



FACUS

February 2018

The Quarterly Magazine of the Friends of the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens



In this Issue: Director's Report * President's Report * Bicentennial Book Launch * 2017 Guides' Conference Report * Favourite Garden Icon * More Gardens' History * Wonderful Wisley * Cacti and Succulents * ANPS Conference 2018 * Friends' News

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Our Cover

Symbols of Summer: Sunflowers outside the
Conservatory

Photo: Mike Maskrey

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From The Editor's Desk

Within the RTBG, the word on everybody's lips this New Year is Bicentennial. This is reflected in the Director's Report, where he lays out the changes that are taking place to mark the 200-year journey of the Gardens since 1818. Many of these changes are to be seen in physical structures that have arrived or are emerging in the Gardens, such as the 'Hub' and the Lily Pads. Other changes involve shifts in emphasis on staffing and the way the Gardens are to be promoted to the outside world. The President's Report takes up this theme by examining the various roles played by the Friends in the joint venture that we are all undertaking. Linked to the Bicentennial is the book launch for the book entitled *The Gardens, Celebrating Tasmania's Botanical Treasure 1818-2018*. The launch took place in December 2017. A brief report appears in this issue.

Also in this issue are a number of noteworthy articles. As previously promised, Louise Rainbow, our official delegate to the 2017 Guides Conference, held last year in Canberra, provides us with a full report of what happened. These conferences, held every two years, are a most worthwhile experience, and I would urge everyone interested in guiding in botanical gardens to get on board for the next conference in 2019 in King's Park, Perth. Jenny Parrott continues the journey through the Garden's past. This article particularly interested me as it deals with a time when those in charge recognised the importance of gardens for collecting, conserving and research. It was also a time when interaction with other botanical gardens was getting underway, with specimens both coming in from elsewhere and being sent outwards to other locations. Stephen Ross has an obvious passion for cacti and succulents and in his article he traces the development of the interest in this group of plants within Hobart. Stephen deals with the origins of the Cactus House at the RTBG, and its subsequent demise and the relocation of specimens to their present site. I have provided an article on one of the most fascinating and diverse gardens in England: the RHS Garden at Wisley in Surrey. I hope that you are able to share my enthusiasm through the images I have included. The favourite garden icon this time is the statue of the Victorian gardener that stands outside the Friends' Cottage. Aina Dambitis provides us with a report on the Conference of the Australian Native Plants Society recently held in Tasmania.

The Friends' News records the final General Meeting for 2017 and announces the first General Meeting for 2018. The Garden's Bicentennial is now well under way and I hope that the Friends of the RTBG are carried forward on a wave of enthusiasm for the great changes that are taking place, while at the same time exhibiting a great pride in what has taken place during the previous 200 years.

Mike Maskrey

Director's Report

We are now officially in our Bicentenary Year: what an achievement.

It has once again been an extremely busy period since the last report with everyone from staff through to volunteers and contractors hard at work. A big thankyou to all the staff, Friends and all volunteers for all your efforts, they are much appreciated. This includes preparing and maintaining the Gardens, managing multiple projects simultaneously with preparation for the Bicentenary as well as doing business as usual with the busy season well into full swing, as can be seen from the visitor numbers.

Speaking of which, visitor numbers for the first six months were up fairly substantially compared the 2016 figures (214,000 compared to 193,000 for the same period). Visits for the months of October, November and December were all up substantially, with a record number in December of 61,000, which was more than previous year which also included some 8,000 people who attended the Carols in the Gardens, which was not held in the Gardens in 2017.

The building contractors, Macquarie Builders commenced work on the Lily Pads (*below*) on

30th October. Work has progressed well, despite a number of unexpected delays in relation to material supply and steel fabrication and galvanising. The installation of all timber work, including the decking boards is expected to be completed by mid-January. Fabrication of the balustrading is currently underway, with the projected installation of the balustrading and lighting to follow, which will see the construction completed by the end of January 2018.



Delivery and placement of the container for the Visitor Services Hub (*above*) took place on 30 November and

after some very careful manoeuvring into place, work commenced on the final fit-out. Electricity and internet services were connected, installation of external timber cladding and the construction of a timber deck took place over the following three weeks.

We are aware that the period of construction and implementation has been challenging for both staff and volunteers, particularly as the project has moved at such a pace that communication has not always been as timely or comprehensive as we would have liked.

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We did however need the Visitor Services Hub as soon as possible with the busy season being in full swing and the Bicentenary year starting. This is an ongoing project, and I am sure there will be more challenges ahead as the area continues to be developed, but we appreciate your patience and ongoing commitment as we focus on improving our infrastructure and experience for visitors to the Gardens. Next steps will see improved way finding and information signage in the area as well as more visible and eye-catching donations boxes.

