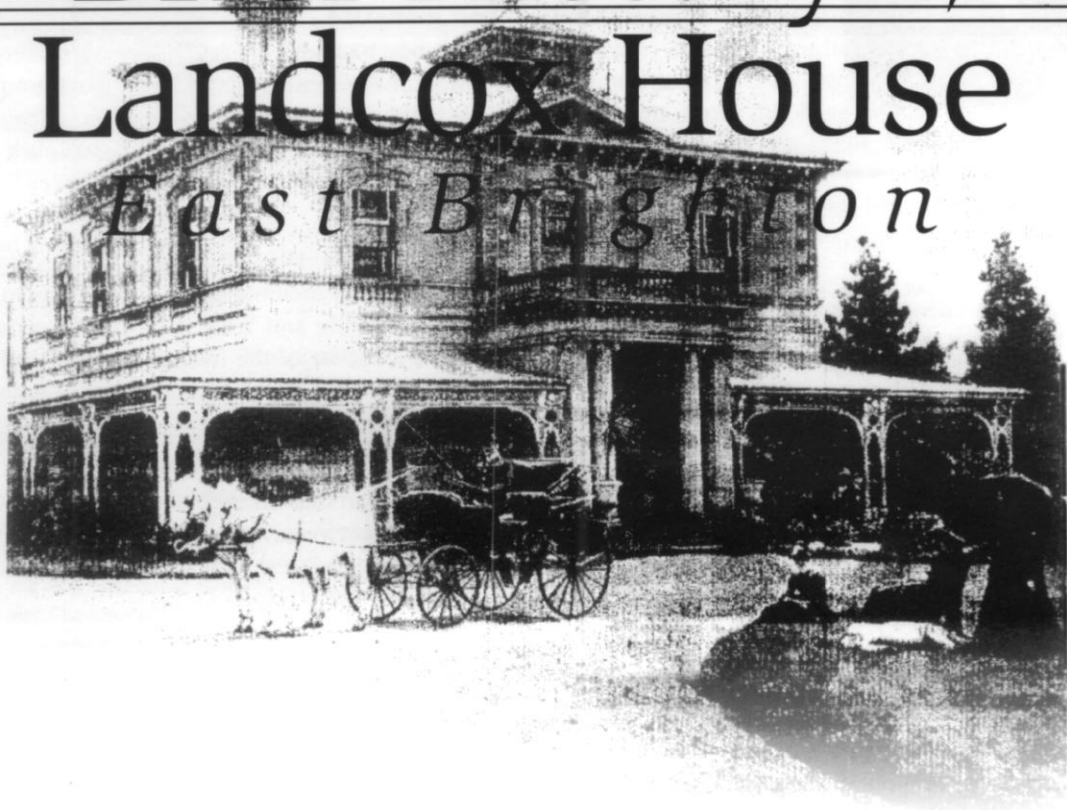


A

Brief History of Landcox House

East Brighton



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The Bunurong

The land lying on the eastern shores of Port Phillip and stretching as far as Wilson's Promontory has been the traditional land of the Bunurong people for possibly 1000 generations. The coastal dunes and swamps lying between the Yarra Yarra River in the north and the Carrum Swamp in the south were the homelands of the *Ngaruk-Willam* clan of the Bunurong.

The beaches and coastal woodlands were a rich source of shell fish, bush food and native animals and birds. The landscape around Brighton carried open forest and heathland of Banksias, Wattles, Manna Gum, River Red Gum, She-oaks and Paperbarks. The indigenous people visited many permanent camping and watering places in their seasonal migrations and the land around Brighton was significant as a location for the clans to gather and trade.

The first Europeans to settle permanently at Port Phillip in 1835 also knew the importance of fertile soils and water and they negotiated with the aboriginal clans for access and use of large tracts of land.

Henry Dendy

In 1840, Henry Dendy had sold his father's estate in England for £7000 and used £5120 of the funds to purchase a land grant from the Commissioners for Land and Emigration in London. He selected 5120 acres in the Port Phillip District of the colony New South Wales under provisions of the British Government's Special Survey regulations.

