



European uses of site

Early European Settlers

William Hovell explored the area that now falls within the Shire of Cranbourne, in the late 1820s. Settlement followed a decade later when graziers came seeking cattle runs to the east of Melbourne and in the vicinity of Dandenong.

The first European settlers in the Cranbourne area were pastoralists. Most of the land was used for cattle stations, but some ran sheep on the better drained soils (many of the areas were too wet for sheep, particularly in winter). Barley, oats and other grains were grown to fatten stock. Early settlers supplemented their diet with waterfowl shot on local swamps and the Great Swamp (Koo-wee-rup Swamp).

In 1852, H.B. Foot made the first survey of the Cranbourne and Lyndhurst district. The township of Cranbourne was reserved out of the pastoral runs - Mayune, Towbeet and Bakers Heifer Station at this time. By then the township was already developing rapidly as an agricultural centre, with dairy farming and wheat cultivation becoming popular with the expansion of the Melbourne market.

Military Reserve

The land now occupied by the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Cranbourne Gardens was a military reserve (Cranbourne Reserve) from the late 1880's until 1970. Some limited military use was made of the site during this time but it is not well documented.

Sand Mines and Private Railways

The increased demand for brick laying and plastering sand after the First World War caused the opening of the sandpits in the sand hills south of the Cranbourne Township in the 1920's.

The Cranbourne Sand Company (owned by the Hocking Brothers) operated a sandpit and private railway into the northwest corner of the Cranbourne Military Reserve from 1933 until 1957. This branch line was one of two operating in the district.

The Cranbourne Sand Co. line branched from the main line on the station side of the Camm's Road level crossing and headed south to cross Frankston Road. It ran adjacent to the cemetery and to the sandpits further on.

Development Cranbourne Gardens

The Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Melbourne Gardens was established in 1846. In the 1940's it was recognized that difficulties encountered in establishing native species could be overcome by using land where the soil was sandier, and less shaded than that in the Melbourne Gardens. It was also recognised that more space was required. After considerable research a Commonwealth military reserve of 345 acres near Cranbourne was chosen. In 1970 the purchase was made and the land secured as a permanent reservation as Botanic Garden and research Institute. There were delays in negotiating an agreed price with the government, and intervention by the Department of the Interior who were unwilling to see the land released from military control due to Australia's role in the war in Vietnam.

Further parcels of adjacent land were subsequently purchased, with assistance from the Maud Gibson Trust fund. The total area is now 363 hectares. The later land acquisitions included land cleared for farming and land from which vast quantities of sand had been mined. Sand mining also occurred on the land under Military control between 1920 and 1970.

Mission of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

The mission of the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is to advance knowledge, enjoyment and conservation of plants through excellence in biodiversity research and management, horticultural displays and educational programs.

Time Scale of Land Use and Acquisition

From the beginning	Inhabited by, and ancestral home of the Mayone-Balluk (a sub-clan of the Boonerwutung)
Late 1820's	Area explored by William Hovell.
1830's	Settled by graziers Clearing of heathland begins
1889	Area reserved for 'defence purposes'. Sand extraction in selected areas begins
1932	Land sold to the Commonwealth of Australia
1945	Maud Gibson Trust together with Melbourne Gardens, begin searching for land for a 'native botanic garden'.
Early 1960's	Sand mining (particularly north western section) Grazing licences allocated (approximately ½ of the heathland area cleared) Commonwealth discontinues 'military use' of the land.
1961	Maud Gibson Trust made aware of the Cranbourne site.
1962	Commonwealth Government offers to sell the land to the State Government
1963	Negotiations for sale fall through.
1965	Negotiations recommence, however they are stalled by the requirement to again reserve the land for 'military purposes'.
1968	Department of the Interior declares no further need for the land.
1969	Maud Gibson Trust 'emphatic' about the need to purchase this land and offers financial assistance to the State Government to secure the purchase.

1970	Sale transacted from the Commonwealth Government to the State Government of 174 hectares.
1977	Additional 22 hectares 'Esso Land' purchased (site of the Special Collections and Amphitheatre).
1980	64 hectares of 'Maintop Land' purchased (site of the Grassy Woodland).
1984	9,135 sqm and 1.46 hectares – 'Smiths Lane Reserve' passed to the Royal Botanic Gardens.
1985	6.19 hectares of land – excess to Rural Water Commission easement purchased. 65.23 hectares 'Putt's Land' purchased (site of the Arboretum)
1989	4.04 hectares of land swapped with the Race Training Complex (area to the north eastern boundary) 14.5 hectares 'Boral Land' purchased on the north eastern boundary (buffer land at the main entry).
1989	Cranbourne Gardens opens to the public.
1991	13.93 hectares 'Exner Land' purchased as an addition to the arboretum.
1996	11 hectares 'Mario's Land' purchased as an addition to the arboretum.