

# Ballarat Botanical Gardens - The Conservatory

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This spectacular glass structure which stands 13 metres at its highest point has become a landmark of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens and allows visitors to walk amongst breathtaking floral displays including the City's world famous Begonias.

The Robert Clark Conservatory, purpose built for seasonal floral displays, has taken the lead in Conservatory design in Australia. Its features include a unique glazing system, retractable shading screens and computer monitored temperature and humidity controls which enable the environment to be manipulated through a full range of climatic extremes from the tropics to deserts.

The Conservatory, the third glasshouse to be built on the site since the Ballarat Botanical Gardens were established in 1867 was designed by project architect, Peter Elliott and has been recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects for its architectural excellence.

## **Background.**

Robert Clark, the son of a Scottish bookbinder, emigrated to Australia in 1855 at the age of 29. He spent a short time searching for gold before returning to the newspaper industry and co-founding The Ballarat Courier in 1867. From 1889 until his death in 1902, Robert Clark was the sole proprietor of the paper, during which time he became highly regarded amongst the Ballarat community.

His grandson, Robert Clark's association with the City was established during periodic visits as a Board member of the Courier.

Mr Clark had inherited a minority interest in The Ballarat Courier, and when the Company was sold to Rural Press late 1990, he decided to do something for the people of Ballarat as a permanent memorial to his grandfather. He arranged for two million dollars to be set aside in the Robert Clark Memorial Trust, with income from that trust to be distributed twice yearly to defined charitable organisations in Ballarat.

Soon after establishing the trust, Mr Clark decided to find a project which would serve as a permanent memorial to his grandfather, one which would either relieve distress, or benefit the people of Ballarat. The two million dollar Robert Clark Horticultural Centre is that project.

## **The Buildings.**

Project architect, Peter Elliott, conceived the idea for the Conservatory form whilst experimenting with paper folding and describes it as a contemporary structure that has been inspired by "the great physical presence, large single volume interiors and strong geometric forms" of conservatories from other major gardens of the world, for example the Palm House at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew.

Peter Elliott says of the Conservatory:

"Derived from natural forms, crystalline and faceted...like a large transparent gem stone, held together by and intricate web of steel. My hope is to have created a building that will inspire, uplift and touch the imagination of everyone who sees it".

The result is a building of considerable visual interest with multi-faceted angular planes and large airy interiors.

In contrast, the Robert Clark Horticultural Centre is described as, "A smaller pavilion, taking its inspiration more from the gardenesque tradition, where the architecture has a closer affinity with nature. Low horizontal and vertical elements overlaid with pergolas, Floating roofs and wall trellises all designed for plant growth."

### **The Floral Displays.**

City of Ballarat nursery staff have been providing floral displays for the public's enjoyment for over 100 years. This tradition continues however staff now have the benefit of a state-of-the-art Conservatory aimed at prolonging and protecting the delicate blooms.

Facilities in the nearby Gardens Nursery, which includes a modern hothouse and large new glasshouses, enable the many of thousands of plants required to fulfil the proposed conservatory program to be raised on site.

The adjoining Robert Clark Horticultural Centre is the administration headquarters of the precinct and the Ballarat Begonia Festival. The Centre provides meeting rooms and exhibition space for local horticultural groups and the Friends of the Botanical Gardens and can be hired for small special events or corporate seminars. For the people of Ballarat and the 50,000 visitors who flock to Ballarat each year for the Ballarat Begonia Festival, the Begonia display remains in the Conservatory from the Long Weekend in March to late April, opening every day. One of the most inspiring aspects of the Conservatory is the chance to stroll amongst the flowers, allowing a far more intimate view of the delicate blooms which grace this rare attraction.

A visit to the Conservatory is always a colourful and inviting experience no matter what season with five different displays presented each year, coinciding with the seasons. A Gardens Gift & Coffee Shop and Visitor Information are also available within the Conservatory.

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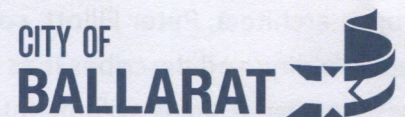
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