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## Newsletter June – 2010

### WEST AUSTRALIAN BRANCH



Hello, members! This newsletter gives notice of the Annual General Meeting, a slide night of gardens of Rome at Challenger TAFE to be held in August (with further details to be given at the AGM) and a talk on Louis Shapcott (1877-1941) and rockeries to be held at Yanchep on Sunday October 24.

We hope you are enjoying the wetter weather in Perth, although some inland parts are still very dry. By the time this newsletter reaches you perhaps a cold front will have moved through with decent falls of rain.

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July, 12pm at Muresk Agricultural College. Speaker: Bruce Bott**

**Cost: gold coin donation for morning tea, \$30 for lunch. Students \$15.**

**RSVP 15<sup>th</sup> July to Joy Hill 9386 7438 or by email [joyhill@bigpond.net.au](mailto:joyhill@bigpond.net.au)**

This year we are planning a drive to the Avon Valley for our AGM. We plan to meet at Morby Cottage outside Northam at 10.30am for morning tea with the Northam Historical Society, and travel in convoy to Muresk Agricultural College for the AGM and lunch at 12pm. Following lunch, Bruce Bott will speak about the history of Muresk, including the involvement of the Dempster family. There will be time to walk around the grounds and perhaps return via Spencers Brook tavern, currently undergoing renovation.

This year under the rules of the Australian Garden History Society's constitution, Sue Monger must step down from the committee as she has exceeded the permitted two terms of three years. Sue has been a wonderful Chair, Secretary, Membership Secretary and Branch Representative, not to mention a driving force of the WA Branch and marvellous caterer. Members are therefore asked to consider filling the roles of Membership Secretary and/or Branch Secretary.

A nomination form is attached to the Notice of Annual General Meeting. Nominations should be received by 11<sup>th</sup> July to be voted upon at the AGM. John Viska will continue to serve on the committee and as an elected member on the National Management Committee. Gillian Lilleyman is happy to continue as Treasurer and Caroline Grant as Chair, taking up the Branch Representative role. However all positions will be declared open at the AGM.

If you can offer space in your car for another member or guest, or are unable to drive yourself, please contact Joy Hill (see contact details above). Guests are welcome to attend for the same price as members. There will be marmalade for sale and door prizes which will include a year's free membership of AGHS.

#### RECENT EVENT

**Who gives a fig? The Cloisters fig tree and Florence Hummerston Reserve, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

We were fortunate in having Marion Blackwell, landscape architect and botanist, present at the Cloisters fig tree on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May. Marion was instrumental in securing the future of the Port Jackson fig tree (*Ficus rubiginosa*) next to the Cloisters around 1972 when Mount Newman House was being built.<sup>1</sup> The roots of the tree were cut twelve feet out on three sides during construction works. On the fourth side was a wall. The architect in charge, Don Bailey, noticed that the tree was stressed: the last metre of its branches hung like pendants. At the time, the Cloisters fig tree was one of the largest, if not the largest tree in St George's Terrace, and an important landmark. Concerned that it might die, he rang Marion Blackwell.

<sup>1</sup> The date 1972 is taken from G. Seddon and D. Ravine, *A City and its Setting*, (1986), Fremantle Arts Centre Press, p, 285. The source quoted is I. Molyneux, *Looking Around Perth* (1981), East Fremantle: Wescolour Press (for the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (WA Chapter)).

Marion had been doing research on reducing stress on transplanted trees in coastal conditions, and had obtained a polymer called Acropol used in Russia to deter frostbite. She arranged for the tree to be sprayed with Acropol, providing it with a 'reverse rain-coat' to conserve water in its tissues, and arranged for regular watering. When it had recovered, Marion called on Murray Turner (WA's first professionally trained tree surgeon) to have the dead ends of branches removed and the tree reshaped to best fit its new surroundings, giving it no more than a fifty per cent chance of survival.

