Albury’s claim to literary fame is usually Rolf Boldrewood (1). His most famous novel ‘Robbery under Arms’ submitted for publication as a book when working as a police magistrate in Albury. While much has been published on Boldrewood (actually: Thomas Alexander Browne), some dealing with his Albury period (2), little has been written about Mrs Margaret Browne and her gardens (3). It was in Albury that she wrote and published ‘The Flower Garden in Australia,’ the first Australian gardening book written by a woman.

THE ‘BOLDREWOODS’ IN ALBURY

From 1881 to 1884 T.A. Browne served as Police Magistrate in Dubbo. Since the climate in Dubbo was too hot and trying for the family, Browne asked for, and in 1884 was given, a post as Police Magistrate and Mining Warden in Armidale. Armidale, however, turned out to have winters that were too cold.

On 31 December 1884 Browne left Armidale to take up the position of Chairman of the newly formed Land Licensing Board in Albury with a purview that covered the area from Tumut, via Cootamundra, Holbrook, Corowa to Mulwala (4). Leaving his family in Armidale for the time being, Browne first took lodgings in Moses’ Globe Hotel, Albury on 13 January (5). Soon after, he boarded at the home of a Mr. Lethbridge and began house-hunting. Given the extent of the family, five daughters and three boys (6), Browne required a large house.

On 31 May 1885 his wife and children joined him in Albury, moving to ‘Morningside,’ a property originally erected in the 1860s for Henry Mott, proprietor of Albury’s first newspaper, the Border Post. The building was a six-roomed brick cottage with a slabbed cellar. Located on the slopes of Forest Hill, ‘Morningside’ was beyond the perimeter of ‘built-up’ 1880s Albury and must be regarded as ‘outer periphery.’

Living a long distance from town, Margaret Browne had to walk, which, given that she had health difficulties, caused concern. At that stage, however, the family finances could not afford the purchase of a buggy. By the end of the year the finances must have improved, as the Brownes could advertise for “a competent general servant,” to be employed for good wages after Christmas week.

When the land licensing district of Albury was amalgamated with that of Wagga Wagga effective 1 July 1887, Browne became redundant. It appeared that the Browne’s stay in Albury was to come to an end. Providentially the position of police magistrate became vacant at
the time; Browne was appointed as police magistrate and mining warden on 19 August 1887 (7) and in the following year also as coro-
ner (8).

In late 1888 the Brownes had become more established and decided to move closer to town, and announced that “'Morningside' now in the occupation of Mr. T.A. Browne” was offered to be let from the end of January 1889 (9). It seems that it took a while for the Brownes to find other suitable accommodation, as the same advertisement still appeared in late May of the same year. In autumn 1889 George Adams, proprietor of the Albury Banner erected two buildings as rental accommodation (10). With the exception of the properties facing Wilson Street, Adams owned the entire city block bounded by David and Olive Streets in the east and west, and by Guinea and Swift Streets in the north and south. While Adams himself lived at Adamshurst, a large 1880s homestead facing David Street, he had a number of rental properties at the back of his block facing Olive-Street (nos 640, 642 and 644 Olive Street). The area was a well respected part of town. N° 618 Olive Street, for example, had been erected in the 1860s for town clerk Samuel Mudge.

One of these two new speculative rental properties was offered to be let in early May 1889. It was advertised as “a newly-erected, large and comfortable Cottage, situated in the best part of the town of Albury, and containing a large drawing and dining room, library, eight bedrooms, dressing room, two bath rooms (with hot and cold water laid on), a large subdivided cellar, good kitchen, laundry, linen-room, pantry, larder, store -rooms &c, &c... admirably adapted for a gentle-
man’s residence”.

In late May 1889 the Brownes moved to this cottage at 642 Olive Street. The property was christened ‘Raby’, after Margaret Browne’s father’s property ‘Raby,’ located between Camden and Liverpool. The building in Olive Street still stands and, christened “Boldrewood,” is now owned by Charles Sturt University (11).

When the Brownes moved in, they moved into an affluent neigh-
bourhood. The 1891 census shows that the well-respected lawyer George Toucher Fleming, who lived in the property 'Burundulla' at the corner of Guinea and Olive Streets was their neighbour to the right.

Browne continued writing in Albury, mainly to generate sufficient income to support his large family and to repay old debts. Encouraged by police magistrate and fellow land board member H.M. Keightly, who himself had had personal experiences with bushrangers, Browne submitted a revised Robbery under Arms for publication as a book. In 1887 the work was published as a triple-decker in London by Remington & Co. Browne’s public appeal was boosted when Robbery under Arms was turned into a play in Melbourne.
The Brownes were in contact with other writers in the region, such as the poet Sydney Wheeler Jephcott at Corryong and J.T. Lang at Corowa (12).

