

Horticultural Pioneer:

CHARLES DRAPER OF CHARNWOOD, ARTHUR'S CREEK.

BY BRUCE DRAPER



Charles Draper JP, at the age of 80 years.
Courtesy Bruce Draper

Charles Draper (1825-1909), a versatile horticulturist, florist, pomologist, orchardist and viticulturist, was the first large-scale fruit grower in the Arthur's and Diamond Creek districts of Victoria. He became a member of the inaugural Board of Advice for the Management of the Horticultural Gardens at Burnley and it is thought that his collection of tuberous begonias contributed to Ballarat's noted collection.

ARRIVAL IN VICTORIA

Born at Shepshed in the Charnwood Forest area of Leicestershire, England, in December 1852, Charles with his wife Catherine and their two small children, Maria aged 3 and Joseph Charles aged 1, left Liverpool in the ship *Kate* bound for

district on the main road from Heidelberg through Eltham to Kangaroo Ground.

Catherine (née Chester) was the daughter of a farmer and Charles a self-taught gardener who '*... commenced the study of horticulture when a young man, in the florist department . . . and practised it successfully during his leisure hours*'.¹ About 1856, the family established themselves as tenant farmers on the rich black soil of the Donaldson Square-Mile at Kangaroo Ground. Charles acted as an overseer for the Donaldsons, becoming an '*enthusiastic fruit cultivator, who for many years . . . made pomology his constant study*'².

SELECTING LAND

In 1862, Charles, with his friend John Ryder, wandered over the stringybark forested ranges to



Overgrown garden and remnant orchards on the original homestead block at Charnwood, Arthurs Creek, c. 1972.
Courtesy Bruce Draper

Port Phillip. On 13 April 1853 they disembarked in Hobson's Bay.

Charles was an experienced wheelwright and blacksmith accustomed to country work. Shortly after his arrival he established himself as a wheelwright at Plenty Bridge on the Plenty River near Eltham, where his skills were greatly in demand. Plenty Bridge (now Lower Plenty) was situated in the midst of a thriving agricultural

the north of Kangaroo Ground in search of '*a piece of land on which to locate himself and family, and which he could call his own*'. Under the recently passed Duffy Land Act, Charles Draper selected land, with excellent shelter and running water suitable for fruit growing, along the Running Creek at Arthur's Creek. He named his property Charnwood '*after his home in the old country*'. By repeated selections, he increased his holding to



Second annual trip of the students of the Horticultural College, Burnley to the Government Scent Farm at Dunolly, 23 November 1893. Charles Draper is standing in second row, fourth from the left.
 Photo: Nicholas Caire
 Courtesy Bruce Draper

*'320 acres in one block, besides 196 acres purchased at a short distance.'*³

The homestead and original orchard were established on the western side of the Running Creek near the junction with the Deep Creek and Arthur's Creek. Some of the first fruit trees, brought from Kangaroo Ground, grew with remarkable vigor in the fertile alluvial soil of the valleys.

The work of preparing the country for planting was *'one of a gigantic nature'*⁴ and newspaper reports described progress:

*'The first trees occupying only about two acres were planted in 1864. Then new sorts were procured from which to propagate, and the next planting took place in 1867, and has been continued yearly from that time.'*⁵

*'While this was being done, dairying was carried on to provide the means of subsistence.'*⁶

EXHIBITIONS AND MEDALS

In July 1871, Charles was elected to the Practical Committee of the Horticultural Society of Victoria, which in 1885 became the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria. He was a member of the Fruit Committee and was appointed a Trustee of the Society's Experimental Gardens at Richmond. A regular exhibitor at Monthly Meetings and Horticultural Exhibitions, Charles Draper later became a Vice-President and Fellow of the Society.

At the Second Intercolonial Exhibition held in Sydney in 1873, *'The fruits exhibited by the Horticultural Society of Victoria and by Mr. Charles Draper of Hazel Glen, made a very fine display, set out, as they were, with great taste in a prominent position in*

*the building, and on a table devoted to them alone.'*⁷ A silver medal was awarded to the society and a bronze to Charles Draper.