Already the Visitor Services Hub is proving to be a great first go-to point for visitors to the Gardens, where they can receive a warm welcome and visitor information from our dedicated volunteers, and are also able make venue hire bookings, purchase tickets to events and tours, as well as purchase plants and merchandise from the Visitor Services Team .

The Sustainable Learning Centre had work commence on site on 29 November 2017 and to date the underground plumbing works are complete and the electricians have completed their subsurface works. The builder has also poured the building slab, thus construction of walls of the additional toilets and storeroom will start shortly. The revised completion date is the end February 2018.

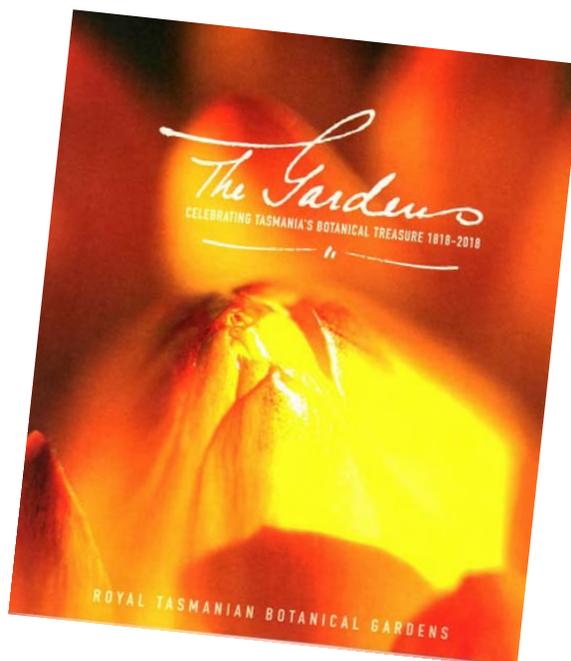
A sudden resignation of the Visitor Services Coordinator has created an opportunity to review the requirements and skills in the position of the Visitor Services function of the organisation and to broaden its scope.. Although this has created some short-term pressure on the team and continuity of processes, an Expression of Interest is underway to recruit someone for the position for six months while the longer term needs are reviewed and acted upon.

The Bicentennial book, *The Gardens: Celebrating Tasmania's National Treasure 1818 – 2018*, was launched by the Premier on Thursday 7 December and initial sales have been strong, with positive feedback regarding the product. The Gatekeepers Cottage now holds a new

exhibition based on the Bicentenary Book. RTBG and DPIPWE staff together with members of the Friends of the RTBG developed and installed the exhibition in time for the book launch. The exhibition covers the history, community and conservation aspects of the book. Many thanks to Joan, Jenny and the Friends committee for all their help.

Ongoing planning of the Bicentenary continues with the Events Calendar containing a mix of cultural and community elements aimed at broadening the reach and profile of the Gardens' activities. The product range available in the year is also in development and the major projects are underway. Stakeholders such as Tourism Tasmania are also being briefed to identify opportunities for cooperation and sharing of assets through various channels. In December, we printed the first iteration of a revised information brochure for the Gardens. Once again, the timelines for this project were condensed due to the need to have the product ready for distribution prior to Christmas. Not only does the new style reflect the brand work that many of our Friends and volunteers contributed to in mid-2017, it also brings a more contemporary feel to the visitor experience in line with similar tourism products (including Melbourne and Sydney Botanic Gardens maps). A number of compromises were required to meet these deadlines including the cover image, and an image shoot is in development to assist with future versions. In addition,

the larger versions of the maps at the gates will incorporate additional detail and information. The Visitor Brochure and map will be complemented by the upcoming developments of signage and information at the Visitor Hub and throughout the Gardens.



The public season of Aladdin has commenced (*right*) and we enjoy the squeals of delight from the children of families attending the play. This is a contrast to the mindfulness that was enjoyed by participants over three days of Spoon Carving workshops in Wombat One from 19 -21 January. We will also host a family music festival on Australia Day and then the 20 year anniversary season of Shakespeare in the Gardens commences on 9 February, with *Romeo and Juliet* taking on an Australian Twist in this year's production. On Sunday the 9th of February, the RTBG is teaming up with MONA to host a book launch with Aaron Bertelsen from Great Dixter in the UK. Mark Fountain will MC and engage in a Q&A with Aaron, as well as promote the Bicentenary of the Gardens. These events are just the start of a busy year, and we look forward to engaging with our Friends throughout the year.