On arrival in the Port Phillip District in 1841, he was granted an area outside the five-mile limit of Melbourne, which he was to name "Waterville". In April 1841, Dendy and Were Bros and Co advertised for surveyors to undertake a survey of the land grant, later to become known as the Brighton Estate.

Jonathon Binns (J. B.) Were had arrived in 1839, four years after the first white settlers arrived in the Port Phillip district. Apparently as part of the partnership arrangement with Dendy, Were selected for himself, 78 acres between Arthur's Seat Road (Nepean Highway), North Road and Union Street. The land was fertile and had good water supply.

The original Landcox, named after the Were family estate in England, was established in 1854. The Were family lived in this seven roomed stone house until 1862, when it was sold to neighbour, Archibald McMillan.

In many ways the McMillan family epitomised the hopes of all emigrants. Archibald McMillan, a Scottish porter, arrived as an assisted immigrant in 1840, with a wife, nine sons and a daughter. He saved enough money from his labouring job to buy a cow. From this humble beginning, in two years he amassed enough to pay Henry Dendy £298 in cash for 42.5 acres of land on the western boundary of the Were farm. The McMillan family quickly entered the squatting ranks, as well as producing wheat and other grains from their property *Clonaig* on North Road.

In 1870, Mrs Kate McMillan commissioned noted architect Charles Webb (see page 7) to undertake extensive alterations to Landcox House and they were completed by 1874.



Henry Dendy, circa 1850.

Henry Dendy was born in Surrey, England on 27 October 1800 and arrived in Melbourne on 5 February, 1841.

He was the second person to secure a land grant outside the town of Melbourne and is regarded as the founder of Brighton. However by the close of 1848 would be bankrupt, having lost all of his land and property assets.

Dendy left his prized Brighton Estate around 1848 and began a brewing business Geelong and later a grazing enterprise in Yarra Glen. He undertook copper and gold mining at Thomson River and Walhalla in his later life.

Henry Dendy died at Walhalla on 12 February 1881.

(Photograph courtesy of Brighton Historical Society, 1997)

Webb's additions appear to have consisted of a two-storey, 8 roomed residence to the east of, and overlaying, the existing house. The building is constructed of rendered ironstone and bluestone. The works appear to be an entrance hall and four principal rooms on the ground floor. A staircase led to two bathrooms, four bedrooms, and a balcony over the front portico. A tower and a staircase entry to the tower were also built.

Following the death of Mrs McMillan in 1881, Landcox Estate was advertised for subdivision, as part of the realisation of the estate of Mr Archibald C. McMillan Esq. The subdivision plan amalgamated J. B. Were's original Landcox farm and the adjoining *Clonaig*.

On 21 May 1881, 88 allotments were auctioned. The sixty acres of vacant land realised around £14,000, and son William McMillan retained possession of the mansion and 20 acres of land on Lot 88.

The painted decorations described in *The Argus* article on 31st March 1882, reprinted overleaf, are still there – largely untouched – under more recent coats of paint.

At the auction of the McMillan Estate in 1881, **Thomas and Elizabeth Bent** secured thirteen of the allotments, and in 1884, they acquired the mansion and its 20 acres for £10,000. Bent was a former market gardener who had entered politics, becoming a Councillor in both Moorabbin and Brighton. From this base he had entered State Parliament. In the great land boom of the 1880s, Bent was a leading speculator and, like many others, was declared bankrupt in 1893. He later recovered to become Premier of the State of Victoria, but in the meantime, *Landcox* was sold to the Officer family in 1894.

Landcox then became the home of **Charles Myles Officer**, MLC for Dundas and his wife. They had eleven children, but it's not known how many lived with them at *Landcox*. Described as a "gentleman", the normal description of one of independent means, Officer died in 1904, and the *Landcox* estate was further subdivided into 13 allotments plus a road reserve.

Mr H. V. Hawkins purchased the three allotments and road reserve, and later offered them to Brighton Council for £872 as the site for *Landcox Park*. *Landcox House* and its remaining ten acres was worth £4,500, but apparently required £800 to be spent in order to make it habitable.

By 1913 the building had become **Landcox Private Hospital**, operated by a Dr Adolph Seelenmeyer.