The Horticultural Society played a prominent part in the development of the fruit export trade. Charles was one of the first Victorians to export apples which were included in the shipment arranged by Mr. John Carson of Kew for display at the Vienna International Exhibition in 1873. This was the first time fresh fruit had been exported from Victoria to Europe. Prior to this fruits modeled in wax were sent overseas for display.

In 1876, apples and pears from Charnwood were sent for display at the [American] Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia. Ninety-seven varieties of pears were sent in the S.S. *Zealandia* as ordinary cargo without a cool chamber, and only three specimens went bad.

Charles Draper imported many varieties of fruit trees into the colony from America and Europe to be proved at Charnwood and then grown for sale. One such early variety was the Jonathan apple, first introduced into Victoria from America under the name of Marston's Red Winter.

Fruit from Charnwood was included in the display from the Australian colonies at the Paris Exhibition of 1878, and a contemporary report stated that *'... [it] appears to have attracted a considerable amount of attention. The idea also appears to be gaining ground that a good market may be found in England for Australian fruit.'*⁸

At the International Exhibition in Melbourne (1880-81), Charles Draper was awarded a silver medal for his collection of fruits.



Commemorative certificate awarded to Charles Draper at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, London, 1886. Courtesy Bruce Draper

'That one grower (Mr. Draper) tabled a collection of 199 varieties of apples and 49 varieties of pears is noteworthy, in being perhaps an incident that has no parallel in the history of Victorian shows.' James Lang of Harcourt was awarded a special first prize for his exhibit of 30 apples that 'contained not a single inferior example.'⁹

Fruit from Charnwood was sent with the trial export to London of fruit and vegetables, partly for sale and partly for exhibition, at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, London 1886. A total of 136 fruit and vegetable growers and exhibitors participated in the experiment. The Victorian Commission administered the sale of fruit, '... a diploma and medal were awarded to each exhibitor.'¹⁰

Charles Draper acted as a judge at many horticultural exhibitions throughout the colony. He was awarded a bronze medal for services as a juror at the Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne, 1888.

At the Centennial Horticultural Exhibition held at Richmond Park in March 1889, Charles was awarded first prize for 50 and 24 varieties of apples, and also for 50 and 24 varieties of pears.

'Apples and pears especially were remarkably fine, the effects of irrigation being visible in the great size attained by some of them, particularly the pears, which however were not improved in colour, some of them being very pale. It was also distinctly proved that fruit capable of taking a high place at an exhibition can be grown without irrigation, as in the case of Mr. Draper's apples, which gained first prize for 50 and 24 varieties.'¹¹

At this time the collection of fruits at Charnwood included 'about 700 varieties' of apples.¹²

VISITS, VINES, NUTS AND BEGONIAS

The name of Charnwood and its owner became well-known throughout Victoria and the neighbouring colonies and the property welcomed many visitors. By the 1890s there were 200 acres of fruit trees. The mode of pruning attracted attention ('Mr. Draper's axiom is to shape

the tree into its proper habit prior to maturing then the necessity for pruning is minimised.'¹³) as well as the practice of keeping apples in store and 'camps.'¹⁴

The *Leader* of January 25, 1890, in an article headed 'Charnwood', noted that 'Mr. Draper has planted a few vines by way of experiment, which are doing well, and he is of the opinion that the whole of the hills might be advantageously covered with wine grapes.'¹⁵ This was proven in December 1902 when the *Garden Gazette* in an article headed 'A Visit to Charnwood' reported that:



Catalogue of new fruit trees available from the Charnwood Nursery 1893. Courtesy Bruce Draper



Early view across Charnwood and the Running Creek Valley to the conspicuous Sugarloaf.
 Courtesy Bruce Draper

*'After dinner our next move was across the creek and up the opposite slope . . . to the vineyard, and through the vines, which were looking lusty and vigorous with promise of a good crop, after which we naturally adjourned to the wine cellar, for Mr. Draper, in addition to being a skilled horticulturist. . . is also his own wine maker, producing a sound, dry white of excellent character.'*¹⁶

Nuts also found a place at Charnwood and at the second conference of Australasian Fruitgrowers held in Hobart during April 1895, Charles Draper 'gave his experience in growing filbert and other nuts.'¹⁷ and incidentally 'took first honours' in the section open to all Australasia for

collections of apples at the Intercolonial Fruit Show held in conjunction with the conference. 'The judges awarded it to him for the large number of varieties, the excellence of the exhibits, and the correctness of the nomenclature.'¹⁸

