

BRANCH CUTTINGS

Issue 34 - February 2011

This branch is affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society & the National Trust of Australia (NSW)

Wauchope's & Newcastle's figs to stay - Eva Cassegrain & Stuart Read

In 1938, central coast town Wauchope planted a median avenue of Hill's fig trees (*Ficus microcarpa* var. *hillii*) along a two-block length of its main street, Hastings Street. This was part of the NSW Sesquicentenary celebrations, when a state-wide initiative encouraged tree planting to mark 150th years of European settlement. Hills figs were particularly favoured at the time and those at Wauchope were paid for by public subscription at five shillings each.

Over the years 2007- 2010 there has been an active public campaign to protect these against proposals to remove them due to complaints of damage by roots to plumbing on adjacent properties also because of invasive roots causing trip hazards, dislodging paths and walls. Wauchope received a wonderful christmas present when Hastings Valley Council decided to preserve the trees in the block from Young to Bain Streets.

Council had prepared a thorough report on the options available said Adrienne van Spanje, spokesperson for lobby group FIGS2010, and (they) showed the cheapest option was to keep the trees and install a root barrier, just as we have always contended.

The outcome is a win for all. The administrator charged the general manager with handling claims of residents affected by any root invasion. And the town gets to keep its iconic trees.

Of significance was the promise to continue to upgrade the street with garden beds to supply water and nutrients to trees and continue to landscape all of Hastings Street down to the river. This has been the vision of the various town plans over the past 10 years.

AGHS helped FIGS2010 with background historical information on Hill's figs. Despite failing to get a branch letter out urging Council to defer cutting them down (I had thought it too late), after public lobbying, Council came to the right decision. Perhaps we can now hope Council sees fit to also list the avenue as a heritage item - it certainly is!

Hill's figs: out of fashion?

Hill figs were planted in association with state government-financed construction of the Manufacturers Hall and Commemorative Pavilion in the (former) Sydney Showgrounds at Moore Park in 1938 (for the NSW Sesquicentenary Celebrations at that year's Easter Show). Hill's figs were planted in other locations around Moore Park around the same time and into the 1940s, including Dacey Street.



State Governor – Edward Woodwood and Lady Woodwood in Hastings Street approx. 1958. Opening of Rotary Hall still standing in Wauchope



The avenue of figs before rehabilitation



After rehabilitation

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends

A happy new year to all and welcome to new members. This report includes welcome news from our northern NSW sub-branch.

I travelled to Adelaide in December to visit the exhibition at *Carrick Hill*, 'Lost Gardens of Adelaide' (wonderful) and to see 'Garden of Ideas' at Adelaide Botanic Garden. While the book *Garden of Ideas* is available now, AGHS nationally co-funded it and are sponsoring the exhibition it is based on to tour several states. It will be in Sydney and Armidale in spring. Until the end of February it's on in Adelaide and several SA cultural institutions have loaned items that won't be travelling, so I went to see them. A feast and well worth checking out when it comes closer to you. We'll arrange for Richard to give talks in Sydney and Armidale closer to the opening.

NSW 2010 Heritage Volunteer Awards included some people relevant to gardens: Emma Brooks-Maher who has worked for recognition and careful management of Haberfield, a seminal 'garden suburb'; Dr James Broadbent, who has saved the 1810 *Cox's Cottage* in Mulgoa near Penrith from ruin - once by purchase and recreating a garden; secondly by fighting off the 2004 bushfires; Kath Smith of Friends of Fagan Park who, since joining in the 1990s, has devoted time to maintaining and restoring both *Netherby* homestead and surrounding gardens in this Hornsby park; *The Long Swamp Cemetery* volunteers, a group of Bathurst residents who have transformed this neglected cemetery since 2008 with clearing, repairs and archival recording that have brought it back to life and Penelope Pike, AGHS member and active volunteer at the 1913 *Eryldene* house and garden at Gordon. Largely maintained by volunteers, Penny has committed countless hours fundraising, getting grants, developing creative promotion and events.

Sydney's rapacious re-/development means branch advocacy for retention and better management of historic gardens continues. Recent submissions have been made on *Fitzroy Gardens* upgrade, Kings Cross ((1970s v 2011); encouraging Councils' support of State Heritage Register nominations of *Werrington House* estate, south of Penrith and *Hyde Park*, our oldest (1810). We continue monitoring inching progress of Penrith City Council towards supporting State Heritage Register listing of the *Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Gallery* - wonderful former Emu Plains home and garden of artists Margo & Gerry Lewers and hub for Sydney's modernist arts community.

