



Sydney & Northern NSW Branch

Branch News – July–August 2016

Tony Kanellos was our guest in late June and he shared with us his years of work reawakening the Santos Museum of Economic Botany in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. In 2009 the building was reinvented - returned to an earlier configuration and disposition while becoming a space where plants, people and culture come together through art, science and nature. He is determined that the Museum “stay on message” and I believe that is a lesson we might heed.

Our walk through the Female Factory in North Parramatta was a great success. This is a very special site indeed with a collection of buildings by significant architects in repose on the banks of the Parramatta River – except for the regular shrieks of the bats from the nearby colony it is calm – mothballed awaiting its new adaptation. We all assisted in the identification of significant trees and Stuart Read was able to suggest likely associations to earlier directors of our botanic garden and other events.

A female factory is a colonial concept and the remnant spaces echo with women’s stories from a dark past. Along the remnant road leading to the penitentiary women and children would be brought from the ship docked at Port Jackson – only after the government took the best workers and the moneyed settlers their pick. The pregnant or children or the unwanted trudged up from the river. One in seven Australians can trace the genealogy back to one of the women incarcerated at the Female Factory. The strongest image I took from the tour was of the intensity of the women, their solidarity and their irrepressibility. The authorities shaved the rusticated stone facing of the buildings to eliminate any foothold that might facilitate escape. In 1827 the women staged a riot or revolt demanding more food – the response was a reduction of rations and so they broke free, flying through the gates “like bees from a hive!” There are plans by the government to introduce new buildings within these sacred confines. Gay Hendriksen, our leader, called it the sister site to Hyde Park Barracks - she unfolded the place where men might have come in search of a wife; women might learn a skill such as knitting or spinning. This is surely a sacred site for women - a place worthy of protection and conservation and an extraordinary opportunity to get it right.

There is a petition you will find on the website <http://www.parramattafemalefactoryfriends.com.au/> - you might consider whether you would support this group in seeking the Parliament of Australia to come to the aid of the party.

In Sydney the big issues in advocacy are “Sydney Modern” and the proposed ‘land grab’ by the Art Gallery of NSW of part of the Domain - public land; the proposed redevelopment of Juniper Hall in Paddington for which the committee has lodged an objection with Woollahra Council advocating that they refuse the application to reinstate shops in front of and below the garden; and a letter to Waverley Council to encourage suitably trained professionals be engaged to manage the Tamarama Gully.

This year is the anniversary of Charles Fraser, first colonial botanist at the Botanic Garden, Sydney. Thirty-one species of native plants have been named in his honour and his grave is in a forlorn state. Fraser’s gravestone, in St. John's Cemetery, Parramatta, is worn and hard to decipher and part of the stone appears to be missing. Mr Fraser died at 43 with no living relatives in Australia. The Society has offered to facilitate and fund a plaque that will interpret his grave and legacy. We intend to have an excursion next year to mark the event.

Happily, we look forward to visiting the much-anticipated exhibitions with a garden theme. Now on at the Museum of Sydney is *Florilegium: Sydney's Painted Garden*, curated by Colleen Morris and in early September at the State Library of NSW will be, *Planting Dreams: Shaping Australian Gardens*, curated by Richard Aitken. Both of these have publications partly funded by AGHS and there will be special events for members and their guests. Check our website for details.

If you have any suggestions you would like the committee to consider, please feel free to contact me – we do appreciate the feedback.

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