Visitors to Charnwood admired the flower garden as much as the orchard. The tuberous begonias, Charles' particular interest, were ' . . . for many years the finest to be seen in Victoria'¹⁹ and ' . . . a gentleman who has recently returned from England, and who visited Laing's and some of the other great growers, declares that some of the varieties are superior to any he saw there, whether for size, form or colour.'²⁰

Indeed, Mr. W.L. Hartland of Creswick, the

Officer-in-Charge of the State Nursery, and a champion begonia grower, purchased the begonia collection from the Charnwood estate in June 1909. The Hartland collection, including the Charnwood collection, is reputed to have been a significant addition to the Ballarat collection.

COMMUNITY WORK

Charles Draper always took an active part in local affairs. In 1878 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and acted as a magistrate in the Eltham and Whittlesea Shires, sitting at Eltham, Queenstown (now St Andrews) and Whittlesea Courts

In May 1890, Charles was one of the fruit and vine growing experts who accompanied the first Parliamentary Visit to Mildura, at the joint invitation of the Mildura Shire Council and the firm of Chaffey Brothers Limited. He advocated:

'... the establishment of an experimental plantation, on which the growth of new and old varieties might be carried out on a small scale, so that the settlers might learn both what to cultivate and what to avoid, and also the best method of culture.' Further, he expressed his confidence *'that Mildura will develop into a large and important settlement.'*²¹

On May 12, 1890, the Arthur's Creek Fruit Growers' Association was formed with Charles Draper as President, P.W.J. Murphy, Secretary and J. Herbert as Treasurer.²² Charles Draper was to serve as President for the next 14 years. The early efforts of the Arthur's Creek Fruit Growers' Association and the Diamond Creek Horticultural Society, formed in September 1884, provided the foundations for the advancement of the fruit growing industry in those districts.

Another community group to which Charles Draper gave his time and energy was the Whittlesea Agricultural Society Show Committee, and he also served as Trustee of the Arthur's Creek Mechanics Institute and Free Library, and Trustee of the Linton (Arthur's Creek) Cemetery – the last for close to 42 years following the inception of the Trust in 1867. In 1896 he was elected a Councillor for the Whittlesea Riding of the Shire of Whittlesea, serving as Shire President in 1900 and in 1903. From 1905 to 1907 he was a Councillor for the Yan Yean Riding.