I am pleased to note *McQuade Park*, Windsor (adjoining St. Matthew's Anglican Church and rectory) is on its way to being listed on the State Heritage Register - Governor Macquarie's 1810 market square. My article on Mrs Macquarie's NSW landscape design is in the latest *Heritage NSW* which is available by post (phone 9873 8500) or online at www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/heritagensw/newsletter_vol18no1.pdf

Northern NSW branch report by Lynne Walker

2010 was a year of growth in northern NSW membership, thanks largely to Trisha Dixon's Edna Walling tour and started to come to grips with the huge area we cover and how best to find and record as many gardens as possible.

It started with a bang with Richard Heathcote, from *Carrick Hill House Museum* in SA, arriving in Armidale to open a Nora Heysen exhibition at the *New England Regional Art Museum*. A dinner was organised with Richard as guest - he entertained us with stories of *Carrick Hill* and a great night was had by all. (Members may not know that *The Old Mole* tool collection will be finding a permanent home in *Carrick Hill* in the future).

Other highlights were trips to: historic *Invergowrie* and *Saumarez* gardens, *The Old Mole's* garden tool shed at *Heatherbrae* and three charming old Glen Innes gardens, prior to the opening of our AGHS photographic exhibition at the *Glen Innes art gallery*. All ended with a memorable meal and small amounts of wine...

We became involved in conservation restoration projects at two historic Armidale gardens, one owned by the National Trust (*Saumarez*) and the other by the University of New England (*Trevenna*) and wrote advocacy letters for two historic tree avenues in Armidale and Wauchope. In November the first meeting was held to discuss the 2013 national conference which will be in Armidale. The year ended with an enthusiastic, well attended and productive meeting followed by our Christmas Party with Helen & Graham Wilson as our fabulous hosts.

Plans for 2011 include mounting another photographic exhibition, this time at Inverell with possible future shows at Tamworth, Grafton and Coffs Harbour and perhaps Maitland. This will give opportunities to both spread the word about AGHS and find out more about local gardens and photographic evidence of them. We also hope to have "border tours" with the Queensland Branch at Stanthorpe/Tenterfield in autumn and with Sydney in the Hunter Valley area, probably in early spring and look forward welcoming Richard Aitken as a guest speaker on 'Garden of Ideas' sometime later in the year. A trip to Bellingen to view the *George Hewitt Memorial Arboretum* at the hospital is also a possibility.

Stuart Read: T: 9326 9468 or E: stuart1962@bigpond.com.

NEW MEMBERS

The Branch would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new local members:

Hugh Hallard, Simon & Jill Hill, Jacqueline Isles, Marjorie Mansfield, Gerri Nicholas,
Fiona Ogilvie, Andrew Pierce, Maree Ross, Jim Vaughan and Helen Wyld.

HELP!

We need a few journals to complete a set that a member has kindly given us. This collection will then be gifted to the Royal Historical Society. Please let Jeanne Villani know if you can help out

Missing are:

All Nos from Vol 1 - Vol 6 (our set starts at Vol 7 No 1 July/August 1995)

Vol 15 No 1 (July/August 2003) and No 3 (November/December/January 2004)

AGHS FORTHCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Date: Thursday 10th February 6.00pm for 6.30-8.30pm

Event: Talk by biologist Dr Peter McGee on soil fungi and microbial action to make and to revitalise degraded soils - read more on page 6

Meet at: Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill

Cost: Members \$20 Guests \$30 includes light refreshments. **Bookings essential**

MARCH

Date: Wednesday 16th March 6.00pm for 6.30-8.30pm

Event: Talk by ecologist Dr Doug Benson on the diverse and threatened flora of Sydney's Cumberland Plain - read more on page 6

Venue: Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill

Cost: Members \$20 Guests \$30 includes light refreshments. **Bookings essential**

APRIL

Date: Sunday 10th April 2pm - 4.00pm

Event: Walk led by David Frecker around the *Kokoda Track Memorial walkway, Bedlam Bay Park, Concord West* - walk among the ambitious plantings and memorials commemorating Australian WW2 service men and women in Papua New Guinea - read more on page 6

Meet at: To be advised when booking

Cost: Members \$15 Guests \$25 includes light refreshments. **Bookings essential**