During their stay in Albury the Browne’s received some celebrities, such as the explorer of Southern Africa, Henry M. Stanley, and his wife Dorothy Tennant in November 1891 and the French author Paul Blouet (‘Max O’Reell’) and wife in 1892, then on a lecture tour through Australia. Stanley, who stayed only for a night was entertained by the Brownes and a select group of Albury’s intelligentsia. While his literary fame was rising throughout Australia, his fame at home, in Albury was limited as poignantly shown by the journalist Tighe Ryan visiting Albury in 1894.

While most of his children were well read and conversant in contemporary English and colonial (Australian) literature (13), only one daughter, Rose, followed in his footsteps and published fiction. What is often overlooked, is that his wife, Margaret Browne, also wrote a book: the first Australian gardening book written by a woman.

**MRS “ROLF BOLDREWOOD”**

Margaret Maria Browne (née Riley) was born in April 1837. When her father, William Edward Riley, died of an accident in December 1836, her mother Honoria Riley (née Brooks) had to fend for a girl, a boy and another unborn child—Margaret. Honoria died when Margaret was two years of age. The three children were taken to live with their aunt Christiana at Denham Court, Ingleburn near Sydney. She and her husband Thomas V. Bloomfield had fifteen children of their own.

During her childhood Margaret developed a deep interest in gardening, visiting neighbour’s gardens as well as local nurseries. While at Denham Court, Margaret had a small garden plot where she grew capsicums and jonquils. Later, she managed to maintain small plots while at school in Sydney as well as at a cousin’s residence, who himself was “passionately fond of flowers” and had his own collection.
In August 1861 Margaret married Thomas Alexander Browne, a young squatter. The Browne’s lived first at Murrabit (nr. Swan Hill) and from 1864 at Bundgeree Station, where Browne ran sheep. It seems that Margaret Browne created a small garden there, which perished, with much of the station, in a prolonged severe drought. In 1869 the family was back in Sydney; from 1871 to 1881 the Browne’s lived in Gulgong, from 1881 to 1884 in Dubbo, in 1884 in Armidale and from 1885 to 1895 in Albury (two residences); finally, in 1895, they moved to Melbourne. In all places Margaret seems to have established a small cottage garden.

As she commented in the preface to her book, “to live without a garden would be for me an impossibility”.

Mrs. Browne was an active gardener and soon landscaped the gardens in Albury. The first garden established by Margaret Browne was at ‘Morningside.’ When originally put up for sale in 1863 that garden contained “a few fruit trees, choice plants, and shrubs; besides a large number of vines bearing quantity of table grapes” (14). We have no description of the appearance of the garden when the Brownes rented the property in May 1885.

When the Brownes moved from ‘Morningside’ to ‘Raby’, Mrs. Browne found there “a large garden already containing many valuable trees and shrubs”. The Adam’s property on the eastern side of the block had been extensively landscaped with ornamental bushes and trees, among them palms (Washingtonia robusta).

When the Brownes moved to Albury the town had grown from a crossing place along the Sydney to Melbourne Road into an urban centre for the Southern Riverina. Signs of ‘civilisation’ abounded: a street tree planting scheme had begun in 1875 and work on the Botanic Gardens had started in 1879. In early October 1886 a Horticultural Society was founded (15).

The block of land leased by the Brownes was large enough to keep four horses, as well as an assortment of fowls, ducks and turkeys. While the rear was, as customary, the ‘business side’ of the garden, the frontage toward Olive Street was the show piece.
‘Raby’ at 642 Olive Street in 1894

‘Boldrewood’ at 642 Olive Street in 2001
The block of land leased by the Brownes was large enough to keep four horses, as well as an assortment of fowls, ducks and turkeys. While the rear was, as customary, the ‘business side’ of the garden, the frontage toward Olive Street was the show piece.

The journalist J. Tighe Ryan visiting the Brownes in the summer of 1894 mentions that the house was protected ‘from the outer world’ by a high orange hedge. The article in the *Review of Reviews* is accompanied by photos of Margaret Browne and of ‘Raby,’ both of which are reproduced here. Ryan comments that:

“the big garden in front of the house is singularly beautiful (as can be expected by everyone who had read Mrs. Boldrewood’s ‘Flower Garden of Australia’.”