Images provided by the Editor

Gary Davies,

Director



President of Friends, Joan Booth and RTBG Director, Gary Davies pose together by the main gates prior to the Book Launch on December 7th. (Image provided by Mark Fountain)

President's Report

At the present time our committee is taking a break and will reconvene in the last couple of weeks of February. This does not mean that Friends' operations came to a halt over December and January. There has been plenty happening with our visitor services volunteers and our tour guides offering their services right through the tourist season. A dedicated visitor hub at the Gardens' entrance, which is manned by RTBG staff, has added a facility for dispensing information, taking bookings and selling plants.

In addition to our usual activities, Friends continues to provide an invaluable service to RTBG through our ability to apply for grants for projects within the Gardens. You may not be aware that since the Gardens is under the umbrella of State Government administration, staff are not able to apply for grant monies. In November I signed an agreement with NRM South to provide \$3,500 to the orchid research program and Kay (our treasurer) and I also signed a contract enabling about \$4,000 to be allocated to the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre field work fund. This was as a result of the work undertaken by James Wood, Natalie Tapson, Lorraine Perrins and Seed Bank volunteers in the 'saving of the *Eucalyptus morrisbyi*' project.

The main item on everybody's agenda at the moment, is the Bicentenary of the RTBG. There is certainly a great deal planned, and over the next few months activities and events will start to roll out. The book: "*The Gardens: celebrating Tasmania's Botanical Treasure 1818 - 2018*" was launched in early December so that it would be available for Christmas. The book is on sale at the shop in the RTBG and also at the visitor hub at the front gates. All proceeds from the book will go to the Seed Conservation /Collection Fund.

Our original commitment to the Bicentenary was to undertake works in the cottage. As you are aware we have completed the refurbishment of the floors and replaced the front door. With the guidance and assistance of Jenny Parrott, we have mounted two displays, one high-

lighting the botanists and plant collectors who made a significant contribution to the Gardens and a photographic exhibition covering 100 years in the Gardens. To coincide with the launch of the book there has been a new display mounted in the cottage which consists of pages from the book which have been enlarged. They highlight the early history, community involvement and conservation functions of the Gardens.

Whilst this has been a management driven initiative there was some consultation with Friends' representatives. Another aspect of the responsibility for works in the cottage has involved a reassessment of the lighting in the cottage. Without going in to detail about the technical problems involved, I would like to commend Jenny for her dedication in pursuing the best options for rectifying the problems and working closely with RTBG staff to ensure a satisfactory project completion. I am pleased to say that the committee agreed to pay the costs involved.

The Lily pond project, to which we have made a considerable contribution, is now well underway and should be completed by the time this edition goes to press. Next time you are in the Gardens have a look at the beautiful timbers in the 'lily pad' platforms.

I hope to see you at our first General meeting for 2018, which will be held on Saturday 17th March at 10.00am in the Banksia room. Our guest speaker will be a long standing member of Friends: Wendy Bowman, who will share what she calls 'A layman's glimpse of plants', from her recent trip to China.

Joan Booth,
President of Friends



Launch for Bicentennial Gardens Book



Chair of the Board, Ms Beth Mathison, introduces the Premier of Tasmania, Mr Will Hodgman. (Image provided by Mark Fountain).

On Thursday, December 7th 2017, an event was held in the Visitor's Centre at the RTBG to launch a book entitled *The Gardens, Celebrating Tasmania's Botanical Treasure 1818-2018*. The book was produced in order to commemorate the Garden's bicentenary, but it's launch was timed to take full advantage of the 2017 Christmas gift market. Invitees to the launch included members of the Board of Management of the RTBG, members of RTBG staff, members of the Friends' Committee, and major contributors to the book. The Chair of the Board, Ms Beth Mathison, introduced the Premier of Tasmania, The Honourable Will Hodgman, who proceeded to present gifts of native plants to the book's contributors who were in attendance.



Premier Will Hodgman presents a native plant to Margie Bloomfield. Margie is a former member and committee member of Friends. Her contribution may be found on page 41 of the Gardens book. Director, Gary Davies and Secretary of Friends Committee, Catherine King can be seen in the background. (Image provided by Mark Fountain).



Discovering the Mystery & Magic of our Gardens

Report on the 2017 Conference for volunteer Guides in Australia and New Zealand

The Conference was hosted by the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) in Canberra between the 15–19 October following the annual Floriade Festival which attracted many of our attendees who arrived early for the Conference. ANBG is a young garden displaying Australian native plants from most regions of Australia, and is situated in a magnificent bushland setting. Sunday was registration day in the Crosbie Morrison Building and began on a high note when we were warmly welcomed by our hosts with a wonderful afternoon tea and an introductory guided walk beginning with the Tasma-



nian Rainforest and making our way up to the Red Centre Garden, which was an absolute joy with Sturt's Desert Pea showing off its brilliant red beauty. Along the way many of us were enchanted with the much photographed Water Dragons (*above*) in the rock pools. For those who were energetic enough a guided Night Walk was on offer in the evening.