MAY

Date: Saturday 21st May 2.00pm - 5pm

Event: Birchgrove walk - discover ex-industrial sites now two contrasting modern harbour-side parks, *Mort Bay Park* and *Ballast Point Park* and a couple of enchanting private gardens in very diverse locations - read more on page 6

Meet at: To be advised when booking

Cost: Members \$15 Guests \$25 includes light refreshments. **Bookings essential**

JUNE

Date: Sunday 19th June 10.30am - 5pm

Event: Self drive day tour of Hawkesbury disappearing agriculture. Discover the Secret Garden & Federation era grounds at UWS Richmond Campus, tour of farm gate/Hawkesbury Harvest and Hawkesbury Artists' trails.

Meet at: To be advised when booking

Cost: TBA includes light refreshments. Lunch - self catering picnic. **Bookings essential**

Bookings & enquiries for all events above: Telephone: Jeanne Villani: 9997 5995 or Email: Jeanne@Villani.com

PLEASE NOTE: Payment confirms Booking. Payments for all events must be made prior to the event by cheque to Australian Garden History Society and mailed to: Jeanne Villani, 90 Cabbage Tree Road, Bayview, NSW,, 2104 or by **Internet** bank transfer to: Australian Garden History Society Sydney & Northern NSW Branch, ANZ Bank, Centrepoint Branch. BSB 012 040 Account 1017 62565 Payment must include your **name** and the **function** you are booking for.

An Individual Membership entitles only that member to the Members Rate.

Members with Household Membership are entitled to Members Rate for anyone living within that household

Refunds for cancellations will not be made if less than 48 hours notice is given.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR THE NORTHERN NSW BRANCH

February 27th - Visit to *Palmerston* historic garden, Dangarsleigh Rd.

March date t.b.a - Visit *George Hewitt Memorial Arboretum*, Bellingen

For more information contact

President Bill Oates on woates@une.edu.au or Secretary Angela Sole on asole@auzzie.net or 0267711661. All meetings subject to weather.

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

Now - 26th April: Exhibition *An Edwardian Summer*, evocative photographs by Arthur Wigram Allen of Sydney including historic gardens Museum of Sydney, cnr. Phillip/Bridge St.s, Sydney, 9.30-5pm daily, \$7

Saturday 12th March: Easy Care Gardens fundraiser at *Mt Errington*, 1 Rosemead Rd, Hornsby. \$5 per person (children free) more info P7

19th March: *Lindesay* open (1834 house, 1960s+ garden) Australia's Open Garden Scheme Lindesay Ave, Darling Pt, 10-4.30, \$6

19-20th March: *Bronte House* garden open (AOGS), (1845 house & garden, 1990s 'refreshed'), 470 Bronte Rd., Bronte, 10-4, \$6;

16-17th April Collector's Plant Fair, Woodgreen, 27 Powells Road, Bilpin, 10-4pm, info at www.collectorsplantfair.com

18th April - 26th June: Exhibition *Carved Trees: Aboriginal Cultures of Central NSW* - Russell Black photographs from the Clifton Cattie Towle collection (1920-40s) of tapho/dendroglyphs. Mitchell Library, Macquarie Street, 10am-5pm, free.

18th June, 2-3.30pm talk by Stuart Read to the Friends of Rookwood Necropolis on rare plants of *Rookwood Necropolis*.

Open to visitors, bookings & venue directions: Robin Hawes - telephone: 9889 3899.

Don't forget to have a look at our website -
www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au It can now be used to check for updated details of events,
membership renewals, gift purchases and routine enquiries.

ARCHIVING FOR YATES - Murray Hook

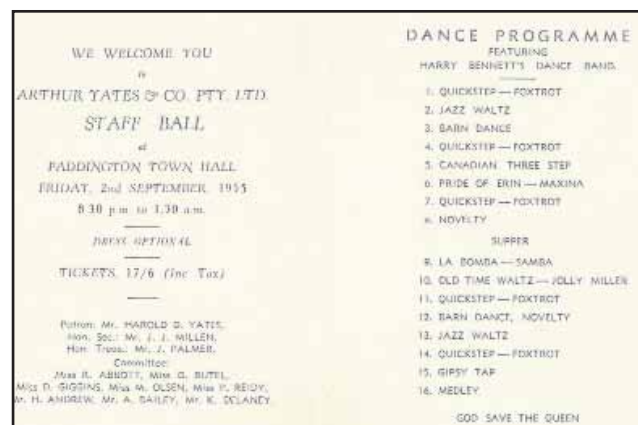


Illustrations of the Warehouses of Yates & Co in Manchester, Auckland and Sussex Street, Sydney

With my large gardener's hands clad in white cotton gloves I set out sorting and cataloguing material, carefully removing staples and metal paper clips and replacing them with plastic clips. Most of the material had been printed on cheap paper which has a high acid content and was not meant to last. Sheets of acid-proof tissue paper were used to separate and wrap delicate documents & photographs before they were placed in conservation boxes.