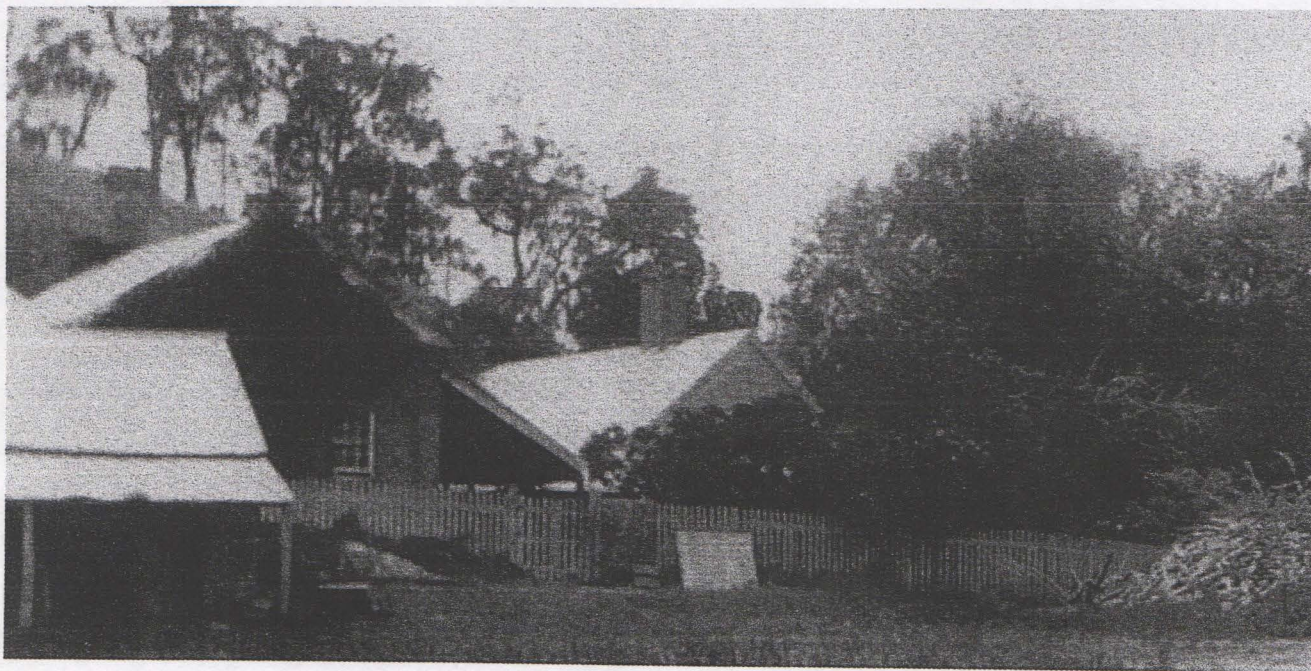
CHALLENGES AT BURNLEY

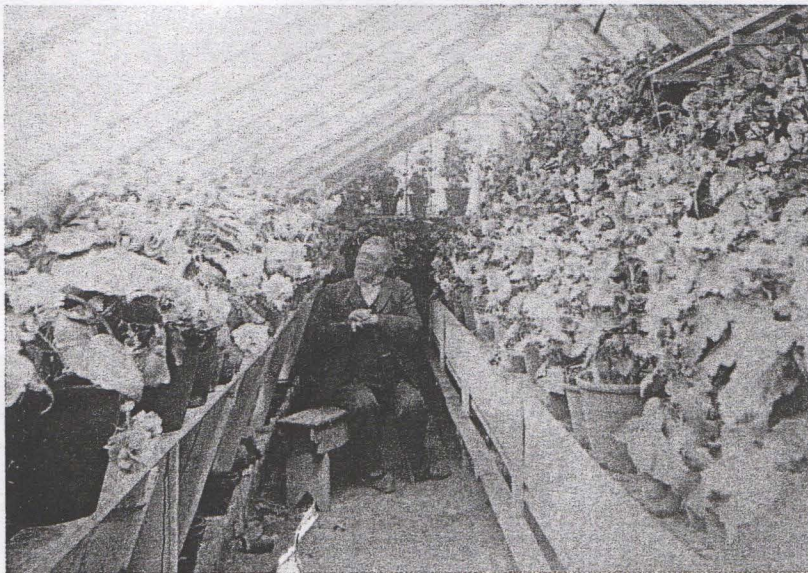
In May 1890, the committee of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria, after considerable discussion of the financial position of the society, proposed to place the society's experimental gardens at the disposal of the Government for the purpose of establishing a school of horticulture.

The Minister of Agriculture visited the gardens in October 1890, accompanied by George Graham MLA, and Charles Draper, Vice-presidents of the Society, and David Martin, Secretary for Agriculture. *'The gardens were found to be in good order' and 'the Minister agreed to take over the gardens from the trustees.'*²³

At a meeting of the Society in January 1891, *'The treasurer announced that the Agricultural Department had taken charge of the gardens and paid over the sum of £1400, the amount arranged for between the society and the Government. This covers the debentures and liabilities of the society.'*²⁴ Messrs. William Anderson, Charles Draper and Henry Boyce were nominated to the Board of Advice for Management of the Horticultural Gardens.

Homestead and garden at Charnwood, Arthurs Creek, 1922.
Courtesy Bruce Draper





Charles Draper at Charnwood with his beloved begonias – 'for many years the finest to be seen in Victoria.'
 Photo: R. Duncan, Ivanhoe
 Courtesy Bruce Draper

The Government appointees were David Martin, Secretary for Agriculture, Chairman, Joseph Harris and James Lang. George Neilson was appointed Curator. The Board of Advice was appointed on 16 February 1891. In May 1891, the first School of Horticulture in Australia came into existence.

