

CARRICK HILL



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Media Release

## The Blade: Australia's love affair with lawn

*Perhaps the most remarkable shared element in both celebrity and vernacular gardens is the ubiquity of the lawn. Indeed, lawn grass should be viewed as the most important plant ornament in the Modern era. **Stephen Forbes***



A new exhibition entitled **The Blade; Australia's love affair with lawn**, will be on show at **Carrick Hill**, Springfield, from **9 April** until **23 May**. Curated by **Richard Heathcote**, *The Blade* explores Australia's love of lawn and how both plant and the mowing of it gained such enduring popularity.

The exhibition marks the 40th Anniversary of the Australian Garden History Society, which promotes awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes. The

Blade will be on display at Carrick Hill in the new Wall Gallery before touring to Armidale in NSW.

*The Blade* showcases more than 100 hand tools associated with lawn maintenance (including a pair of Roman grass clippers from 23 AD) along with tools used by Aboriginal Australians who initially used fire as a tool used for grass management. The show also includes 12 historic lawn mowers dating from 1869 including Adelaide's own contribution, the 'Scott Bonnar', up to the very popular 'VICTA' ('zip on the do-da') rotaries from the 1960s and 70s.

Richard Heathcote said, 'Lawn has played a significant role in Australian social history, becoming a status symbol to which all could aspire. Consider the setting of our federal Parliament House or the government houses in each state, or the superbly maintained turf for our iconic sports, whether in stadiums, golf courses or local ovals. Regardless of irrigation issues Australia has hundreds of thousands of hectares of lawn under cultivation'.

The word 'laune' was first used in English around 1540 to mean a glade or open space in a forest, becoming 'lawn' later that century. For more than two centuries the much-loved use of grass has survived changes in horticultural fashions and environmental conditions.

Grass is used universally for lawns, paths and sporting surfaces and this came about because of the 'lawnmower'; a garden tool invented 190 years ago in England and patented by Edwin Budding; it revolutionised how grass was used in parks and gardens. The first lawnmowers arrived in Australia towards the end of the 19th century.

Before lawnmowers, only the very rich could afford to hire the many hands needed to scythe and weed the extensive 'Acadian' grass vistas (the owners often avoided these costs by grazing sheep to keep the grass short). From the 1880s horse drawn 'gang mowers' (later towed by tractors) were used in Australian botanic gardens.

In the 1920s an Adelaide company Scott Bonnar was producing a range of push, motor and gang mowers. With Aussie ingenuity Malcolm Bonnar and brother Scott added an electric motor to an earlier a Thomas Green and Son (Leeds) chain mower. Quiet and efficient it was used at the Glenelg Bowling Club with great success. Greater success followed the company for the next fifty years when they were supplying mowers to ninety nine percent of the 4000 bowling greens in Australia. The Adelaide factory had showrooms in all states and exported successfully to South Africa

On 1 June 1940 Carrick Hill's owner, Mr Bill Hayward's first Scott Bonnar motor mower was delivered to cut the newly landscaped lawn terrace and tennis court. A lawn tennis court was a crucial meeting place (especially in rural areas) to play, socialise and conduct business. Tennis had also become important in the Australian psyche as a consequence of Aussie lawn tennis players winning Wimbledon.

As the Australian suburbs expanded lawns in the rear as well as the front garden were being encouraged. The Hills rotary clothes hoist changed the way clothing was dried and lawn below the hoist was kinder than soil. The grassed back yard was also a cooler and gentler surface for children's games.

In the early 1950s the way grass was mown in Australia was changed by Mervyn Victor Richardson's VICTA Rotary mower. Although not the first of its kind it was cheaper lighter and easier to use than other rotary mowers and met the demand of the post war suburban

market. VICTA Mowers Pty Ltd sold more than 6.5 million units in thirty countries across the globe.

And to wind up our lives on the lawn, Australia's first lawn cemetery was established in suburban Enfield, in Adelaide in 1948.

A public program of talks and events will accompany the exhibition including:

**Hallowed Turf** an illustrated talk explaining the plant, the machine and the aesthetics of lawn; a **Lawn Mower Concourse; Croquet** on Carrick Hill's tennis lawn and a **Lawncare workshop with Neutrog representatives**. Details of these events may be found on Carrick Hill's website [www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au](http://www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au)



The Blade is an Australian Museum of Gardening national touring exhibition.

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