I found some very interesting treasures including old photograph albums of the family; former business premises; staff photographs and product development dating from the beginnings of the company in Australia 124 years ago. There were also large and very heavy old leather bound ledgers, account and minute books, all beautifully handwritten. I did wonder if computer-generated records of our time could hold one spellbound 100 years on!

In the collection a history of seeds in Australia from 1887 to the present can to be traced, the company early on being primarily concerned with the following categories: packets sold in stores around Australia, bulk quantities for commercial growers and for agriculture. I was surprised to learn that there were more than 100 seed companies in Sydney at the turn of the last century and amongst the resources were various packets in which seeds were sold and some of these still unopened and containing seeds. I sorted through collections of Yates 'Garden Guides' dating from 1895. It is company policy to retain at least 4 copies of each edition and I was lucky enough to find an extra copy from the year of my birth which Yates kindly presented to me on the completion. There were also *Seed Annuals* and *Catalogues* from 1899, *Winter Planting Lists*, *Short Lists*, a collection of *Staff Newsletters* and a good collection of other industry related magazines and publications. I remember seeing much about sweet pea varieties and their trial beds around town. Carnations, dahlias gladioli and chrysanthemums were very popular in years gone by and there was much about these. Information also included ever-popular roses, bulbs and orchids. Amongst the collection were also facts on fruit and vegetables with onions, tomatoes and strawberries featuring strongly.



One of the highlights was finding an invitation to the staff ball from the 1950s. I chuckled when I read that dress was 'optional'! On the reverse of the invitation card was the menu and along with other goodies the starters included 'Buttered sliced bread' and 'Sardines on toast.'

Through my association with the AGHS I was invited by Yates to carry out archiving work for their company. Being a horticulturist and knowing a little about Yates and their importance in the industry I jumped at the opportunity to learn more.

A very brief history of "Yates":

In 1826 George Yates opened a grocery and seed shop in Manchester, England and this enterprise was so successful that he set up another store selling seeds 3 years later. His eldest son went into the family business and the second son Arthur was sent to New Zealand as it was thought that the climate would be kinder to his frail health. On the 3 month long boat trip he kept a diary and a copy of this detailed log is in the archives and makes fascinating reading. After working for a few years on farms around NZ, Arthur saw great opportunities and set up a small shop in Auckland in 1883 where he sold seeds. Later he moved to Sydney and in 1887 leased premises in Sussex Street. He left his younger brother Ernest in charge in N.Z. and both businesses ran in conjunction until an amicable split took place in 1906. The Yates family ran the business until the 1980s and it is still Australian owned despite having had a succession of owners since then.

Though this significant collection which includes company records, documents, photographs and letters was catalogued some years ago, through time and with new material donated all had become a bit jumbled and difficult to source when required.

In other memorabilia I unearthed several medals presented to gardeners selected for excellence in various fields of expertise. There were also copies of *Mr Bear* book, published to foster a love of gardening in children, cross stitch kits illustrating Yates' range of flowers and vegetables and original watercolours and prints of various vegetable species. Old materials using metal and glass as templates for packaging and advertising products were fascinating and there was quite a lot of information on developing new Yates Products including prototypes. That this great, varied and interesting collection has survived intact over years of mergers and growth is a testament to management particularly in recent years.

It was a great pleasure to work with wonderful staff and special thanks to Judy Horton and Jeanne Villani for making this experience happen.

“The Little Mouse That Roared” - Rosemary Potts



Some of the crowd at the Save Fitzroy Gardens Rally



The El-Almein Fountain, Fitzroy Gardens

A lesser-known aspect of our branch's work is the amount of advocacy we do in any given year. Have a look on our website under *Sydney Branch News Update* to get a more detailed run down of the many diverse issues we have tackled.