As a member of the Board of Advice (familarly known as the Hort. Board), Draper was involved in the appointment of the mercurial Charles Bogue Luffman as Principal of Burnley and he undoubtedly had views on the later arguments with Luffman over methods of pruning, but his position on these matters is not clear. Press reports do not refer to him in relation to the charges against Luffman. It was James Lang who appears to have led the attack. Draper was in his 70s, whereas Lang was 20 years younger.²⁵

'A HOUSEHOLD WORD'

The end of an era came in 1903, when the Charnwood estate was subdivided into four orchard and grazing allotments of from 50 to 90 acres for sale by auction at Kirk's Bazaar, Melbourne. Charles Draper was now 78 years old and there were no successors available to carry on the management of the orchards. The original homestead block was retained, and is still held within the family as a grazing property.

At the Diamond Creek Horticultural Society's Show Luncheon in March 1908, Mr. William Murphy made reference to Charles as '... one who was undoubtedly the father of the fruit growing in the district.'²⁶ The following year Charles Draper died at Charnwood, at the age of 84 years, on 23 April 1909. The Hon. George Graham MLA, Minister for Agriculture, stated that he 'was a household word among fruit growers who regarded him as an authority on the orchard.'²⁷ while the *Australasian* lamented that 'His burly form and genial face will be much missed at our flower and fruit shows.'²⁸

- 1 'The Fruit Garden at Charnwood, Hazel Glen', *The Leader*, 6 February 1875.
- 2 'Charnwood Fruit Ranch, Hazel Glen, Plenty Ranges', *The Weekly Times*, 8 February, 1873.
- 3 'The Fruit Garden at Charnwood, Hazel Glen', *The Leader*, 6 February 1875.
- 4 'Fruit Growing in the Plenty Ranges', *The Leader*, 24 February 1872.
- 5 'The Fruit Garden at Charnwood, Hazel Glen', *The Leader*, 6 February 1875.
- 6 Bruni, 'In an Orchard District. A Successful Fruitgrower', *The Australasian*, 29 June 1889.
- 7 'The Exhibition', *The Argus*, 7 May 1873.
- 8 'Horticultural Notes. Australian Fruit in Europe', *The Weekly Times*, 23 November 1878.
- 9 'Notes on the Exhibition Fruit Show', *The Australasian*, 26 March 1881.
- 10 'Annual Report of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria for 1887'.
- 11 'Horticultural Notes', *The Leader*, 30 March 1889.
- 12 'Charnwood', *The Leader*, 25 January, 1890.
- 13 D.Jones, 'Points of a Pilgrimage', *The Queenslander*, 20 December, 1894.
- 14 Bruni, 'Fruit Growing near the Yan Yean. Charnwood Revisited' *The Australasian*, 14 March 1891.
- 15 'Charnwood', *The Leader*, 25 January 1890.
- 16 'With Camera and Pencil. A Visit to "Charnwood"', *The Garden Gazette*, December 1902.
- 17 'Australasian Fruit Growers' Conference. Papers and Discussion on Fruit Production', *The Mercury*, Hobart, 23 April 1895.
- 18 'The Horticultural Show. Second Day', *The Mercury*, Hobart, 26 April 1895.
- 19 'Horticultural Notes'. *The Australasian*, 1 May 1909.
- 20 'Charnwood', *The Leader*, 25 January 1890.
- 21 'As Others See Us. Experts' Opinions', *the Mildura Cultivator*, 29 May 1890.
- 22 'Fruit Growers' Association, Arthur's Creek', *The Evelyn Observer*, 16 May, 1890.
- 23 'Horticultural Notes', *The Australasian*, 11 October 1890.
- 24 'Horticultural Notes', *The Leader*, 31 January 1891.
- 25 'Burnley Gardens', *The Australasian*, 19 August, 1899. See also Nina Crone 'Apples for Gold-diggers', *Australian Garden History* Vol. 13, No. 5, March/April 2002, pp. 7-9.
- 26 'Diamond Creek Show, 18th March 1908. The Luncheon.', *The Evelyn Observer*, 27 March 1908.
- 27 'Death of Mr Charles Draper, J.P.', *The Evelyn Observer*, 30 April 1909.
- 28 'Horticultural Notes', *the Australasian*, 1 May, 1909.

Bruce Draper is the great-grandson of Charles Draper the pioneer horticulturist who settled at Arthur's Creek in the 1860s and developed highly productive orchards on his property Charnwood.