Landcox House remained a private hospital or convalescent home until 1942 when it passed into the ownership of the Catholic Church and **the Daughters of Charity**, who renamed it "Marillac House" in honour of the French founder of their order.

There are 4 principal building zones on the site from this period:-

- The mansion, "Landcox House"
- The School Building and the former Domestic Arts Building
- The Hall and former Dormitory Building
- The Chapel (now the Gompa or meditation hall).

A site plan dated April 1952, shows the layout of the existing house and external buildings. That year, the School Block designed by Thomas J Power of Mont Albert was added to the site. This building is



Jonathan Binns Were JP, CMG
(circa 1851)

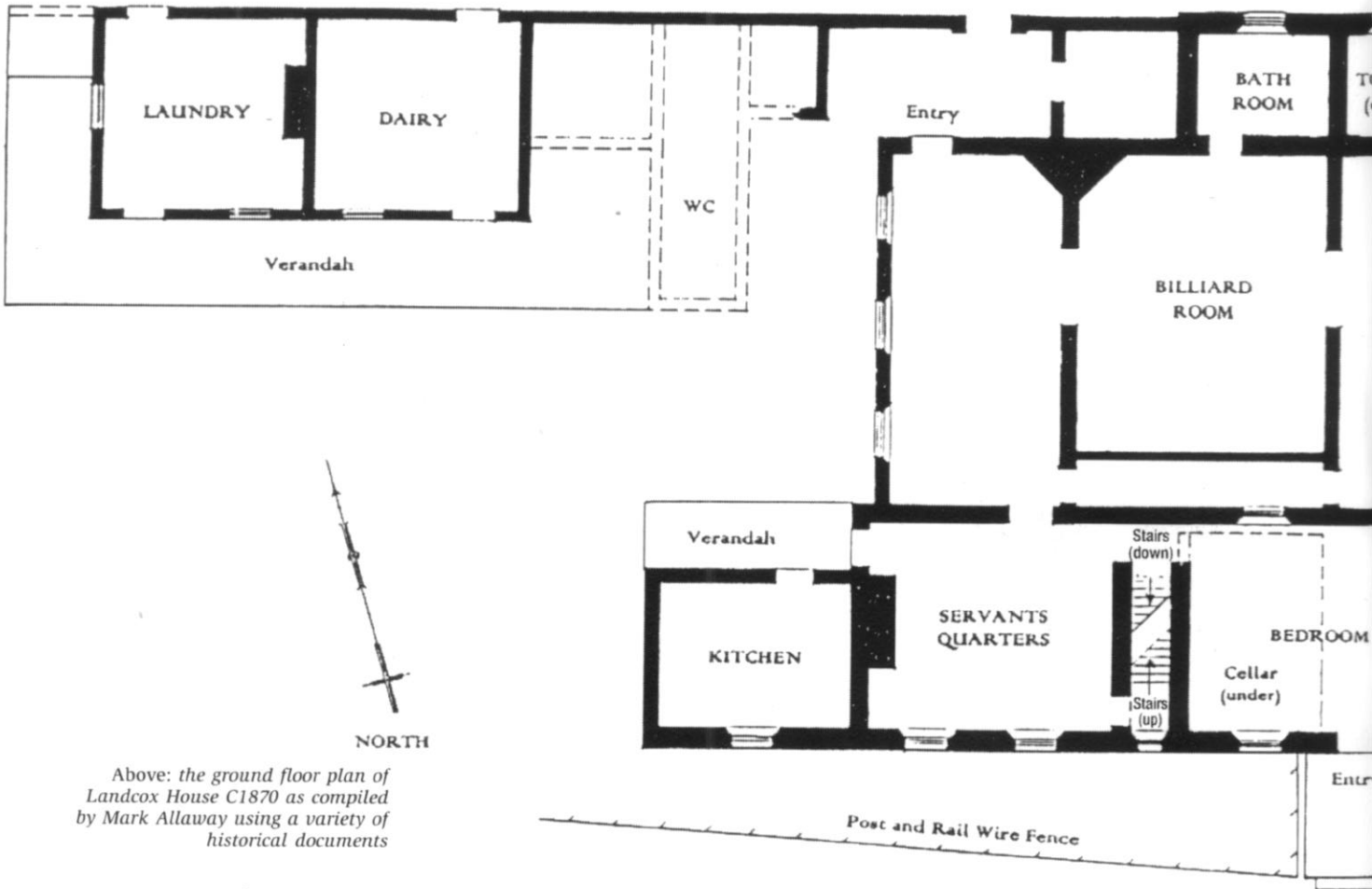
Jonathan Binns Were was born at Wellington, in Somerset, England on 25 April 1809 and journeyed to Melbourne in 1839 with his wife Sophia and two of his eleven children. He established Were Bros, merchants and agents, with his brother, George, and brother-in-law, Robert Dunsford.