As one of the last members (it seemed) staying home in Sydney during our recent Tasmanian conference I agreed to talk at what was to be a *small rally of a few residents* to save Fitzroy Gardens. This is the park adjacent to the El Alamein Fountain on Macleay Street, Kings Cross. Many of you will know it as a much loved and well used green space in the heart of the Cross. It has many different user groups who find it both accommodating and a green sanctuary from intense local streets and commercial outlets.

Sydney City Council unveiled plans to totally re-design/re-make the park and our branch wrote a submission registering our concerns at this. Our submission has been credited with causing the Council to pause and rethink the whole project before proceeding further.

Fitzroy Gardens' evolution mirrors the rich layers of history of the area since European settlement. It was originally part of Alexander Macleay's huge Elizabeth Bay estate and from about 1939 the area developed as a public park in several stages as sites became available (Its history is on Council's own website in the *Park Histories* section).

In 1971 Ilmar Berzins, perhaps Australia's first landscape architect employed by a local Council, contributed the last phase of park upgrade and redesign. His work included level changes, plantings and the 'geometric' bed shapes that echo the famous fountain's pools. Berzins endowed his designs with contemporary European modernist philosophy, providing a strong contrast to the traditional Council designs of the time. His works are rare - *Centennial Gardens*, *Hyde Park*; and *Arthur McElhone Reserve*, Elizabeth Bay are other examples. He worked for Sydney City Council from c.1951 to 1988, ultimately as Director of Parks and Recreation.

Allan Correy, former senior lecturer and Head of the Landscape Architecture program at Sydney University, has gone on record about this park and Berzins work. *Fitzroy Gardens are at the very highest level of architectural heritage significance. At that time in Sydney only Ilmar Berzins was working on that scale, with a sophisticated approach to modern art and design. He was the only trained landscape architect. Berzin's Fitzroy Gardens and Bob Woodward's El Alamein Fountain go together - to think of the fountain without the gardens is (like) considering Elizabeth Bay House without its harbour setting and garden. Berzins' hallmarks include plants that are spectacular in terms of foliage and are used purely as architectural forms.*

Tempe McGowan wrote in an article on Berzins (Monument 25, 1998) *He held the passionate belief that all people need to enjoy nature and that nature in turn can ameliorate the human temperament...His designs were socially responsive and typical of trends in international, modernist design culture in the way he created little arcadian retreats in the city wilderness.*

Walking around the gardens you can see how well this rare example of a '70s modernist landscape design works. Its strong structure and plantings form distinct garden-rooms that minimise individual user impact.

The proposed loss of so much mature vegetation that is an integral part of the design and contributes so much to the success of the park is also alarming. Some of the plant material in the gardens is also of botanical interest and could be construed to refer to the land formerly being the public entrance to Alexander Macleay's famous Elizabeth Bay House garden. An example is the giant *Yucca elephantipes* near the fountain, Lord Howe Island palms and African tulip trees (*Spathodea campanulata*).

The branch thinks the reserve has potential heritage value in its own right. I understand that the National Trust is also looking into the park's significance.

An important discussion we should have is about the value of rare modernist landscapes in NSW and the work of Berzins. The relative lack of surviving designs and documentation of his work conspire to deprive Berzins of his rightful place in garden history. It is also strange that the City Council who *trail-blazed the employment of our first landscape architect* seem content to destroy Fitzroy's heritage fabric in the rush to re-make the park.

The day of the rally (6/11/10) dawned to pouring rain that magically cleared about half an hour before start time. This was wonderful because up until then no one much except for a few market stallholders were in the gardens.

Kings Cross people really know how to hold a rally! They got the PA system going, someone sang the Rally song *Lets tear down Fitzroy Gardens* in a gravel voice, Jimmy Barnes style, with keyboards. People started to stream in from everywhere. At least 500 plus was the count. What a wonderful diversity of people, displaying that timeless quality that is the essence of the Cross. Mad hats, bikies, men in kilts - a scene from the Village People!

As first speaker I was introduced as *the little mouse that roared* meaning AGHS! I detailed the park's history and our concerns. This was followed by a number of passionate speakers. Malcolm Turnbull detailed concerns, closing the Rally. Clearly I was punching above my weight!

Council since decided to defer the project until new submissions can be taken. These closed on 31/01/2011. Let us hope this is a genuine attempt to re-think the whole project (for more info, google *Save Fitzroy Gardens* for a wealth of material and also U-tube videos from the Rally).