The Cloisters was constructed in 1858 with a grant from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and with funds from the first bishop of Perth, Bishop Matthew Blagden Hale.<sup>2</sup> It was established as the first secondary school in Western Australia, the forerunner of Hale School. The Port Jackson fig tree was planted when the eastern part of the Cloisters building became a private residence in the 1880s, the home of Mr and Mrs William Stephens. Mrs Stephens was given a small tree in a pot and planted it at the Cloisters about 1893. After Marion had saved the tree she was contacted and thanked by a grandson of Mrs Stephens, in a letter which is available to read in the Battye Library.

The fact that the tree did survive and continues to contribute greatly to the character and amenity of the Cloisters 40 years on, has ensured another generation of Western Australians and visitors have enjoyed this large, gracious tree. Marion Blackwell's efforts show just how worthwhile it is to conserve our old trees.

After Marion's presentation we walked up to Florence Hummerston Reserve, known as St George's Terrace Reserve when it became a public garden in 1898. The park was granted to the City of Perth in 1970 and later named for Florence Hummerston, the city's first female councillor (1951-68). Phil Palmer, Landscape Architect for the National Trust (WA), and John Viska showed attractive images of the reserve in the past. Whilst traffic demands have truncated one corner of the reserve, we admired the original plantings of camphor laurels (*Cinnamomum camphora*), Norfolk Island hibiscus (*Lagunaria patersonii*), Washington cotton palms and later plantings of *Jacaranda mimosaeifolia* and lawn which offer shade and comfort for visitors and workers. The fountain in the reserve was moved there from Stirling Gardens in 1995, in memory of Sir Charles McNess. He was the philanthropist who gave the State funds to provide employment in developing the national park at Yanchep during the 1930s Depression.<sup>3</sup> We will hear more about him in October. A statue of Alexander Forrest (1849-1901), explorer and city father, stood in the reserve from 1903 until 1916 when it was moved to Stirling Gardens.

### **PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION OF EARLY PERTH GARDENS**

Following the difficulties in ascertaining whether or not we would receive a grant this year from the City of Perth, and making the decision to postpone the exhibition rather than bear the cost alone, news came that we would receive a grant of \$7000 after all. The proviso was that the money be spent before 30 June 2011. As the exhibition subcommittee had tentatively re-booked the ground floor of the Perth Town Hall for May 2011, this works out well. The grant money of \$3000 from the National Management Committee of the AGHS remains available. The subcommittee will now prepare for the exhibition, the launch on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May, and production of a catalogue. Costs are expected to be approximately \$800 more than the grants promised. It is hoped to raise sufficient funds to cover the shortfall and produce a publication as a record of this event.

### **NEW MEMBERS**

A warm welcome to Mary Ross and Dianne Thompkins. We look forward to them joining us at our events.

### **ELMSTOCK TEA FUNDRAISER**

The success of our tea party in March has led to an offer by Hilary White of Elmstock Tea to supply tea to AGHS WA at wholesale prices, so that we can make a profit on the mark up for our exhibition. The retail prices are as follows:

English Breakfast tea blend 1kg (4 x 250g foil packets) - \$30

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Heritage Council of Western Australia assessment, *The Cloisters*. Go to <http://register.heritage.wa.gov.au> to the places database and type 'Cloisters'.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography (online edition) entry for Sir Charles McNess (1852-1938), <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/adbonline.htm>

Great grandfather tea (single estate broken orange pekoe) 250g – \$13  
Afternoon tea 200g - \$13

If you would like to order some tea, please call Caroline on 9384 3414. You can bring payment, either a cheque made out to Australian Garden History Society (WA Branch), or cash to the AGM, and collect your order then.

#### **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

##### ***The Vision Splendid in Launceston, Tasmania, 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> November***

Those who applied to attend the national conference should be notified shortly, if confirmation has not already been received. In a bid to satisfy a greater number of applicants, the NMC decided to increase the number of participants from 200 to 250. The optional day, pre-conference and post-conference tours are all full.