The next day, Monday, we made our way to the Shine Dome for the beginning of the conference. Mrs Marlina Jeffery, Vice Patron, Friends of the ANBG, opened the proceedings and the keynote speakers addressed a

range of topics. Most notable was the talk by Dr Helen Cleugh on "Climate Change in Australia – an update".

Prior to lunch a team of four panellists fielded a range of questions from the audience, the topic being "Climate Change in the context of botanic gardens guiding". After lunch a range of activities were enjoyed, with two nearby walks offered, or a talk by Dr Ben Walcott, "Gardens that have influenced us". Afterwards, on our return to the ANBG, we undertook a History Tour of the gardens.

ANBG was formally opened in 1947, and the photograph taken of the tree planting, which appeared in the *Canberra Times*, paints quite a different picture from the present day, with Canberra still very much the 'Bush Capital', and the absence of Lake Burley Griffin most notable. The *Eucalyptus mannifera* planted by the Director of Kew Gardens can be seen growing by the main entrance gates (*below*).

Tuesday afforded a focus on Guiding Skills, and the morning sessions were held at the National Library of Australia in their very impressive and comfortable theatre. The speakers in the first session were well received, and after morning tea we heard speakers from the Australian War Memorial, Museum of Australian Democracy, Questacon, National Gallery of Australia (NGA) and the National Library of Australia.





It was clear that all these institutions offer a very professional approach to the way their volunteers are trained. While our volunteer training is currently more of a mentoring experience, the feedback obtained from our visitors indicate they do enjoy the smaller groups and personal touch we impart while conducting our tours.

Lunch was catered for in the foyer of the National Library, and I just had time to slip into the Treasures Gallery for a quick inspection of the wonderful Peter Dombrovskis' retrospective photographic exhibition on display. Of course, most of us are familiar with Peter's work and remember him with admiration for the way he recorded the beauty of the Tasmanian environment with his camera in many of the wilderness places most of us have never seen.

The afternoon was very warm, and I chose to visit the Sculpture Garden at the NGA. This is an amazing place, and I was particularly taken with one of their more recent sculptures, *'ithin without*, a Skyspace by James Turrell. Incidentally, another of his Skyspaces can be seen at MONA. Next port of call was the Australian War Memorial where we undertook another guided tour. The guides in both the NGA and AWM are hard working and demonstrated to us their knowledge and presentation skills. In both cases they also need to keep abreast of fairly constant changes to the exhibitions.

On Wednesday we participated in "Out and About Tours" and I chose Birds and Capital Country Garden Landscapes. Apparently the early start with birdwatching in the ANBG was the highlight of the day for many, but I have to admit that I was recalcitrant on this occasion, only recently recovering from knee surgery. I did enjoy the bus trip to three different gardens only about fifteen kilometres out of Queanbeyan.

The countryside is lovely here, and our first stop was to a property, *Wanna Wanna*, established early in the 19th century, with its restored slab and daub hut, the original home for the settlers in the early 1830s. This was a European style garden surrounding the homestead with a very beautiful wisteria walk in full flower (*above left*) Lunch was held at the next garden, fortunately in the shade of a covered area as the weather was again very warm, a much newer garden, with a very interesting enclosed henhouse set amongst the vegetable garden. The final garden was also one fairly recently established and has the beginnings of something quite interesting.

Other groups went to a variety of gardens including the Arboretum and the garden of Dr Ben Walcot and his



wife and by all accounts were very much enjoyed (*above*). Wednesday evening was our Conference Dinner in the Great Hall at University House, preceded by drinks in the courtyard. The dinner was a wonderful occasion to catch up with others and to hear of their different experiences during the Conference.

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The Thursday morning session was held back in the Shine Dome and the theme was : “Informed Guiding-Discovering the Mystery and Magic of our Gardens”. Representatives from the National Arboretum, Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens (yes, Scotland), Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens and the ANBG gave us snapshots of their gardens and what they do, and they spoke about guide numbers, the recruitment process, and their training programmes.

Eileen and Mike Maskrey, Alison McKirdy and myself represented our gardens, and we all agreed that we had learnt a lot and enjoyed the conference, and as a first timer it was interesting to discover there were many participants who fondly remembered their experience with our own conference held in 2009.