How do soils work? How can we restore degraded soils?

Gardeners, farmers – we all need to know more about what goes on in our soils: how they work. Australia has some of the world's oldest, most-eroded soils on earth. And we're busy mining, cropping and concreting them apace. Yet how much do we know about how they function: how topsoil and fertility form. How do we continue to produce food and fibre from less soil?

Our first 2011 event is a talk by Associate Professor Peter McGee, a mycologist from Sydney University. We know microbes decompose organic material; their other roles are poorly understood. Peter's unit is examining the functions of groups of microbes to clarify three important questions important to sustainability: development of soil function in mine spoil, carbon sequestration in soil and modifying soil pH in agricultural soils acidified by nitrogen fixation. Our long-term goals are to select and inoculate relevant microbes to degraded soils in order to return them to a functional state and to enhance our response to global climate change.

AM fungi are critical to aggregating and storing minerals in soil: selected isolates from NSW and Qld are being tested as potential tools to enhance food and fibre production through restoring mine sites and degraded agricultural soils. As one of the world's major food producers and an important mining country, this is vital research.

Fungi found in plant roots appear to contribute to a wide range of soil functions including transforming and storing carbon, and ameliorating soil acidity. Peter's unit has a collection of some 900 fungi isolated from healthy plant roots. Some appear to be involved with aggregating soil and may have a role in the forming biofilms. Modern scanning technologies are used to clarify the spread and productivity of soil endophytes.

Different landscapes, different soils, different histories:

exploring the interactions between Sydney's historical growth and its bushland landscapes

Our March event is a talk by Doug Benson, Senior Plant Ecologist with the National Herbarium of NSW at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. Doug has spent over 30 years field surveying, studying and documenting the mega-diversity of the Sydney region's plants. He intimately knows the distribution, diversity and threats facing our unique assemblages of plants, both on sandstone and shale.

Author (with Jocelyn Howell) of *Taken for granted: the bushland of Sydney and its suburbs* (1990) and *Sydney's Bushland: more than meets the eye* (2000) and (with Lyn McDougall) *Rare bushland plants of Western Sydney* (c1991), Doug has long sought to improve our understanding and care for our flora. Some members may recall him talking to a joint AGHS: Marrickville Heritage Society event a few years back about the remaining natural heritage of the Cooks River Valley – fascinating! Others may recall Craig Burton's keynote address to the 2004 Sydney national AGHS conference about Sydney's bushland and how human settlement since 1788 has impacted it: a theme Doug has focussed on for years.

Sydney's landscapes range from coastal sandstone headlands and rocky ridges and plateaus around estuarine inlets to gently undulating country on the Wianamatta Shale soils of the Cumberland Plain, west of Parramatta. Sydney's vegetation is closely related to its soils and while we may regard the well-known Banksias and Waratahs of the sandstone soils as the characteristic Sydney flora, the quite different grassy woodlands of the Cumberland Plain with their less showy herbs and grasses area also an important component of Sydney's biodiversity. Indeed these were the areas most sought out as grazing lands by the first European colonists and they have been severely altered by 200 years of rural and later suburban landuse.

Using historical accounts from explorers and botanists and clues provided from surviving remnants of vegetation, this talk will explore what these different parts of Sydney were like 200 years ago, how they have subsequently changed and how we can use this knowledge to maintain our biodiversity in the future.

April event - Kokoda Track Memorial walkway led by David Frecker

David Frecker is a lawyer who has had a long personal and professional association with Papua New Guinea, since he first visited the country as a student in 1969. He lived and worked there for extended periods in the 1970s (at the time when Papua New Guinea became independent) and again in the 1990s. He continues to visit the country frequently. He first walked the Track in 1992, which was the 50th anniversary of the wartime Kokoda campaign and before "walking the Track" had become popular. David found this a moving experience, as he learnt first-hand about the endurance and sacrifice of the young Australians who faced the Japanese in 1942 and the dedication of the native Papuans in assisting them. The Track has since become a well-trodden pilgrimage for today's generation of Australians. With a small group of friends (average age of 60), David walked it again in 2009 to re-live the experience. David is also a director of the Kokoda Track Foundation, an Australian based charitable organisation which seeks to give something back to the Papua New Guineans along the Track and in the surrounding areas through educational and health programs, agricultural support programs and efforts to preserve and develop the Kokoda Track as a sustainable eco-tourism destination benefitting the people of the areas. The Foundation raises funds by various means, including through its annual Ralph Honner Oration Dinner, named in memory of the inspirational commander of the 39th Battalion which first confronted the Japanese at Kokoda.