J. B. Were would become a leading Melbourne citizen founding the stockbroking firm, J B Were and Company, the first Melbourne Stock Exchange and Chamber of Commerce. He would become a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1856 and was a Commissioner for the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1881.

J. B. Were died at his home, Wellington, at Moorabbin, on 6th of December 1885.

The Were firm, which today is an international stockbroking company, has operated successfully over the past 157 years and is one of Victoria's longest continuously trading companies.

(Portrait; courtesy Bayside Council)



Above: the ground floor plan of Landcox House C1870 as compiled by Mark Allaway using a variety of historical documents

Landcox House circa 1870 GROUND FLOOR PLAN

In October 1881 McMillan contracted interior decorators Cullis and Hill, who created work of such quality that *The Argus* printed the following review on 31 March 1882.



A detail from the Drawing Room ceiling

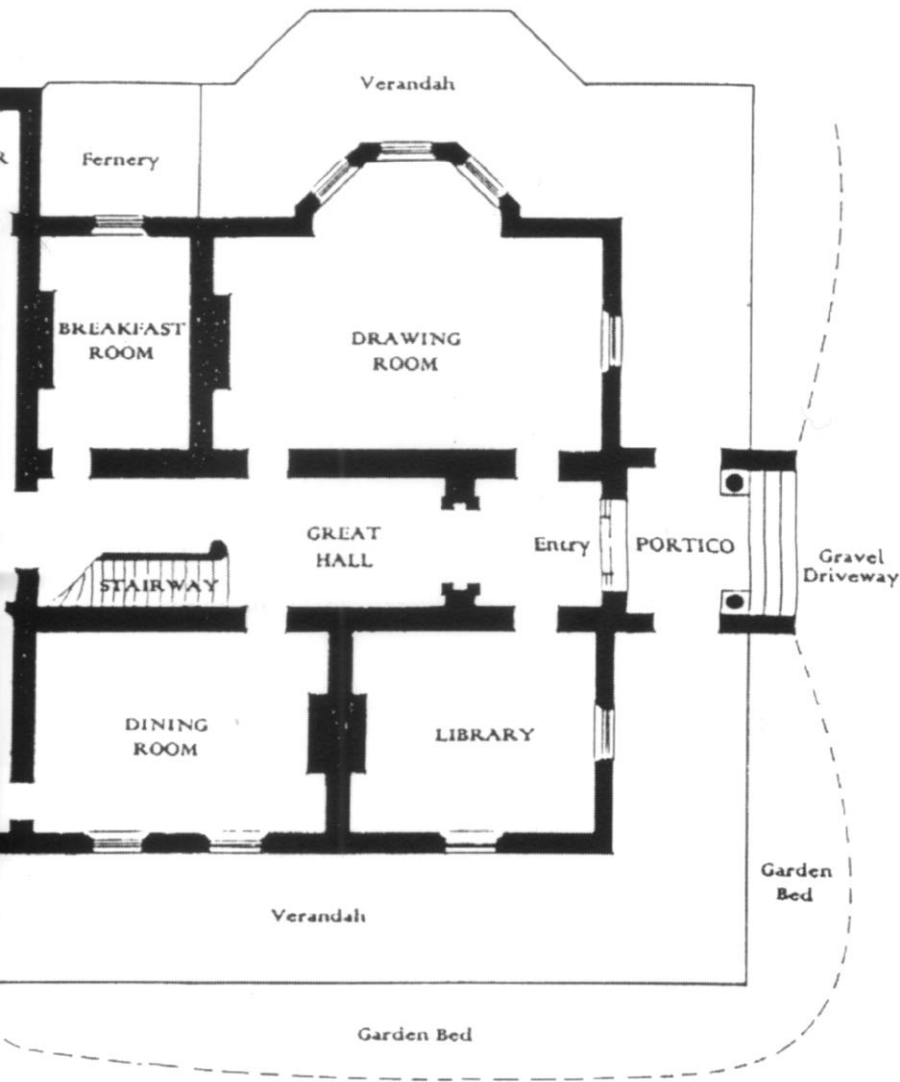
"...the decorations of Mr William M'Millan's house *Landcox* at North Brighton, which were in the hands, of Messrs Cullis Hill and Co for six months, and have recently been completed, are deserving of more than passing notice. A description of the **drawing room** will, perhaps, give the best idea of the style in which the work has been done.

