

Monuments and Monkeys:

a walk in historic City Park, Launceston

Launceston is the third oldest city in Australia. Beautiful City Park is closely associated with its history and development. Here around 1807 Lt Col William Paterson, the first commander of the northern settlement, built a hut and later a cottage surrounded by vegetable gardens and fruit trees. The cottage, the Government House of the north, played host to the cream of colonial society including Gov. Macquarie, Gov. Arthur and Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin. Next door a derelict plot grew a fine crop of weeds. In 1841 this wasteland was leased for 21 years to the newly-formed Launceston Horticultural Society.

Under the presidency of Ronald Campbell Gunn and his successors the Horticultural Society developed an extensive botanical garden boasting a Grecian lodge, a greenhouse, a large pavilion for exhibitions and a flourishing collection of exotic plants gleaned from across England and Europe. In time the Government Gardens were included as well. The Society charged non-members a fee for entry to its prized garden, but every Wednesday the gates were thrown open and the general public were admitted for free.

By 1863 the expense of keeping a large staff of gardeners became too much. The Horticultural Society handed its grounds to the City Council. Fresh paths were laid, lawns planted and a new pavilion constructed. Scotsman William McGowan, who served as Superintendent of Reserves for more than 50 years, played a major part in the park's development.

The 'People's Park' became an integral part of Launceston life, a place for children to play, for adults to take a break, for the community to celebrate its present and commemorate its past. In 2013, the year the Launceston Horticultural Society celebrated its 175th anniversary, this fine, heritage-listed example of Victorian and Edwardian design was recognised as one of the top ten public parks in Australia



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