



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

STANGATE HOUSE

Saturday 4th & Sunday 5th May, 2025

The land was first surveyed in 1855 but not subdivided until 1882 and was purchased by Florence Emily Thomas a descendent of Kyffin Thomas, newspaper proprietor and one of the original settlers in 1836. Florence Emily left it to her daughter Florence Gwyneth who married Rev Raymond Cornish and bequeathed the property to the NT in 1967. Raymond was the younger brother of Elsie Cornish, one of Adelaide's most respected garden designers in the 1920s and '30s.

The Cornishes were followers of the Arts and Crafts Movement which was fashionable in the UK between 1880 and 1920. It was a reaction against the drop in standards of design and factory or mass-produced furnishing, (and a reaction to the vulgarity of many of the exhibits in the Great Exhibition of 1851). They believed Utility must have precedence over Ornamentation. Linked to social reform, they yearned for a return to the simpler way of life, country based rather than in industrialised cities, and in the importance of good craftsmanship and tradition. William Morris started making furniture and furnishings in 1861 combining traditional methods with designs based on flora and fauna motifs.

Gertrude Jekyll was the most influential garden designer of the time and lived at Munstead Wood, Surrey. She formed a partnership with Edwin Lutyens and together they designed many houses and gardens. She wrote for Country Life magazine, was a friend of William Robinson and developed woodland style gardens and colour themed herbaceous borders. She was very shortsighted. She was an artist, silver smith and embroideress but as her eyes deteriorated in her thirties, she turned increasingly to garden making and designing.

Elsie Cornish was born in 1870 and moved to North Adelaide in 1886 and into Palmer place in 1888 after her father died. Her mother died in 1913 and her sister in 1916. This is when, at age 46, she began her career as a horticulturalist and garden designer. She was the older sister of Raymond, 14 years her junior. She lived two doors down from John Ednie Brown, the State Forester, and close to Sir Samuel Way, a keen gardener, who made his garden in the gardenesque style and gave all his books to the University including a number of Gertrude Jekyll's books.

Elsie had two cousins who were also followers of the Arts and Crafts movement. Laurence Howie was principal at the SA school of Arts and Crafts and her other cousin Makin was an architect with whom she worked on several gardens. Elsie formed a partnership with Walter Bagot the architect (Gwyneth was also friends with the Bagots). Bagot and Cornish worked together from 1924 on the Broadlees house and garden on Waverley Ridge, Crafers, built for the Waite sisters Eva and Lily between 1924 and 1926. Eva was a passionate gardener and follower of Gertrude Jekyll. Broadlees has a strong Italianate influence and featured cypresses and succulents which Elsie also planted at the University of Adelaide. Elsie also worked on the Reid's garden, Eringa for Sir Sidney Kidman, the Wilcox garden in North Adelaide with a house designed by Eric McMichael (later St Anne's College) and the Darling garden in North Adelaide (which became Aquinas College). All these houses had shutters like the ones at Stangate. Elsie made gardens for the University of Adelaide from 1929 to her death in 1946.

Open Gardens South Australia Inc: is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

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She designed Model Gardens at the Royal Show from 1929-1938. She designed and planted the Pioneer Women's Memorial garden from 1937 to 1940. She also worked on the Darian Smith Garden in North Adelaide designed by Guy St John Makin (Elsie's cousin), Neo Georgian with an Italianate influence, shutters and Mediterranean plants.

Rev Cornish went to England in 1922 and at the end of 1923 became chaplain at St Thomas Hospital in Lambeth, London, a position he held to 1939. Raymond and Gwen were married in 1927 in Surrey. Raymond designed Stangate House between 1937-39 and made a cardboard model and asked Eric McMichael to build it. Earthworks began in January 1940 and they moved in, in July. They named it after Stangate, London where they had lived. Elsie and Gwyneth planted a Tilia avenue along the driveway, many oaks, conifers and five camellias, retained some grey box and red gums, rerouted the creek, built stone walls and planted thousands of bluebells.

Gwyneth who had no children, so bequeathed the house in 1967 to the National Trust but they did not take possession until 1970. The Mount Lofty branch took care of the house from 1970 until they disbanded in 2019.

Members of the Camellia Society, many of whom were also National Trust members started planting the collection of camellias in 1977 which now numbers over 770. The garden was officially opened in 1982. It was awarded the honour of an 'International Camellia Garden of Excellence' in 2012. Camellia Society members have been working in the garden every Tuesday for over 40 years, tending the camellia collection and planting other ornamental trees, shrubs and perennials.

In January of 2020, a group of National Trust garden volunteers led by Horticulturalist and Garden Historian, Marilyn Kuchel began working on the garden surrounding the house. They removed a huge old cypress hedge behind the house and planted the now sunny bank with 30 heritage roses donated by the Heritage Rose Society of SA. In the tradition of Gertrude Jekyll, they are developing an herbaceous border with colour themed perennials. In 2021 the declining conifer collection on the western bank of the Oak lawn was removed and is being planted with camellias suited to topiary work and white perennials and roses to enhance the display for the summer weddings held under the big oak tree.

Mystery surrounds the planting of the big oak tree which is recorded on the National Register of Big Trees as the second largest oak in Australia. Legend has it that an acorn was planted by an early settler on his way through the Hills perhaps as early as 1838. Others believe that it was planted by Sarah and Richard Hawkins who built the Aldgate Pump Hotel opened in 1864.

In July 2024 the Rhododendron Society formalized a new partnership with the National Trust and began planting a large collection of rhododendrons and azaleas. Their members now work regularly in the garden and have also overseen the installation of a new bore in the NE corner of the oak lawn which will provide a more reliable water supply. It has been a difficult summer with the old bore running dry and many of the trees losing limbs and leaves due to drought stress but the volunteers are now feeling more positive about the future developments and plantings in the new beds. All proceeds from today's opening will go towards the replacement of the irrigation system and more choice trees and shrubs. More volunteers are needed to help on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. Contact Marilyn on 0428851582 or mdkuchel@bigpond.net.au

The gardens that open for us are chosen to reflect a great diversity of styles and may even challenge the conventional view of what constitutes a garden. While aspects of a garden may not be to your taste, we urge you to celebrate this diversity. Please remember you are visiting a private home and show respect and sensitivity for the owners who have so generously shared their garden with you. Thank you.