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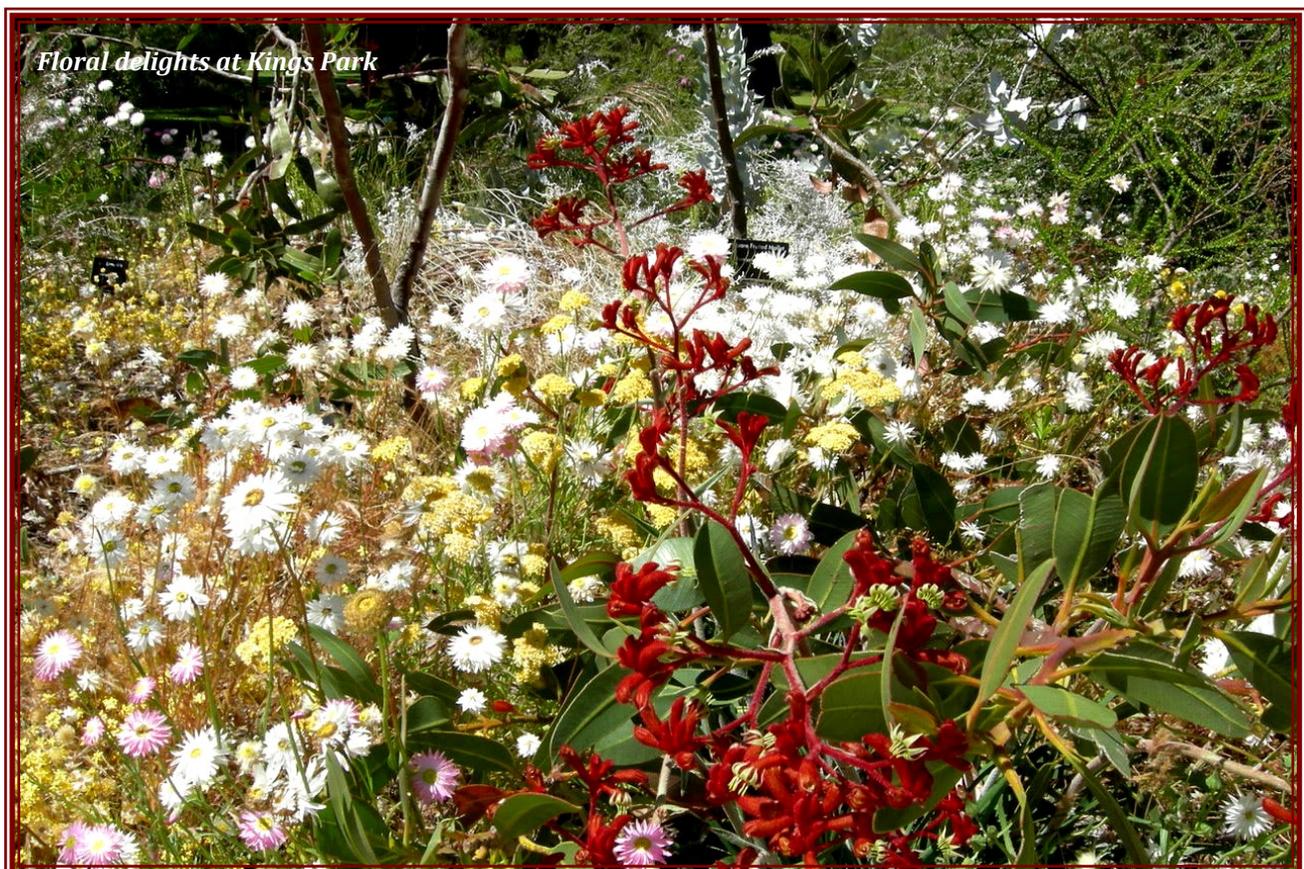
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e kpguidesconference@gmail.com
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A springtime Conference will be held in 2019 at Kings Park Perth (see details at left), the theme being *The Wild West*. It should be a knock-out.

The Canberra Conference was superbly organized and we experienced an amazing range of topics and experiences; congratulations must go to everyone who was involved with the planning and the day to day running of the programme.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the Friends of the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens for so generously sponsoring my Registration fee to attend the Conference as their official delegate.

Louise Rainbow



Favourite Garden Icon

Number 8 - The Gardener Statue



Most visitors to the Gardens are familiar with the wooden statue of an 'old-time' gardener working with his hoe on the garden bed in front of the Friends' Cottage. The statue was created and donated to the RTBG by Bernie Tarr in 2007. It was officially unveiled on June 12th of that year. The figure and his coat, which is draped over a spade handle on the other side of the garden path leading to the cottage (*at right*), are formed from King Billy Pine. His basket, on the other hand, was fashioned from a Blue Gum that once grew prominently at the bottom of the main pathway through the gardens.

