

Rippon Lea House and Garden



The place

Rippon Lea is a two-storey Italian Renaissance Revival brick mansion, set in extensive gardens covering 14 acres. It was built in 1868 for politician and merchant Frederick Sargood, but has been added to and remodelled, including the addition of a pool and ballroom in the 1930s. Outbuildings include stables.

The gardens feature a lake, hill and grotto, shrubberies and flower gardens, expansive lawns, shaded walks, glasshouses, a substantial fernery (shade house), a rose garden, an original orchard, a summer house and tower, and a gatehouse. The original garden scheme, including its irrigation system, is largely intact.



Location

Elsternwick, City of Glen Eira

Traditional Owners

Bunurong People

Main Impacts



More **intense** downpours



Average annual temperature **increase** of up to **2.4°C**


Type

19th century suburban complex, comprising:

- o brick and timber walls, tiled roof, and cast iron ornamentation
- o historical garden with fernery, irrigation system and other landscaping.

Heritage Listing

National Heritage List



Rippon Lea is historically important as an early estate with a sophisticated system for water self-sufficiency.

Rippon Lea was bequeathed to the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) in 1972 from the estate of the owner, Louisa Jones. It is open to the public and is used for public and private events.

Heritage significance

Rippon Lea is significant for its Lombardic Romanesque mansion, designed by prominent architects Reed and Barnes. Hollywood style additions made in the 1930s are significant in their own right. Rippon Lea is also important for its association with previous owners, the heritage fruit trees in the orchard, the design and layout of the mansion and gardens, and as an early example of water self-sufficiency.

Climate change impacts

Rippon Lea is expected to experience changes in seasonal rainfall and higher average temperatures, which will increase the duration and intensity of droughts. Heatwaves, reduced water availability and soil degradation are also expected.

More frequent storms with higher rainfall and greater wind intensity are predicted. This could periodically raise the local watertable and increase surface run-off and roof drainage, raising the risk of flooding and water penetration into the building.

Site vulnerability and heritage impacts

As an urban property containing buildings and an extensive plant collection surrounded by increasing suburban development, Rippon Lea is vulnerable to storm damage and changing water availability and quality.

Loss of species in the garden, particularly among the heritage fruit trees and older plants, and increased or new weed infestations are likely as the mean temperature increases and flooding becomes more common.

Excessive run-off and flooding may damage pathway and driveway surfaces, the irrigation system, and trees. Trees are more likely to fall in high winds, particularly when the soil is saturated.

The current water harvesting system is good, but reduced annual rainfall, poorer water quality, and changes in the broader water catchment are threats to the garden and orchard.

Intense rain, hail, lightning, winds and flooding could have a dire impact on the building's structure and on the plant collection. Accelerated deterioration or damage to the exposed paintwork, masonry, stained-glass windows and roofing is likely without appropriate management.



Poor roof drainage is likely to lead to water damage internally.



Flood damage after a severe storm.



Tree and garden damage after storms.

Gutters and downpipes are likely to overflow during torrential rain or become blocked by hail. The box gutters are a particular problem because they can overflow back into the building, causing mould, peeling paint and wallpaper, corrosion of pressed metal ceilings, electrical failures, and damage to furniture and other heritage items.

The basement of the mansion could be more susceptible to water entry from flooding during severe storms. Dampness may damage the important interior elements such as wallpapers, stained-glass windows in the stairwell, and cast plaster embellishments.

Current management for climate resilience

Management is informed and guided by the Rippon Lea Conservation Policy, prepared in 1995, as well as the knowledge and experience of National Trust staff. The National Trust's *Climate Action Plan 2021–2023* sets its agenda for responding to climate change risk.

Targeted maintenance is a fundamental part of the National Trust's strategy for the property. The historic stormwater drains have recently been re-lined and are now coping well with water received on site. Documentation and record-keeping for the site is also improving. For example, paper-based gardens data was recently transferred to a digital format.

Tree succession planning is also under way. Preliminary research on suitable species is available but existing and emerging research will be used to inform future succession planning.

The water supply, which includes a significant storage capacity in the lake, is adequate at present but is rationed in summer.

Potential strategies for building resilience

The National Trust considers that timely, proactive maintenance is the best way to improve climate resilience for Rippon Lea, but improved strategic planning would also help. New landscape succession planning models and strategies developed for the Royal Botanic Gardens and Carlton Gardens could help inform the practice at Rippon Lea.

Increasing the diversity of plant species and ages in the gardens, and choosing species better adapted to a warmer, drier climate, will improve resilience. Ensuring a reliable water supply and water quality is also seen as critical. For example, by installing large-capacity underground tanks or cisterns, which would have existed historically. Such approaches could be explored in an updated conservation management plan that incorporates climate change considerations and policies to assist conservation management and planning.

Additional immediate actions that would improve climate resilience include:

- planting species that are adapted to the predicted long-term climate for Melbourne
- maintaining the original drainage system around the basement and not storing important collection items in this area
- investigating alternatives and providing improvements to roof drainage and discharge to cater for increased roof drainage flows
- maintaining natural ventilation to buildings
- insulating the roof space and upgrading heating and cooling systems to maintain suitable environmental conditions inside the building to protect heritage wallpaper and interiors
- adding fabric awnings to north and west facing windows where appropriate.

Actions that would help mitigate climate change impacts in the long term include:

- improving monitoring and record-keeping practices to enable a better understanding of the effects of climate change over time
- monitoring water use and water quality data, and their changes over time, to support the management of water on the site
- carrying out urgent maintenance and upkeep works on the fernery
- building relationships and networks with specialised plant growers and collectors to improve accessibility to hard-to-find plant material that is important for maintaining the significance of the gardens and diversity of the plant population.

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