The ceiling is panelled out in the palest shades of blue, grey, and pink. Within the panels are hand-painted figures representing the four seasons, music, and poetry, with other subjects suited to artistic treatment. One of the most beautiful of the figures is that of Flora, floating in a stream of flowers. The frieze is composed of 10 cherubs' heads and 12 cameo tablets, with groups of cupids united by festoons of white roses, and leaves. Two of the cherubs, one over each door, are portraits of Mr.

M'Millan's daughters. Two panels above the chimney-piece represent fairies hidden away amongst tall grass and flowers, playing with a butterfly and a gaily plumaged bird.

In the representation of the Seasons, spring is driving away winter with a volley of flowers, and a daisy stalk, which he holds spear-like in a threatening attitude. Summer is depicted sorrowfully carrying away the flowers to make room for the Autumn produce. In another group, Poetry, Music and Rhetoric claim the laurel crown. Music, holding the lyre, seems to be the successful competitor. Rhetoric, in the posture of an orator, is apparently next, while Poetry seems to have grasped at the prize and failed to reach it.

Architecture, Painting and Sculpture are represented in the



next panel as engaged in a similar competition. The inside of the doors are in marble relief on a pale blue ground, with gilt ornamentations. The pictorial subjects treated are — Spring, a floating figure hearing flowers of the season; Summer, a more mature figure bearing the fruits of the earth; Autumn bearing cereals: winter bearing a cresset: figures representing the gentle east wind fanning flowers, the breezy west wind bending reeds, the hot north wind and the showery south wind. All the figure painting was done by Herr Vandebrandt, the floral decoration by Signor Rizzi and the ornamental scroll work by Herr Brechsneider, artists in the employ of Messrs Cullis Hill and Co. They appear to great advantage in this species of decorative art, and their work will bear the closest inspection.

The mantelpiece has a coved top, on which a dramatic incident is painted in three views, and elegant cabinets, and beautifully painted Dresden plates add to the attractiveness of the chamber. For the summer there is a polished floor.

For the **dining room** the decorations are in greys and browns. The ceiling is panelled out in arabesque and floral designs in various shades of those colours. The frieze is also panelled, and contains spiritedly-drawn pictures representing scenes from popular operas including "Don Giovanni", "Aida", "Faust", "Rigoletto", "The Magic Flute", "Ernani", "La Traviata", "The Daughter of the Regiment" and "Maritana".

The dado is of grey with a very pale blue arabesque design. The other panels are of bronze, gilt and buff.

The doors have decorations in shades of buff, gold, bronze and black.

The room has a parquet floor, and a tiled fireplace in dark green and brown marble.

The ceiling of the **breakfast room** is panelled in the renaissance style. The ground work is of the palest sea-green with pink, grey and brown arabesque ornamentation. The frieze represents delicately outlined flowers and birds, the dado being made to correspond in tile lightest shades of brown on a grey ground. the furniture is of black walnut, and the curtains and valences in old gold and sages.

The mantelpiece is of brown and black marble, The doors are decorated in dark browns and gold on a grey ground.

