and Melbourne City Council, Yarra Park was added to the VHR in May 2010.

**Fawkner Park**, is 41 ha (101 acres) in size. Named after John Pascoe Fawkner, a co-founder of Melbourne, it was proposed as a park reserve in 1859 and formally reserved in 1862. The Park was developed in 1875 by Nicholas Bickford, an assistant to Hodgkinson, whose distinctive style remains. It retains a substantially intact radial pathway system, and open, spacious grassed areas intersected by distinctive tree-lined avenues, giving it a distinct 'Hodgkinson' character. The Park caters for both active and passive recreation.

**Albert Park** was temporarily reserved in 1862, proclaimed in 1864, and laid out by Clement Hodgkinson. An area of 301 ha (745 acres) was set aside in two portions, and comprised the lagoon and land between Fitzroy Street, St Kilda Road and the St Kilda railway line. Albert Park suffered excision of land and fierce political debate over the need to reserve all the parkland for the growing colony. The park surrounding the Albert Park Lake is occupied by a golf course, stadium, cricket/football ground, the State Swimming Centre, and is the site of the Australian Grand Prix.

**Princes Park** comprising 39 ha (97 acres) was originally part of the 1036 ha (2,560 acre) site suggested as a reservation for recreational purposes by La Trobe in 1845. It was proclaimed in 1854 and permanently reserved in 1873. As with other large parks, it was used for grazing stock in its early days to provide a source of revenue for the Council. Princes Park Oval became the home of the Carlton Football Club in 1880, the club having played in a clearing in Royal Park since 1866. From 1898 and well into



Above: 1866 plan of Melbourne and suburbs by De Gruchy & Leigh (image courtesy of the State Library of Victoria). Top left: Burke and Wills monument, Royal Park.

the twentieth century, large numbers of trees were progressively planted.

In 1862, the Minister for Lands Charles Duffy noted that it was 'notorious that the metropolis of Victoria had more parks than any other city in the world'. As the Heritage Council noted in its determination for Yarra Park, these areas of public parkland have been 'critical in shaping the physical character of Melbourne and its distinctive character'.

In recent times, the heritage of the 'emerald necklace' has been protected by the City of Melbourne's Parks Policy, which states as Principle 1 that:

'Melbourne's parkland areas will be maintained with no net reduction in area and new opportunities for parkland will be explored and developed where appropriate.'

The proposed East West Link project which threatens Royal Park is at odds with this policy, and faces strong opposition from several local governments. The City of Melbourne has calculated that 22.8 ha (14% of the total park area) will be required for the temporary construction area, and that at least 9.3 ha of parkland (6%) will be lost permanently. The National Trust made a submission to the East West Link Assessment Committee, stating that the project amounts to one of the most heritage-adverse projects of the last few decades in Melbourne. In a time of increasing urban pressure, it is now up to Victorians to defend Melbourne's 'emerald necklace' of outer ring parks.

*With thanks to Ms Lee Andrews and Dr Sue Hughes for their contribution to this article.*