David & his personal porter, Hobert, at the end of the trek.

National Archaeology Week event: Birchgrove wander

Our May event is an opportunity to discover new & recent waterfront parks, an inspiring laneway garden & a couple of charming private gardens. *Birchgrove Park* is almost all that remains of the once grand *Birchgrove House* and estate. The bay's reclamation and progressive subdivision led to a dense but varied suburb. Nearby industrial sites - *Mort's Dock* and the cluster of oil tanks dominating Ballast Point dominated it since the mid-19th c.

Mort's Dock was the largest private enterprise (dry dock) in Australia helping establish the colony and Sydney as Australia's premier port. Ballast Point was quarried and from c1920-2002 a depot storing imported oil in massive tanks. Their becoming public parks reflects inner Sydney gentrification.

A laneway garden shows what you can achieve on 'waste' land in eight years. Lantana and rubbish are now vegetables, fruit and flowers delighting neighbours. And we visit a couple of private gardens: one a hidden courtyard down a small lane, with borrowed views of *Birchgrove Park's* trees. The other laid out around a Victorian house on a sandstone cliff with wide views and richly planted.

Easy Care Gardening Fundraiser Day at *Mount Errington* - Wendy McCready



Mt Errington is much as it was when it was built in 1897 for Sydney jeweler Oscar Roberts. It is an Arts and Crafts style two-storey brick and stucco house with slate roof, steep gables, and semi-circular arched front entrance in a sandstone base. A wide verandah runs along two sides. An enclosed verandah is on the west and an unfenced verandah at the rear.

A coach house, now garage is in the western part of its garden. Early plantings included a *Royal oak* (c1930), a large *Strelitzia nicolae* dominating the northwest corner and a *Bunya pine* (c1900). Also of note are the smooth bark *Angophora costata*, red bloodwood and c1950/60s trees including *Liquidambar* (c16m) and lemon-scented gum. More recently the garden has been under planted with native shrubs with more traditional Azaleas.

Mt Errington is on the highest site in Hornsby, overlooking Old Man Valley (named for *old man* kangaroos found by timber getters) and across to the next ridge where another historic home, *Mt Wilga*, was clearly visible before homes were built and other trees planted across Rosemead Road.

Oscar wanted to live near the bush and at a higher altitude and the newly-built railway meant he could commute to town. He was driven by private coach to Hornsby, travelled to Milsons Point (the end of the line) then a ferry to town.

As the President of the Hornsby Progress Association, he was one of five councilors appointed to the new Hornsby Shire Council. He failed the election. Tom Richmond in his 2007 book 1906: The Birth of Hornsby Shire suggests that *Hornsby had a large contingent of railway workers and others who would have regarded themselves as working class and they may well have felt that their best representative was not one ... driven to the station each morning from his mansion in his private coach.*

Oscar was successful in the next serving until 1917 when he retired. One of his major achievements was to make sure that land was set aside for Hornsby Park.

Easy Care Gardening Inc is a service for the frail aged and people with a disability on a pension. Teams of volunteers weed, prune, mulch and make gardens safe and tidy and easy care so vulnerable people can stay in their own homes. ECG has been operating for 22 years in Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai areas and in Ryde and Hunters Hill for nearly 10 years.

ECG always needs new volunteers to meet the increasing call for service from an aging population. A Garden & Market Day is being held in *Mt Errington's* grounds to attract new volunteers (and as a fundraiser: garden tools wear out!). A number of speakers include: Tim Entwisle, Government Botanist; ABC weatherman Graham Creed; gardening writers and radio personalities Judy Horton, Meredith Kirton, Jennifer Stackhouse and Helen Young. Stalls with gourmet food, unique products and entertainment include a wildlife animal display and a performance by acapella chorus SydneySiders Express.

Weekends with Simon Marnie on 702 ABC Sydney is hosting the Saturday 6am to 12 noon program from *Mt Errington*.

Where: Mt Errington, 1 Rosemead Road, Hornsby **When:** 12 March 2011, 9am to 3pm **Entry:** \$5 per person (children free)



Oscar Roberts

Letter to the editor of Grenfell Record from Ian Rufus - a happy participant of the *Iandra* weekend in September last year

Happy visitors to Grenfell

I came with the Garden History Society to Grenfell on the weekend. It was wonderful to see the countryside so productive after all these hard years.