Great attention has been paid to the **large hall**. The ceiling is of the lightest tinge of grey, with ornamented designs in shades of brown and blue. The panelling of the walls contains various allegorical figures, which are beautifully painted. The frieze and dado are also ornamented in pale brown and blues. The frieze is supported by brown marble columns, with Corinthian caps, and the skirting is of brown marble. The doorway at the end of the hall is hung with Portia curtains of crimson silk velvet, bordered with a gold fringe. At the foot of the staircase a large bronze figure on a carved bronze pedestal supports in one hand a gasolier.

The large grounds which surround the house are carefully kept, and the establishment is well worth seeing. The paintings on the ceilings and walls are admirable as specimens of the decorative art. The fittings are in excellent taste throughout, and too much credit cannot be give to the firm and the skilful artists by whom the work was performed; while Mr M'Millan may be congratulated on the display of liberality in a direction in which it should always be encouraged to flow."

The Argus — 31 March 1882

located to the south and west of the courtyard, and includes sunroom, kindergarten room, four classrooms and toilet room. The courtyard contained a cloak room and laundry with sewing annexe, outside lavatories and a storage room.

The year 1958 saw further building works designed by Thomas Power, including additions to the school to the north, construction of a new hall and dormitory wing, creation of a new entry on the south wall, and partitioning of internal ground floor rooms.

The chapel was designed in 1960 by architects, J. McCarthy and Associates, and was constructed on the site of an older (circa 1930) weatherboard house. Initially the chapel was connected to neither the main house nor the hall. The walkway and covered hall connections appear to have been constructed at a later date.

The site plan for the chapel shows the verandahs on the mansion are still present, and also shows a circular driveway entering and leaving the site on the eastern boundary of the property.

Additional two-storey facilities were added to the south side of the main house at some stage in the 1970s, and this coincided with the removal of the verandah.

In 1979, noted artist Alan Sumner completed **the stained glass window in the Chapel**. He intended it to be something with which the handicapped children of Marillac House could identify. Marillac House had a pond and the children loved to watch the fish. One little girl used to sit under a tree all day and watch the birds. Sumner used some of the children for models and incorporated them into the brightly coloured glass work.

Recognition of the importance of *Landcox* came in 1986, when the National Trust of Victoria recommended that *Landcox* be nominated for inclusion on the Register of the National Estate.

With changing times, the Daughters of Charity decided *Landcox* no longer met the needs of Marillac House, so in 1987 it was sold for \$1.2 million to the Tibetan Buddhist organisation, **Tara Institute**.

Landcox became a public and residential centre for Buddhist study, teachings and meditation. In this phase, the former chapel, now called the "gompa", became the venue for meditation courses and regular group teachings.

The remaining period decorations and fittings in the main house were not included in the 1987 auction sale but were offered later for specific sums. The new owners were reluctantly unable to buy them because of financial constraints.

Between 1989 and 1992 restoration and conservation works to the fresco ceilings and walls in the main drawing room and hall were undertaken by Ian Watson, and in 1996 there were major works to the gompa, when the floor level was raised to accommodate heating, insulation was added to the ceiling, the power supply was upgraded and a new altar constructed along with secure glass cabinets for an extensive set of hand-printed Tibetan texts.

Tara Institute quickly recognised that it holds the building in trust for the community, and in 1997 began a heritage study of *Landcox* House.



Landcox House C1918, with circular drive and tennis court buildings to the right. (Photo courtesy of Mrs Gregory)

**Charles Bridges Webb
(1862 - 1898)**



Charles Webb was an influential early Melbourne architect and is credited with many notable Melbourne landmarks in a long career spanning forty years in Victoria.

- Macs Hotel, Franklin Street (1853)
- Church of England Grammar School, St Kilda Road (1856-7)
- Wesley College 1864
- Alfred Hospital 1869
- Royal Arcade 1869.

Webb was born in Sudbury, Suffolk, England on 26 November 1821 and migrated to Port Phillip on 2 June 1849, to join his brother James Webb in partnership.

Between 1849 and 1853, the practice was influential in establishing the architectural character of Brighton. The brothers designed and built 22 houses and shops in a subdivision on the old section of Dendy Park.

Other important Webb buildings include;

- *Farleigh* Brighton (1865) —left
- *Chilton* Brighton (1853) —below
- 2nd St Andrews Church, Brighton
- Mechanics Institute, New Street



Farleigh in the 1870s, top — and, below, as it is today.



