

PAUL SORENSEN AND THE GLENIFFER BRAE GARDENS



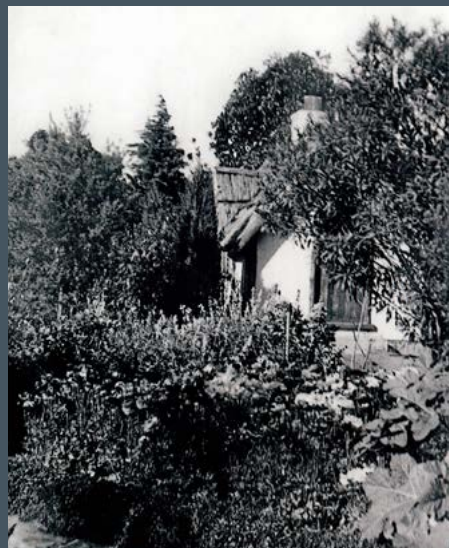
Early Career

Paul Sorensen was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1890. Due to the early death of his father he left school whilst still very young (not quite 12 years old) to seek employment and found it at a nursery called the *Horsholm Planteskole* where he enrolled in a Horticulture Certificate Course which required five years' practical work experience. During this period he worked with Lars Nielsen (a highly respected landscape designer and horticulturalist in Denmark) on the gardens at the *Villa Hvidore* which was the summer house of Queen Alexandra, grandmother of our Queen Elizabeth II.

Arriving in the Blue Mountains

Sorensen worked in Germany, France and Switzerland before migrating to Australia in 1915 as an assisted-passage migrant. He arrived in Melbourne and found work on a farm outside of Yarrowonga (west of Albury on the Murray River) and then at a local nursery back in Melbourne. Not happy with either job, he went to Sydney to take a boat to New Zealand and saw an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald for a Gardener for the *Carrington Hotel* in Katoomba. He successfully applied for this job and, through the exposure to guests and the community it offered, was able to build a business including garden design and maintenance services, and a small nursery which he eventually relocated to Leura.

Through the 1920s and into the early 1930s, Sorensen designed and maintained a range of gardens for guesthouses, and designed private gardens for wealthy clients throughout the Blue Mountains and in the surrounding countryside. One of these gardens was *Dean Park* which was designed for R. J. Wilson, who introduced Sorensen to his friend Henri Van de Velde, for whom Sorensen began to design and construct the garden *Everglades* in 1933. *Everglades* is now owned by the National Trust.



The Hoskins Commission

Sorensen's high attention to detail led him to employ the firm of Beale Pianos to build some of the joinery at *Everglades*. It was in this way that Ronald Beale came to be familiar with Sorensen and the *Everglades* garden, and was able to recommend Sorensen and his work to his friend Cecil Hoskins.

Cecil Hoskins had need of a landscape architect to design a garden for his new house *Invergowrie* in the Southern Highlands and to oversee work already commissioned to a local gardener at the headquarters in Port Kembla of Australian Iron and Steel (AIS), which had recently merged with BHP Pty Ltd. After his success with the garden at *Invergowrie*, Sorensen was then employed to design the gardens of *Gleniffer Brae* for Cecil's brother, Sidney Hoskins.

The Garden at *Gleniffer Brae*

Sorensen began the garden at *Gleniffer Brae* in 1939, as soon as the house was finished. Some features of the design included:

- Transplantation of several Illawarra Flame trees to provide instant shelter and shade
- Transplantation of Coral trees from Jamberoo
- Planting of other trees including Jacarandas and Brush Box
- Development of The Spinney, a planting of hundreds of Azaleas under an existing grove of Turpentine
- Development of a sandstone flagging driveway which blended into the surrounding grass
- Formal garden at the rear of the house using dry stone walls and featuring a sunken fountain and children's Doll's House.



Sadly much of Sorensen's original gardens disappeared during the time *Gleniffer Brae* was a school, and more recently during its life as a function centre and home of the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music. Richard Radcliffe writes in his 1990 book *Australia's Master Gardener Paul Sorensen and his Gardens*:

"Apart from The Spinney, which is readily recognisable as part of the original garden, the changes necessary to adapt a domestic garden, no matter how big, to use as a public park have disguised Sorensen's work so that his hand is no longer visible over large areas. The simplification of maintenance around the Conservatorium has also reduced his impact."

With this in mind, David Beaver, at Council's request, produced a Landscape Master Plan for *Gleniffer Brae* in 2007. Although this plan has not fully been implemented, some works have taken place, including a recent restoration of parts of the driveway.

The Hoskins as Patrons

The relationship between the Hoskins and Paul Sorensen also produced other gardens of note in the region. In addition to *Invergowrie* and *Gleniffer Brae*, Sorensen was commissioned to design and construct the gardens for *Greenhill* and *Hillside* at Figtree, executive residences of AIS. During this work, Sorensen assisted Hoskins in lobbying the Council to preserve the famous Fig Tree after which Figtree was named, but which later died.

Sorensen was also commissioned by the Hoskins to design the *Mount Keira Scout Camp* and some of the features of the camp, including the preservation of landmark trees, and the integration of the chapel into the surrounding setting and its re-use of onsite materials, are considered fine examples of the techniques used by Sorensen in his work.

In the Southern Highlands, Cecil Hoskins commissioned Sorensen to produce the gardens at the *Southern Portland Cement* site at Berrima and a Remembrance Drive of memorial tree plantings along the Hume Highway.

Sorensen also designed the grounds of the *Hoskins Memorial Church* at Lithgow, which Sidney built as a memorial to his two sons who died in infancy. After Paul Sorensen lost two of his own sons in the Royal Air Force during World War Two, Cecil Hoskins suggested he also construct a memorial in the church grounds to their memory, which he did.



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Wollongong City Council Botanic Garden History Page: <http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/botanicgarden/about/Pages/history.aspx>

National Trust Everglades Website: <http://www.everglades.org.au/>

Heritage NSW Gleniffer Brae Listing: http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_04_2.cfm?itemid=5045680

Buck, Glenda "The Changing Face of Gleniffer Brae 1938 – 2011" Glenda Buck Caringbah (2001)

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