I was very impressed with the attention to history in the town, especially for one of its size. It is a great thing for the town as well as good marketing. I spent a small fortune at the CWA shop with all their local produce. Same at the veg shop and the Grenfell butcher. I'm working on exporting their meat to me in Lithgow.

Being a target shooter as well as a history buff, I nicked off early for a shot with the Grenfell Rifle Club and was warmly welcomed. After checking my credentials and ensuring safety, they let me have a shot and encouraged me to stay all day. However, I had a date with *Iandra* that was not to be missed.

I also played truant for a bit and went to the races especially to hear the town band. You have such a wonderful lot of musicians, all happy and focussed and it was also nice that the neighbours from Cowra mucked in as well.

I stayed at the Railway for 3 nights and of course slept and ate well. A beaut, clean, friendly country pub. Bought every meat tray ticket I could, but still could not win that great Grenfell meat. Met locals all weekend and talked my head off. *I shall return.*

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Although difficult to pinpoint dates, Lyons Road in Five Dock and Leylands Parade in Belmore in Sydney both sport Hill's fig avenues from the late 1930s/early 1940s that could also be Sesquicentenary plantings.

Other prominent Sydney plantings are in Randwick (several streets), Edgecliff Road, Mona Road in Darling Point and the northern part of the Esplanade at Balmoral.

Hill's figs were popular in the 1920s-50s era as street, avenue, park and specimen trees.

Unsurprisingly with pressures on road corridors for more lanes of traffic, parking spaces, wider drives, services upgrades - any tree in a road corridor or nature strip is under increased threat today.

Northwood Street, Camperdown is another example of an avenue of Hills figs under pressure of removal, thwarted so far only by vigorous resident opposition.

The main street of Sawtell on the north coast has two magnificent Hill's figs down its centre, under-planted with other species, as a major feature and recently planted another three Hill's figs to their avenue - a model Wauchope may yet emulate. Ducting services in dedicated trenches with root barriers is a 'tool' Councils might consider, (such as Brisbane City Council's model scheme for Queen Street mall's bold choice of planting a Queensland kauri avenue right down the middle, with coordinated, trenched/ducted services, proper planting pit/trench soil preparation, drainage: major work but only once!

1926-7 is the date the famed Hill's fig avenue *Lovers' Lane* in Sydney's Hyde Park was planted, as part of Norman Weekes' competition design. Despite problems with fill and fungi and some being removed, this avenue continues to delight strollers, romantic or functional and forms the spine of this, our oldest urban park.

Hill's figs are under attack recently because of their invasive root systems. This is a large, vigorous rainforest tree specie better suited to generous road corridors, large parks or estates than small urban or suburban streets or gardens. They have structural problems such as bark inclusions definitely no more or less than any tree species left unpruned or untrained in tight growing environments - this type of stock standard

statement 'bark inclusion' is damaging when used generally and was inaccurate information in our situation and made it so very hard for our community to convince Council and there have been failures of mature trees in Queens Park, Sydney.

Woollahra Municipal Council in 2009 had a saga over Hills figs on New Beach Road, Darling Point bounding *Yarranabbe Park* - with some residents claiming the trees must go (to reveal 'their' views of harbour). Yet they define the park and date to the 1920s. Originally a continuous avenue extended along this road.

Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens and Crematorium removed a number of Hills figs recently because of invasive roots causing trip hazards, dislodging paths and walls.

San Francisco still uses them as street trees but with careful management including use of root barriers. Spain and the Canary Islands use Hill's figs proudly in town squares, plazas and streets. Beirut sports Hill's figs in similar situations.

CityRail recently removed several Hill's figs off the island railway platform at Wahroonga station, where roots were lifting paving creating potentially deadly trip hazards (and wonderful deep shade and rain shelter). They are being progressively replaced with blueberry ash: a narrower, taller, slower growing tree. Fig-loving locals are still grumbling. Newcastle City Council in December decided to retain 14 Hill's figs otherwise proposed for removal in Laman Street flanking its Civic Square. Long public opposition to Council's previous proposal for their removal forced a dramatic turn around, like Wauchope. Some were planted in the 1920s and others 1957 in conjunction with the opening of the Civic Square Art Gallery & Library complex. Again they make a major visual and spatial contribution to this civic 'heart' of NSW's second-largest city.