For a brief period, Charles Webb travelled to the Bendigo diggings during 1851-52 and returned to practice with Thomas Taylor for four years between 1854 and 1858. From 1858 until 1888 he practiced on his own and thereafter he worked with his two sons.

In 1865, Charles Webb built a two-

Two views of the Landcox tower, below, compared with the Melrose tower, right.



storey brick villa, *Farleigh*, for his own family in Park Street Brighton. The house was set well back from the road at the head of a broad gravelled drive with park-like garden with sweeping drive-way and summer house tucked away.

This style would prove attractive to the wealthy citizens of Brighton fostering a rural atmosphere and country retreat appropriate for those in a high position in society.

The design at *Farleigh* is strongly reminiscent of his later design for the additions to *Landcox House*. The elevation shows heavy quoin stones, typical of that time, enclosing verandah, paired columns, prominent portico and *Greek Revival* details.

Webb repeated many elements in his later designs. *Landcox* may have inspired Webb to add a similar bay window to his own house *Farleigh* in the early 1870's. The tower at *Melrose* (1896) —right— in Caulfield is almost identical to the tower at *Landcox*.



Two of Webb's finest buildings were completed in 1880's and are regarded as typifying the optimism and grandeur of the period. The South Melbourne Town Hall (1880) —right— and the Grand Hotel (1884), now called the *Windsor*, are viewed as the most imposing and dignified examples of Webb's civic architectural style.



Charles Webb died at *Farleigh*, on 23 January 1898 and is buried at Brighton Cemetery.



The Heritage Restoration Fund and its aims

Landcox House had an important place in early Melbourne and it deserves to be retained for future generations. A major project is therefore urgently required to restore Landcox House and conserve its heritage importance.



Landcox House as it appears today

The Heritage Restoration Fund has been set up to enable the necessary works to conserve and restore the main 1870 building and landscaped grounds in a sympathetic style and treatment appropriate to its local and state historical importance.

The objectives of the Heritage Restoration Fund are to:-

- serve as a significant milestone to mark the tenth anniversary of Tara Institute at Landcox House;
- document the existing condition and status of the heritage values of the building and grounds, in consultation with the Executive Committee of Tara Institute and other suitably skilled and qualified persons;
- identify a suitable program of works for restoration, and assess budgets and strategies to achieve completion in a defined timetable;
- enable the wider community to become more familiar with the house and grounds and allow the building and the grounds to be opened to public viewing on special occasions.

Landcox House Heritage Conservation and Restoration Fund

Although the Board of the Fund has not yet met, Tara Institute will be looking to them for initiatives such as:-

Applying to Heritage Victoria to secure grants and loans to undertake various restoration works;

Emergency repairs to roof drainage and re-roofing of the main building and tower in slate;

Progressive uncovering and restoring of the murals, frescoes and painted decorations in the main house;

Reconstruction of the tower stairway;

Removal of the external paint finish to the stucco render of the house;

Drawing up of plans for the progressive replacement of the cast-iron verandah;

Finding an aesthetic way to link Landcox House into the Landcox Park precinct.

How you can help reclaim a piece of Victoria's history

Please help us. The Fund needs your support in order to carry out its community aims. And naturally, the first step is to raise the funds that will fuel the program.

If you have the interest and capacity to help, please make a donation to the *Landcox House Heritage Conservation and Restoration Fund*. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible and such donations are restricted by law to only be used for the building works controlled by the Board.

Enquiries may be made via the Tara Institute Office during business hours.

This brochure was written by Mark Allaway and Adair Bunnett. It was prepared by Tara Institute to mark its tenth year of residence at Landcox House, and has been published as part of its Open Day celebrations held on Sunday, 16 November 1997. The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the following groups and people who supported the preparation of this heritage document.

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*Tara Institute is a branch
of the FPMT —the
Foundation for the
Preservation of the
Mahayana*

*Tradition — a network
of Buddhist Centres in
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Following the Mahayana teachings of the Buddha — in the tradition of HH the Dalai Lama — we work to relieve all beings from suffering in all its forms.

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