

**DAWSON'S CACTUS GARDENS & HOUSE  
NURSERY, HOUSE  
571 NAPIER STREET, WHITE HILLS**

**SURVEY DATE: 1991-2  
STUDY GRADING: B  
CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1868C-  
FIRST OWNER : MARKS, EDWIN 1868-  
LATER OWNERS: THOMAS DAWSON & JUSTIN GILL**



**CITATION:**

**History**

The stuccoed verandahed house was built c1868, presumably by its builder-owner, Edwin Marks, also the grantee of 1867<sup>1</sup>. A later long-term occupier was a teacher, Marcellus Moran, c1880-1916.

At the rear Thomas Dawson and Justin Gill started a cactus nursery in 1937. Gill, an artist, financed a milkman's (Dawson) aptitude for breeding cacti. Dawson's daughter, May Slattery, helped her father in the nursery and was

1 Butcher & Gregson, p.144-

**BENDIGO & EAGLEHAWK HERITAGE STUDY-SIGNIFICANT SITES  
GRAEME BUTLER & ASSOCIATES**

the occupier of the Napier Street property until recently. The front fence now acts as a dividing fence for the nursery at the rear while the timber greenhouse also survives there.

After successfully propagating cacti imported from America, the nursery was able to export their products back to where they had come from because of the rarity in America of some specimens. Their old catalogues list some 2000 succulent varieties.

### **Description**

Huge examples of their products (agave, cordyline and yucca specimens, etc.) still grow in the rear garden while early nursery structures (quarantine shed, shade house) and the former iron front fence survive nearby.

### **Significance**

Dawson's Cactus Garden is significant on a State-wide basis:

as one of the most intact cactus gardens in Victoria, the plants not merely used as isolated specimens but forming a total design, and the collection of buildings such as the shade houses and quarantine shed which complement the plants;

for its collection of outstanding individual specimens of cacti and succulents, amongst which are many plants imported in the period prior to restrictive quarantine embargoes;

for the manner in which the garden reflects the hot and relatively dry local climate;

for the retention of a mid-nineteenth century rendered brick residence, characteristic of Bendigo architecture and now romantically dwarfed by giant cacti and mature trees;

for its contribution to the streetscape of the Midland Highway, a thoroughfare which contains notable gardens such as Rosalind Park, Lake Weeroona and White Hills Botanic Gardens; (and)

historically as a noted specialist nursery responsible for the wide range of cacti and succulents throughout Australia<sup>1</sup>

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1 Aitken, report to the National Trust of Australia (Vic) gardens committee. 1990