

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's  
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service  
on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May 1995 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Enoch Barratt

Citation by Murray Hewett

In the same year that the first settlers arrived in the Swan River Colony, Stephenson's rocket was chosen as the engine to haul the first trains on England's first railway line, the Liverpool to Manchester railway. It was a great success and marked the start of the rail revolution. Other railway companies quickly followed and began building lines to link England's other cities. Among them was the London and Brighton Railway and that's what brought Enoch Barratt to the Swan River colony - that is to say it was the reason that Enoch Barratt found himself aboard the William Jardine along with other convicts in the northern summer of 1852. You see, Enoch was England's first great train robber.

The convict with the green thumb was transported to help bolster the labour force of the struggling colony after having been sentenced to 10 years for robbing the trains on the London and Brighton line. As the switchman at Bricklayers Arms junction, it was his job to hold the trains on the branch line until the mainline trains went through. However, along with his brother George, he took the opportunity to lighten the load while the wagons were waiting. In 1851, after two years of padding their pockets, the brothers were caught and sentenced to 10 years transportation.

Family folklore has it that Enoch had previously worked at Kew Gardens, so soon after his arrival in the colony, and after being conditionally pardoned, he began working in Government House Gardens. As part of an immigration program, his wife Mary and their three children were among 2412 people who arrived in Perth in 1854 - helping to boost the population to 11,743.

Two years later Enoch is recorded as working for George Shenton, a man of substance who donated lilac trees that lined St Georges Terrace in the 1850s. This horticultural experience, along with his stint at Government House Gardens, gave Enoch the required confidence to strike out on his own when he received his full pardon in 1858. Initially he stuck to street trees, which he sold to the city council. The records show that the council paid him 16 shillings for street trees in 1861.

By 1868, with the population of Perth nudging 25,000, Enoch is listed in the WA Almanac as a market gardener operating from a spot about where the Entertainment Centre now stands. The land was fertile because it was in an area that was once Lake Kingsford.

An open drain flowed from the drained lake along beside Roe Street, into an underground drain and on to Claisebrook. The enclosed section of the drain tended to block during heavy rains and the fledgling nurseryman had to endure periods of flooding.

But the fertility of the ground made it all worthwhile, because by 1867 he was advertising in the Inquirer fine young lilac trees fit for transplanting. The colony had its first commercial nurseryman. A year earlier he had received a special mention at the Perth Horticultural Society's February show and a prize of five shillings for his rhubarb. To show it was no flash in the pan, he did the same again in 1867, a first prize for his rhubarb and a second prizes for his pansies.

In 1868 he pulled off the hat trick with a first prize and yet another five shillings for the champion rhubarb.

As a family, we are so proud of the rhubarb that one branch has been the custodian over the generations. And thanks to Florrie Thompson, Enoch's great-grand-daughter and current custodian of the rhubarb, allow me to introduce the great-great-grandplant of the original champion rhubarb.

The rhubarb isn't the only floral descendant from the nursery in Douro Place, the street we now call Wellington Street. Over here we have the same variegated aspidistra that has blossomed in the gardens of Barratt descendants in the 100-plus years since it first took root in the fertile ground of the old Kingsford Lake.

At 56, Enoch was appointed Government Gardener and his domain was what was then called Government Gardens on the corner of St Georges Terrace and Barrack Street. His salary was 70 pounds a year plus an extra 13 pounds to make up for not having accommodation on site. The land had been set aside by Governor Hutt as an acclimatisation garden.

Enoch was a busy man, with Government Gardens to attend to plus his nursery business that, between regular flooding from the overflowing drain, was starting to blossom. His advertisements started appearing regularly in the *Inquirer*, offering mulberry, peach, pear and loquat trees, along with grape vines, oaks and lilacs.

His son James joined the family business and in 1871 his grandson Edward was born into the horticultural household and was destined to become the one of three brothers to carry on Wellington Nursery into a third generation.

In his book *The People of Perth*, Tom Stannage relates the tale of an ex-convict gardener who carried a knobbed stick to chase away children who took fruit from the fruit trees in Government Gardens.

With the help of James, Enoch expanded his range of trees to include guavas, cypresses, poplars, Sydney cedars and Australian ash. All were available from the shop he opened at the top of what was called Barrat Lane which ran down to Wellington Street. Along with Chipper Lane, which continued across the street and joined Murray and Hay Streets, Barratt Lane was renamed Shafto Lane, a move by the Perth City Council in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that left both families bemused and which erased a historic link with the colony's early days.

Although given the grander title of Head Gardener of the Public Garden and Public Reserves in the late 1870s, Enoch continued to take an active interest in the family business, though son James was taking an increasing role in the day to day running. They became locked in competition with Joseph Wylde who also began advertising in the *Inquirer*, then with Charles Howlett. Joseph Wylde travelled to South Australia and returned with conifers and garden seeds which he quickly advertised.

Enoch's Wellington Nursery, with son James at the helm, continued to expand, broadening its range to cover bulbs, tubers and roots along with the plan and ornamental flower pots and saucers. Enoch retired as the government's head gardener in 1881, at the age of 68, so that he was free to travel to Melbourne the following year to arrange more seed agencies and expand on the firm's range.

Between them, Enoch and James owned 15 blocks along what is now Wellington Street, ranging west from the present Entertainment Centre site. These were successively resumed when the Perth to Fremantle railway was built and some of the land was required for the railway itself or for the associated sheds. Two were sold to Bunning Brothers for

The last remaining trace of the once thriving nursery was a line of giant poplars, once planted as a windbreak, that stood at the northern boundary of the Entertainment Centre car park until two years ago when they were removed to make way for earthworks for a proposed bridge to link Fitzgerald Street to the city.

The family business, by this time run by three of James's brothers, took up land in the Wanneroo district for their nursery. They also moved into the retail florist business, opening two shops, one in Hay Street, near the old Central Arcade, and one in Murray Street.

Enoch, the pioneer nurseryman, married a second time after the death of his first wife, Mary, and became a partner with his second wife, Maria Church, in a clothing and furniture shop in Murray Street.

It is just short of 100 years since he died in December 1895 at the age of 87. By then discovery of gold in WA had swelled Perth's population to just over 82,000 and the number of nurseries had grown to five.

It was from these small beginnings, and thanks to the dedicated nurserymen like Enoch Barratt that Perth is such a beautiful and bountiful place for us and future generations.