

La Trobe's Cottage Garden News

Winter Update – June 2012

Slowly, we are finding plants that would have been available to La Trobe in the 1840s/50s. It is quite difficult for several reasons. One is that they have gone out of fashion, are no longer grown and therefore not available in Australia any more. Another reason is that they have been hybridised or become cultivars, which means the original species are not grown any more. A hybrid is when two species of the same genus are cross pollinated, either by human hands or nature and can be recognised by the X in the name, for example *Camellia x williamsii*. A cultivar is a plant that has been bred by cuttings, grafting, division or budding and is written *Camellia* 'Plantation Pink'.



Camellia 'Plantation Pink'

To help us find plants we have been using three sources:

1. Plants Listed in Nursery Catalogues in Victoria 1855 to 1889, by the Garden Plant Conservation Association of Australia
2. The Historic Houses Trust of NSW Colonial Plant Data base
http://www.hht.net.au/research/colonial_plants
3. Hortus Camdenensis Data base, which was Plants grown by Sir William Macarthur at Camden Park between 1820 to 1861 <http://www.hortuscampden.com>

When we find a plant we cross reference it, checking to see if it was available in the period that we are looking at. We have a cut-off point of 1854, because that is when La Trobe returned to London. We use the two NSW data bases the most because they show which plants were available very early in our settlement and because most plants in the early days came from Sydney or Tasmania. We have evidence (letters) showing La Trobe received plants in the 1840s from the Sydney Botanic Gardens and his friend Ronald Gunn in Tasmania.

When we find one, we get quite excited because it is such a challenge to source them. Most times it is no good going through the nursery industry because they cannot supply them. Instead, we have been contacting specialist groups such as the Salvia group or the Chrysanthemum Society or people who grow rare plants. Yes, old fashion species are considered rare plants because cultivars or hybrids have become more popular.

We have been looking for *Campanula persicifolia* Peach leafed bellflower and *Euphorbia milii* var. *Splendens* for at least two years. Finally, we thought why not check the Royal Botanic Gardens

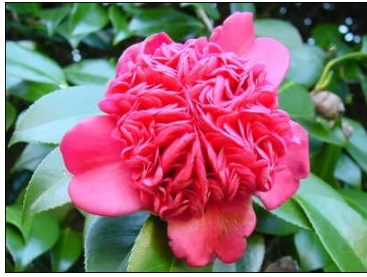


Campanula persicifolia

Melbourne Plant Census and see if they grow them? Yes they do and they are the only people who grow them. We realised that our first inquiry should be to check the Gardens data base. We really like the fact that these unusual plants today (once common) are found in the Botanic Gardens that were established by La Trobe: it is a nice circle linking La Trobe back to the gardens' beginning. Thanks to the kind donation of Dermot Molloy from the Royal Botanic Gardens, we have just planted the campanula, the euphorbia and special iris called Jolimont.



Euphorbia milii var. *Splendens*



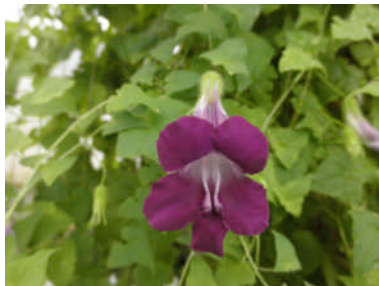
Camellia japonica
'Anemoniflora'

If the Plant Census does not help, then we contact the Growing Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne to see if they can source plants for us. At the moment they are growing for us an especially old camellia *Camellia japonica* 'Anemoniflora' known as the Waratah Camellia. It is listed in the 1830 and 1836 editions of Loddiges' Nursery catalogue, copies of which are held at Camden Park, NSW. It is very unusual as it has a red flower and looks like a Waratah. La Trobe does not mention any camellias, so it is impossible to know whether he grew them. But it is quite possible, as they were available in Sydney and he probably would have seen them when he arrived there a couple of months before coming down to take up his position in Melbourne.

What is happening in the garden at the Cottage?

The garden is looking fantastic and all our hard work is paying off. Unfortunately, possums have found a taste for some of our succulents which is a real nuisance. We have had to move some of the *Crassula falcata* Propeller plant and the *Echeveria* 'Big Red' to the front garden (as possums do not like walking along the ground as they are too exposed). The chosen succulent bed may not be so well located after all. Chicken wire didn't sufficiently protect the plants, so we decided to net the entire bed. Thanks to Rick at Citywide, an inconspicuous net has been put over the entire bed. But possums are determined. They are nibbling through the netting and we are now considering a third solution with the help of the arboriculture department of Citywide.

The front garden beds still need some work and will be completed in spring when we receive our last three heritage roses. We are also hoping to replace some of the trellis (with the permission of the National Trust) using the George Alexander Gilbert's pastel drawing, *A View of Jolimont, Melbourne, Port Phillip 1843-44*, as our source of interpretation.



Maurandya barclaiana

The trellis will help recreate the romantic atmosphere of the Cottage and provide the Mrs. Perry's creeper *Maurandya barclaiana* a much needed support to climb on. Mrs. Perry was the wife of Melbourne's first Anglican Bishop and she mentions seeing the creeper growing at Jolimont. It has a purple flower, so watch out for it in spring.

Volunteers Beverley and Joy have done a fantastic job looking after the *Iris unguicularis* Californian iris. Each autumn they cut the foliage to the ground, fertilise it with some potash and off it starts blooming. Another plant that is doing its best since we started looking after the garden is our camellia. Our volunteer Jenny pruned it after it flowered last year, it was given some potash and it is blooming beautifully. (See picture on previous page.)



Iris unguicularis

If you are looking for rare or unusual plants, trying contacting the Growing Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne to see if they can grow them for you. Their website is:
<http://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/rbg-melbourne/friends-melbourne/plant-sales>

Update on *Glycine latrobeana*

As you may know, we are supporting the nationally listed vulnerable species *Glycine latrobeana* Purple clover which is a small native perennial herb. We have very exciting news. The Department of Sustainability and Environment, Bendigo has provided the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne with some seed to germinate in their glass houses for us. When they are mature, we will plant them in the garden and help to raise its profile in the community.

***If you or your group would like to book a garden tour
please contact***

Property Manager

Lorraine Finlay

Tel: 03 9563 6363

Itc@latrobesociety.org.au

View down along the side of the Dining
Room

Jenny, pruning the *Camellia* 'Plantation
Pink'



Our Resident Magpie



Our Team of Volunteers enjoying
morning tea