The statue was inspired by and modelled on a photograph of an un-named gardener working in the gardens at some time in the late 19th Century. A reproduction of

that photograph can be found on page 19 of the recently released book *The Gardens* issued to mark the Gardens' Bicentenary. It can also be seen on page 13 of the November 2013 issue of *FIGUS*, incorporated into an article on the very Blue Gum from which the statue was carved. This article in turn was reprinted from an article on the same subject which appeared in the November issue of *FIGUS* in 2006.

There is nothing new under the sun! – but I guess history is like that. It would have been a nice gesture to try to discover the Gardener's name for this Bicentenary Year, or at least provide him with a fictitious name that rings true to his character and his task at hand. Until such a time, he will remain simply 'The Gardener'.

I acknowledge Christine Santi for helping me with the date of the Gardener's appearance.

"An island clothed...with the richest and most curious production of Flora...."

Sir Eardley Wilmot's announcement that a part of the Government (Domain) Garden was to be managed by the newly formed "Botanical and Horticultural Society of Van Diemen's Land" (later The Royal Society of Tasmania") was not well received by a certain section of the Press

A Grant of £400 from the Government was allocated to the Society who immediately began to make some sweeping changes. The Superintendent's House was to be occupied by the Secretary of the Society and a new Cottage built for the Superintendent. The aims of the Society were high: "it was proposed to investigate, by chemical analysis and otherwise, the nature and properties of the gums, resins, and other vegetable products of this island, as well as the qualities of those vegetable substances that may be rendered useful in medicine, dyeing &c..."

An article in the *Courier* supported the new arrangements and asserted that the Society would receive public approval, "...in the great and delightful and profitable work of investigating nature..." James Dickinson was appointed to look after the preservation and enlargement of the collection and the plants in the greenhouse, and although there was no intention to supersede Mr Grant, he felt otherwise and resigned.

The appointment of James Dickinson was surprising. Dickinson came from a wealthy Quaker family in the north of England and was brought up in the Lake District where he associated with botanists and developed an interest in "the beauties and mysteries of the vegetable kingdom." Dickinson was an emancipated convict and following his release he was permitted to cultivate the garden next to the Friends' Meeting House in Murray Street, probably due to his Quaker connections, and shortly afterwards opened a Florist Shop at 39 Murray Street. Before he was appointed to manage the Royal Society's Garden he was exhibiting at the Gardeners & Amateurs Horticultural Society Shows and in 1844 he was awarded joint 1st Prize for presenting the greatest variety of native flowers; he continued to be an enthusiastic supporter of the Society, becoming Secretary in

1853. There is little record of Dickinson's contribution to the Gardens. His appointment was criticised by the Press as he was allowed some time off to continue with his florist business. Dickinson replied that the management of Public Gardens should be placed under the superintendence of a responsible nurseryman, as advised by the "most noted and public spirited horticulturist of modern times, Mr Loudon". His association with the Royal Society Gardens did not last long, as he disagreed with the policy of making available some of their choicest and rarest plants to members at the expense of business to the hard-working florists and nurserymen in the town. In August 1845 both Dickinson and the Secretary of the Royal Society, Dr Storey, resigned. Dickinson continued to make his mark on the horticultural scene and produced not only an extensive catalogue of plants but in 1855 he published *The Wreath - a Gardening Manual*, the first such manual to be produced in Van Diemen's Land since Daniel Bunce's *Manual of Practical Gardening* in 1838.

The Press continued its attack on the Royal Society. Many considered that it was wrong to hand a public facility, supported by government money to an elite group of settlers. The fact that members would have access to surplus plants from the Gardens would be of detriment to the honest and hardworking nurserymen and florists who would be competing with a garden supported by public money.

The next Superintendent (Curator) was Francis William Newman. Newman was a Government sponsored immigrant and had been engaged as a gardener to the son-in-law of John MacArthur, James Bowman in N.S.W. After an unsuccessful application to the Sydney Botanic Gardens for the position of Superintendent he came to Hobart to take charge of the Royal Society Gardens.