Ryan adds that flowers had not only been her hobby, but her life study, and that the Albury garden had been brought “to the highest pitch of perfection”.

Hammocks slung between verandah posts suggest that the garden was not just for show, but that it was enjoyed as a living and recreational space. The 1894 photograph shows an ornamental flower garden with well kept pathways and flower beds—and no lawn, as was custom at the time.

The house was decorated with a multitude of pictures, mainly original drawings and engravings, “all speaking of life in the bush, and the feverish pursuit of gold”. The drawing room was described as ‘conventional’, but “the other rooms, which are evidently the author’s haunts, are full of literary interest”.

It would appear that Margaret Browne’s green hand was not only visible at their home, but also at the place of her husband’s work—the Albury’s court house in Dean Street. Tighe Ryan mentions in passing that “the police magistrate’s room is approached through a flower garden.”

Unfortunately we do not have available Mrs. Browne’s diary for her time in Albury (16).

As an active gardener, Margaret Browne exhibited some of her plants at the annual shows of the Albury and District Agricultural, Pastoral and Horticultural Association. In this she was aided by her husband. When it was decided to mount a special flower and bird show in 1886, Thomas A. Browne was appointed as a member of the committee (17). It appears that neither Thomas nor Margaret Browne participated in the exhibition (18).

It seems that she began exhibiting in 1888. She won several prizes in the amateur section, mainly for cut flowers and bouquets at the 1888 (19), the 1889 (20), the 1890 (21), the 1891 (22), the 1892 (23), the 1893 (24), and at the 1894 Albury show (25). She does not seem to have entered the Autumn flower show in April 1895, possibly because she was winding down her garden. On occasion Margaret also seems to
have entered in the professional section, normally reserved for nurseries and horticultural establishments; she won a first prize for an exhibit of Hyacinths at the 1888 show (26), was commended for the same flowers at the 1889 show (27), and a first prize for a collection of pot plants at the 1893 show (28).

Her youngest daughter, Vera, also entered the competitions. She won second prize for a bouquet of cut native flowers at the 1891 show, a collection of pot plants at the 1894 show (30), and a wide array of prizes at the 1895 autumn flower show (31).

On the occasion of the wedding of her second oldest daughter Emma, Margaret Browne decorated St. Matthew’s Church with an elaborate arrangement of flowers. The Albury Banner commented:

“...The church was beautifully decorated ..., chrysanthemums, ferns, vine leaves, ivy, and other flowers in prodigal profusion being arranged with exquisite taste and delicacy, and making a very pretty foreground to a pleasing scene. Across the front of the church an arch was erected from which a bell formed entirely of chrysanthemums was suspended, and on either side of the archway were the letters B and S, the initial letters of the Bride’s and bridegroom’s names, in chrysanthemums. There was a correspondingly pretty display of floral decorations in other parts of the church” (32).
Margaret Browne not only used flowers for her own and her family’s use, but also freely distributed seeds and cuttings. In the introduction to her book she claimed that

“Next to personal care and culture, nothing has given me greater pleasure than the distribution of plants, as tending to the encouragement in others of the taste which has afforded me such restful recreation.”

In 1895, at the age of 69, Browne retired from the bench and the family moved to Melbourne.

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CHENERY & CO. have been favored with instructions by Mrs T. A. Browne, owing to her leaving Albury, to sell by public auction, at her residence, on above date, the undermentioned Splendid Variety of well cared for POT PLANTS, CARPENTER’S TOOLS, GARDENER’S TOOLS, &c., amongst which are some large assortments of Begonias, Fuchsias, Primulas, Daphne, Camillias, Taros, Callas, Chrysanthemums, 10 large Palms, besides Bulbs of all kinds ready for planting.

ALSO,

Children’s Private Kitchen (with stove and fittings complete), Carpenter’s Tools, Mowing Machine, Patent Sprinkler’s, Gardener’s Tools, Garden Chairs, Flower Stands for verandah or sittingroom, Canary Cage and Canaries, &c., &c.

Leaving Albury after ten years of residence entailed disposing of all property which was no longer required. In addition to the ‘well-maintained’ furniture and several household effects (including the linoleum in the hallway!), as well as their horses and buggies, there were Mrs. Browne’s plants and gardening tools to be sold. Such a sale was not uncommon at the time.

This was to occur four weeks before the clearance sale for the contents of the house. Margaret Browne had engaged local auctioneers Chenery & Co, which published the advertisement shown at left:

It would appear that the sale was successful.