#### **NATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT**

- The NMC met in Sydney on 6<sup>th</sup> June. There was much discussion on the heavy bookings for the conference in Tasmania and the implications for future NMC conferences. Whilst a large enough venue may be available for the lectures, suitable gardens to visit and availability of accommodation, particularly in regional areas, may be a limiting factor. No doubt this will be a hotly debated topic at the AGHS AGM on Sunday 6 November!
- Restoration of Historic Gardens: review of the guidelines included a suggestion that the criteria also include conservation/archiving of items about gardens i.e. plans.
- Avenues of Honour: Stuart Read has compiled a comprehensive list of known Avenues. Those in Kings Park, Albany, Esperance and recently, Mosman Park, are documented for WA.
- Autumn tour: Trisha Dixon and Jackie Courmadias led two Edna Walling tours in Victoria with an excellent financial result for AGHS.
- Membership: there are 1552 members nationally, 75 in WA. There will be a small increase in the annual subscription rate towards the end of 2010.
- Journal: Editors' proposal for a budget increase to for full colour printing was agreed.
- Future Development Working Group: Foster links with scientific bodies working in horticulture i.e. universities, TAFE colleges, museums, botanic gardens. Register of historic gardens: states to draw up and maintain a list. Keeping up with and relevant use of digital technology was taken into consideration.
- Lost Gardens of Adelaide: a research project by undertaken by Richard Heathcote, Carrick Hill, using aerial photographs from SA University Geography Department.
- Publicity and Membership: how best to raise the profile of AGHS? Use of electronic and radio media, joint ventures, free events, Branches to nominate a media contact and notify sub-committee Chair Lynne Walker.

#### **OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST**

##### **Trisha Dixon on ABC Radio National**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June, members may have heard Trisha Dixon being interviewed on *The Book Show* on ABC Radio National about the influence of landscapes on writers. Trisha is a member of our National Management Committee and also tour leader extraordinaire. The interview was rather succinct. In an email exchange with Trisha afterwards, Trisha said how much she had enjoyed giving the talk on 'Literary Landscapes' at the National Library in Canberra that evening. You can hear the interview by going to the ABC Radio National website: [www.abc.net.au/rn](http://www.abc.net.au/rn) and typing in 'Trisha Dixon'.

##### **Araluen Botanic Park Rose Pruning Demonstration**

It's that time of the year, so sharpen your secateurs and head to Araluen where members of the Rose Society of WA will give informal demonstrations and answer questions on growing and caring for roses. Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July, between 11am and 3pm. Croyden Rd, Roleystone. Further information on 08 94961171 or [www.araluenbotanicpark.com.au](http://www.araluenbotanicpark.com.au)

##### **Australia's Open Garden Scheme**

The scheme opens its West Australian season on 21-22 August. The 2010-2011 Guide will be available early August from newsagents or by ordering online. Visit [www.opengarden.org.au](http://www.opengarden.org.au)

## MUNDARING WEIR AND FRED JACOBY PARK PHOTOGRAPHS – CHAIR’S REQUEST

There is a heritage strategy currently being undertaken by the Water Corporation at Mundaring Weir, which involves the Portagabra site (where the Department of Environment and Conservation Hills and the Perth Hills Centre is located), and your Chair has been asked to participate in documenting the landscape component. While on a reconnaissance of the Weir area and Fred Jacoby Park I noticed some changes to the gardens, and wondered if any members would have old photographs which they would care to share, as it would seem that some garden history advocacy might be a good idea. The committee has recently written to the Chair of the Heritage Council to suggest that the category of horticulture should be added to the Directory of Consultants. We await a response.



**Above:** Marion Blackwell speaking to AGHS WA members about the Cloisters Port Jackson fig tree, standing next to the Cloisters building.

**Left:** The Cloisters fig tree photographed from the north-east corner of the Cloisters building.

### 2011 AGHS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

This will be held in Maryborough, north of Brisbane, 26-28 August.

In **2012** we'll gather in Ballarat, in the Victorian goldfields. The proposed dates are 9-11 November

To catch up on what other branches are doing, and on National Office information, visit the Australian Garden History Society website at [www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au)