During the years that Newman was at the Gardens there was a lot of recorded activity in the exchange of plants and the importation of rare and wonderful species. The Council of the Royal Society were quick to recognise his worth when they recognised the progress and improvement at the Society's Gardens. The Council had a lot of

plans for the development of the Gardens and proposed to divide the area into three segments: one for the botanical arrangement of plants, classified and labelled; another for the cultivation of plants used in agriculture, medicine and the arts; and a third for the reception of such trees, fruits and plants which may be useful to the colony. They also removed the payment of the entrance fee for members and opened the gardens to the public two days a week until sunset. Newman received great support from some members of the Council. They felt that his salary of £80 per annum was not enough in view of the work he was expected to carry out, and some of his efforts were paralysed by the lack of improvements; in the first instance due to the lack of a "forcing stove and hot-house."

The Gardeners' and Horticultural Society were very active in the introduction of new plants, trees etc. The general attitude was expressed by Mr Lipscombe: "In this mercantile age...it is often necessary to defend pursuits that do not immediately yield pecuniary profit. The rise, progress and gradual development of horticultural pursuits...[meant that] health will be secured and peace of mind promoted which are riches that cannot be purchased with gold." The *Britannia and Trades' Advocate* supported an increase in Newman's salary, which was eventually increased to £120 per annum. Improvements at the Gardens continued. Besides introducing 28 new kinds of apples, a border on the north side had been set aside for indigenous plants, a section adjoining was being prepared for plants from New Zealand, a portion of land in the centre of the Gardens set aside for medicinal plants and there were several hundred seedlings in pots from South Australia, Port Phillip and North America. Newman had imported, at his own cost, 37 varieties of flowering shrubs from Sydney and Port Essington and a gang of men were forming a large pond to secure a constant supply of water. A consignment of apple and pear trees from London, plants, bulbs and seeds from the Cape and India, seeds from the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne and of choice exotics and interesting natives from New South Wales. A few years later it was reported that "A magnificent collection of plants had been received from the Mauritius Botanical Garden." However, due to the want of a hot-house the plants were placed in the Conservatory at Government House before being sent to Norfolk Island. The Gardens

were also sending out cases of plants, and one account lists *Araucarias Cunninghamii*, *Bidwillii*, *excelsa*, a new pine from Caledonia, conifers from New Zealand and some Tasmanian trees. At one exhibition Newman sent 315 plants consisting of "the choicest and most recently imported productions of Flora from every quarter of the Globe." A list of plants growing in the Gardens in 1856 included three full grown oranges from a tree trained against the brick wall, supposed to be the first oranges grown in the Colony. As well as the trade in useful plants that could have a commercial value the truly exotic was not forgotten. At one meeting of the Royal Society Newman presented "a few of the grotesque seeds of *Trapa bicornis*, the kernel of which is eaten by the Chinese ..and a section of the pith of the *Araliaceus* plant from the Isle of Formosa from which rice paper is cut by the Chinese".



***Trapa bicornis* (above) also known as Bull's head, Devil's Pod, Bat Nut. An aquatic plant.**

In August 1859 Francis Newman died. His obituary in the *Mercury* in August 1859 said that he had largely contributed to the excellence and utility of the Gardens, that he had laboured constantly in importing every plant, tree or shrub that was either useful, profitable and ornamental; the colony had indeed lost a benefactor who had held the office for so long and worthily and would be difficult to replace.

The Lily Pond, now receiving an up-grade has developed from Newman's water-hole into one of the most visited features of the RTBG to-day.

Jenny Parrott

References: *Nature in its Wildest Form* self-published biography of James Dickinson by Irene Schaffer.

Louise Rainbow research: Newspapers, mainly *The Hobart Town Courier* and *The Britannia and Trades Advocate*.

Wonderful Wisley

A Brief Look at the Pride of the RHS

The Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley located south of London in the county of Surrey, is one of four gardens run by the Society. Its origins date back to 1878 when Victorian businessman and RHS member George Ferguson Wilson purchased a 24 hectare block where he established the "Oakwood Experimental Garden" where the aim was to grow 'difficult' plants successfully. When Wilson died in 1902, the land was purchased by Sir Thomas Hanbury, a chemist and horticulturalist, who had already established a celebrated garden on the Italian Riviera. Hanbury gifted the site to the RHS in 1903 as part of the RHS centenary.

RHS Wisley, as it came to be known, now covers a total area of 97 hectares, of which almost 55 hectares are open to the public. Over the past decade Wisley has drawn over one million visitors annually, making it second only to Kew Gardens for visitor numbers among British gardens. Wisley incorporates many widely diverse features, as can be discerned from the map (*image 1*). I do not intend to talk about every one of these, but to mention a few that attracted Eileen and I on our visit to the gardens in June of last year.