THE FLOWER GARDEN IN AUSTRALIA

Margaret Browne saw gardening as a means

“to direct the efforts of the mistress of the house, too often weary and heavy laden, in her search for recreation free from regret and reaction”.

She also believed that a cottage garden was an educational as well as a family enterprise. She felt
“sure that there would be much more happiness in the world if more gardens were made, and flowers more highly valued.”

and posited that

“If the cottage homes were more generally beautified with flowers and shrubs, greater domestic happiness would often result. Husbands would linger and admire, perhaps help to plant and water; children would learn to be more thoughtful and unselfish.”

The environment created by Margaret Browne certainly suited her husband, who would ‘neither play cards nor billiards’ and thus spent much of his free time writing and apparently also gardening. Indeed, Thomas Browne was found mowing the lawn when visited by a journalist in 1894. Her daughters were also involved. Vera Browne’s exhibits at the Albury Show have already been mentioned.

What amounted to fifty years of planting experiences gained in a variety of climates of New South Wales stood Margaret Browne in good stead when she decided to publish her knowledge in the form of a gardening book.

At the time, there had previously been a few practical gardening books and descriptive nursery plant catalogues published in Australia, mainly by nursery men. Chief among them were Robert Thomson and Messrs Serle as well as the Melbourne nursery firms of George Brunning, and Law, Sommer & Co. In her preface, Margaret Browne freely acknowledged the information provided by these sources.

Her decade of residence in Albury found Margaret Browne with more leisure time than before. Her children were now in the late teens and early twenties—and thus less of a demand on her time. Her youngest daughter, Vera, a young teenager. Emma, her second daughter, had left home in 1892 when she married Edwin H. Street, formerly accountant with the Commercial Bank in Albury and at the time manager of the same bank in Mulwala (38).

Margaret Browne chose to spend her leisure time writing up a practical guide to gardening with an emphasis on flowers. The 144-page book was published in 1893 in Melbourne by Melville, Mullen and Slade, a company which acted as the main local agents for Macmillans, her husband’s British publisher. The book appeared under the title “The flower garden in Australia. A Book for Ladies and Amateurs”.

Given that her husband’s name had a high public recognition value and that it would increase the potential sales, Margaret Browne decided to publish her book under the name ‘Mrs. Rolf Boldrewood’ (39). We do not know who suggested this, whether it was her husband, desirous of extending the ‘Boldrewood’ literary empire, or whether the idea came from Melville, Mullen and Slade. It is the first gardening book in Australia to be written by a woman, and, as contemporary
critics noted, one of the first to be specifically written for Australian conditions (40).

The book was dedicated, “by permission,” to the Countess of Jersey, the wife of the Governor of New South Wales at the time. Lady Jersey had visited Albury in February 1891 en route to taking up residence in Sydney, and for a prolonged visit in September of the same year (41). During that time Albury women decorated her rooms with flowers, and Lady Jersey inspected the entries at the Agricultural Show. It is very likely that Margaret Browne would have met Lady Jersey at that time, and, sharing an interest in flowers, may have continued the acquaintance.

Once advance copies of The Flower Garden had become available in late December 1892, Margaret Browne gave one copy to each of the Albury Newspapers. All three duly published small reviews. The Border Post noted that “Mrs. Browne has added to her reputation as a florist by the very capable manner in which the book seems to be compiled.” It added that “the work should have more general application than modestly assumed by the authoress in the introductory note” (42). The Albury Banner lauded that “the principle feature of the work is comprehensiveness combined with simplicity” and posited that “anyone thoroughly mastering its contents will be considerably better posted up on floriculture than many so-called gardeners” (43). The Albury Daily News was the most effusive, commenting on the volume as ‘artistically bound’, and stressing that its chief value rested in the fact that it was written for Australian conditions (44).

In hindsight, it is surprising that the book did not run to many editions, as it was a useful and well written guide. As Keast Burke speculates, the reason may well rest in the fact that between 1892 and 1895, but particularly in 1893, Australia was in the grips of an economic depression, which may have curtailed sales.

NOTES

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4. AB 2 January 1885.—Note regarding Browne’s farewell AB 9 January 1885.


6. Rose Christiana Angell (*1862); Everard (*1864); Hubert Riley (*1866; †1866); Emma Margaret (*1867); Gerald Macleay (*1868); Elizabeth Corientia (*1869); Thomas Valentine (*1869; twin with Elizabeth); Emily (*1874); Vera (*1878).


8. de Serville, (op. cit.) p. 362.


