

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE AND ITS CONSERVATION IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

AUSTRALIA

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An Australian Hybrid: The Gardiner house, French Island

Australia does not have any one distinctive version of the vernacular, for the climate varies from the cool temperate to the tropical, the distances are vast – comparable with the distance from Oslo to Damascus – the population is sparse, the sources include the architecture of the first settlers from British isles, the transitory structures of the Aboriginal inhabitants, and the importations of migrant groups from the Chinese to the Germans.

The Gardiner house exemplifies some of these characteristics. It was built in the mid-19th century at what was then an isolated and inaccessible location, French Island in Westernport Bay, in the south-east of Australia. John and William Gardiner were squatters on the island – that is, settlers with no real legal tenure, but tolerated on public land so long as they paid a licence fee. It can be no earlier than the date of the Gardiners' squatting licence, 1847, but need not be much later, and it most probably pre-dates their application to purchase the site in January 1854.

The first section has a machine sawn frame which may have been imported nearly 3,000 kilometres from Western Australia. The top and bottom plates were neatly drilled to create rounded mortice holes for the uprights, and midway between each was a single drilled hole which allowed a light sapling to be sprung in vertically. Other such saplings were nailed to either side of each upright, and within each panel the horizontal basketwork was woven in and out between and braced by the saplings. This was plastered with a daub consisting essentially of the locally available soil. This construction makes extensive use of nails, which

had only recently become cheap. In more traditional building the sides of the posts would have been grooved to receive the ends of the horizontal wattles.

At an early date the building was extended, in similar wattle and daub construction, but more crudely built out of local split and adzed timber with a split paling roof. An analysis of the daub has revealed seeds of various introduced European plants, which is consistent with our belief that this is the later section. When the building was investigated some years ago, the original structure had collapsed and only the later addition stood. It was difficult to believe that the collapsed portion was the original; that it could be such a sophisticated structure of milled timber; and still less that it had been prefabricated. At that time prefabrication in wattle and daub was unheard of, though other examples have since been found.

This building exemplifies a number of things:

- the use in Australia of wattle and daub, a traditional European technology
- the adaptation of this technology to a sophisticated system of prefabrication
- the transport of building components over considerable distances
- the *ad hoc* adaptation of this system to local materials and more primitive techniques
- the extensive use of industrialised components, that is nails, in vernacular building.