10. Actually the buildings were owned by the AB joint owners George Adams, M. Thornton and M Adams.

11. The building was re-identified as Boldrewood’s residence in the 1960s: ‘Move to preserve the old house of author Rolf Boldrewood’ BMM 18 August 1961 (with wrong building shown).—’Rolf Boldrewood’s home in Albury?’ BMM 24 August 1861.—’Riddle of Raby has been solved’ BMM 30 August 1861.—”Raby” window signatures identified by daughter’ BMM 7 September 1967.—In the 1950s the house, then called ‘Wonga’ was converted into flats to serve as a hostel. The verandah was closed in and the windows removed to make internal doorways. After Charles Sturt University acquired it in 1984, the building was converted into an office building by removing the verandah walls, replacing the windows and lowering the ceilings (to accommodate an airconditioning unit). In 1992 the servants’ quarters at the back of the house were demolished and the present extension added.


14. Advertisement for sale of property, BP n° 590, 30 January 1863.—In 1863 the property was set in a vineyard of 1 1/2 acres, planted with 2500 Riesling and 500 Shiraz and Malbec.

15. AB 8 October 1886, p. 21; BP 5 October 1886, p. 2.

16. The Mitchell Library holds her diary for the year 1916 (ML Mss 6135).

17. AB 8 October 1886, p. 21 — BP 5 October 1886, p. 2.


19. AB 14 September 1888, p. 17–22; 24; Margaret Browne won a first prize for an exhibit of Hyacinths (p. 21).

20. AB 13 September 1889, p. 17–22; 24; Margaret Browne won a first prize for an exhibit of two Hyacinths, a hand bouquet, a bridal bouquet, a second prize for a table bouquet and commendations for cut flowers and for a bouquet of native flowers (p. 21).
21. *AB* 12 September 1890, p. 17–22; 24; Margaret Browne won first prizes for a hand bouquet and for a bridal bouquet (p. 21).

22. *AB* 11 September 1891, p. 17–22; 24; Margaret Browne won first prizes for Begonias, for a collection of cut flowers and for a bridal bouquet (p. 21); *ADN* 9 September 1891, p. 3; Results: *ADN* 10 September 1891, p.3.

23. *AB* 16 September 1892, p. 17–21; 24; Margaret Browne won first prizes for: cut flowers, a hand bouquet, a table bouquet and a bridal bouquet (p. 21).


25. *AB* 14 September 1893, p. 18–21; 24; Margaret Browne won a second prize for cut flowers (p. 21).


28. *AB* 15 September 1893, p. 17–21; 24; Margaret Browne's results p. 21.

29. Photograph reproduced with permission, Albury Regional Museum.

30. *AB* 14 September 1893, p. 18–21; 24; Margaret Browne won a second prize for cut flowers (p. 21).

31. *AB* 26 April 1895, p. 24.—Vera Browne won first prizes for a basket of flowers, for a bouquet of mixed flowers, for a Bridal wreath, and for two spays, while she gained a second prize for two button hole bouquets.

32. 'Wedding at St. Matthew's' *AB* 3 June 1892, p. 24.

33. *AB* 31 May 1895, p.23; *ADN* 29 May 1895, p. 2; *ADN* 30 May 1895 p.2.

34. At the time all floor coverings, bar the floor boards, were owned by the tenant: *AB* 24 May 1895, p. 1; *ADN* 28 May 1895, p.2; *BP* 28 May 1895, p.1.

35. Advertisements *BP* (Albury) 17 May 1895, p.1; 28 May 1895, p.1; *AB* 17 May 1895 p.1; 24 May 1895, p. 1.


38. 'Marriage at St. Matthew's' *ADN* 2 June 1892, p.2.—'Marriage Bells' *BP* 2 June 1892, p. 11.—'Wedding at St. Matthew's' *AB* 3 June 1892, p. 24.

39. She was not the only one. Their eldest daughter, Rose Browne, also used the Boldrewood pen-name when she published in 1911 her novel 'The Complications At Collaro.'

40. 'The Flower Garden in Australia.' *ADN* 4 January 1893, p.3.

41. From 8 to 12 September 1891. cf. various reports in the Albury papers, including final banquet where TA Browne presented a toast to 'the ladies' suggesting that spouses were also present (*ADN* 12 September 1891, pp. 2-3).

42. 'The Flower Garden in Australia.' *BP* 6 January 1893, p.11.

43. 'Publications received.' *AB* 30 December 1892, p. 22.

44. 'The Flower Garden in Australia.' *ADN* 4 January 1893, p.3.