One very important function that Wisley performs involves the trial plots, (*image 2*) where new cultivars are submitted for trial. The most successful of these may be awarded the highly prestigious RHS award of Garden Merit. The landscaping of the parts of the gardens open to visitors is truly stunning (*image 3* shows just one such example). Wisley does not neglect the home gardener. There is a very well presented herb garden (*image 4*) and vegetable gardens, which show off new varieties in their various plots (*image 5*). The new and very extensive glass houses, (*image 6*) which rival those at Kew, and their accompanying lake, were planned to celebrate the RHS Bicentenary in 2003. Inevitable delays meant that construction did not begin until April 2005, and the glass houses were eventually opened to the public on June 26th 2007. They cover 3,000 square metres and contains over 5,000 different variety of

plant. The walled garden, (*image 7*) designed by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, was opened in 1969 and remains one of the lasting images of any visit.

Wisley has always placed a great emphasis on education and the creation of environments that engender child exploration and learning. The area referred to as "Wild Wisley" allows children to act out their imaginations among quirky structures such as in the example shown (*image 8*). A display that we found very engaging was to be found in the Clore Learning Centre that demonstrated the importance of root systems and their relationships (*image 9*). There is a great feel of 'community' at Wisley, and volunteer groups regularly work in the gardens on many aspects of garden maintenance.

As a final aside, it is perhaps worth mentioning the controversy that Wisley has become unwittingly engaged in since late last year. Highways England are planning to widen the A3, which borders on parts of Wisley (refer to map), and one of their options involves taking an area of the gardens. The RHS has reacted to the news by denouncing the proposal as a "criminal land grab" that would see the removal of 500 trees, many more than 100 years old and one planted by Queen Elizabeth to mark her Silver Jubilee. At time of going to press the issue is unresolved. Work is due to begin in 2020.



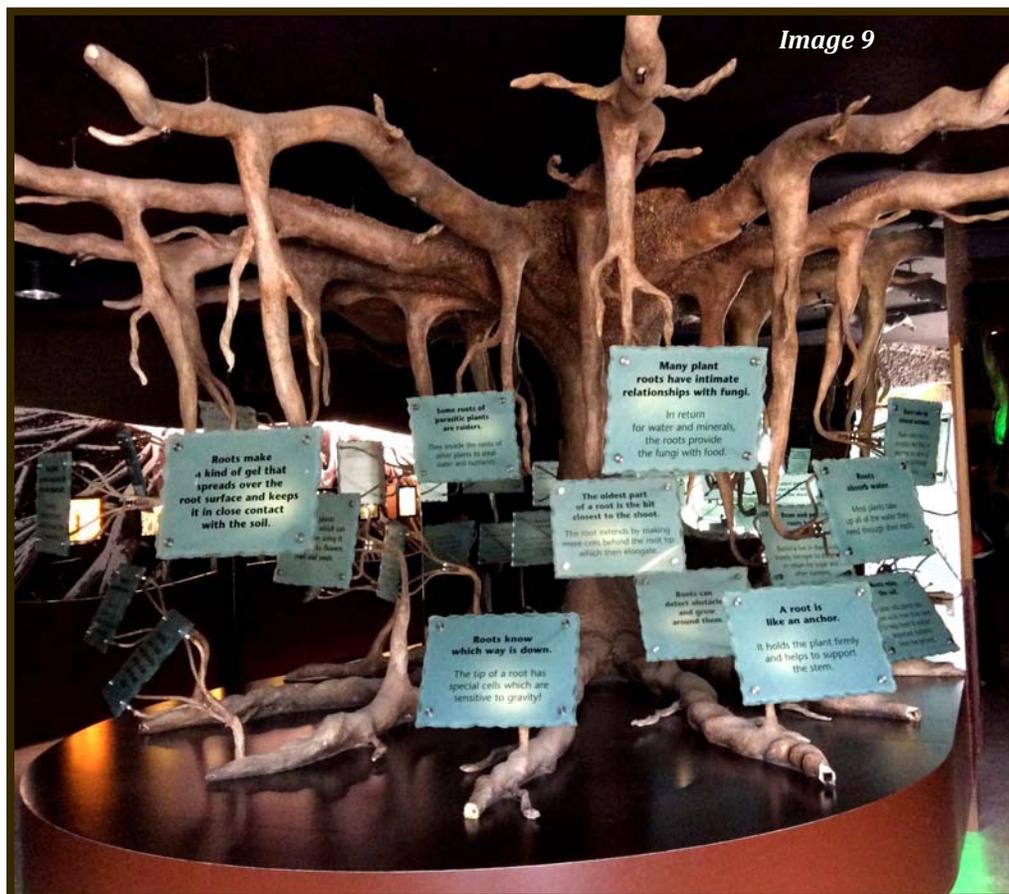
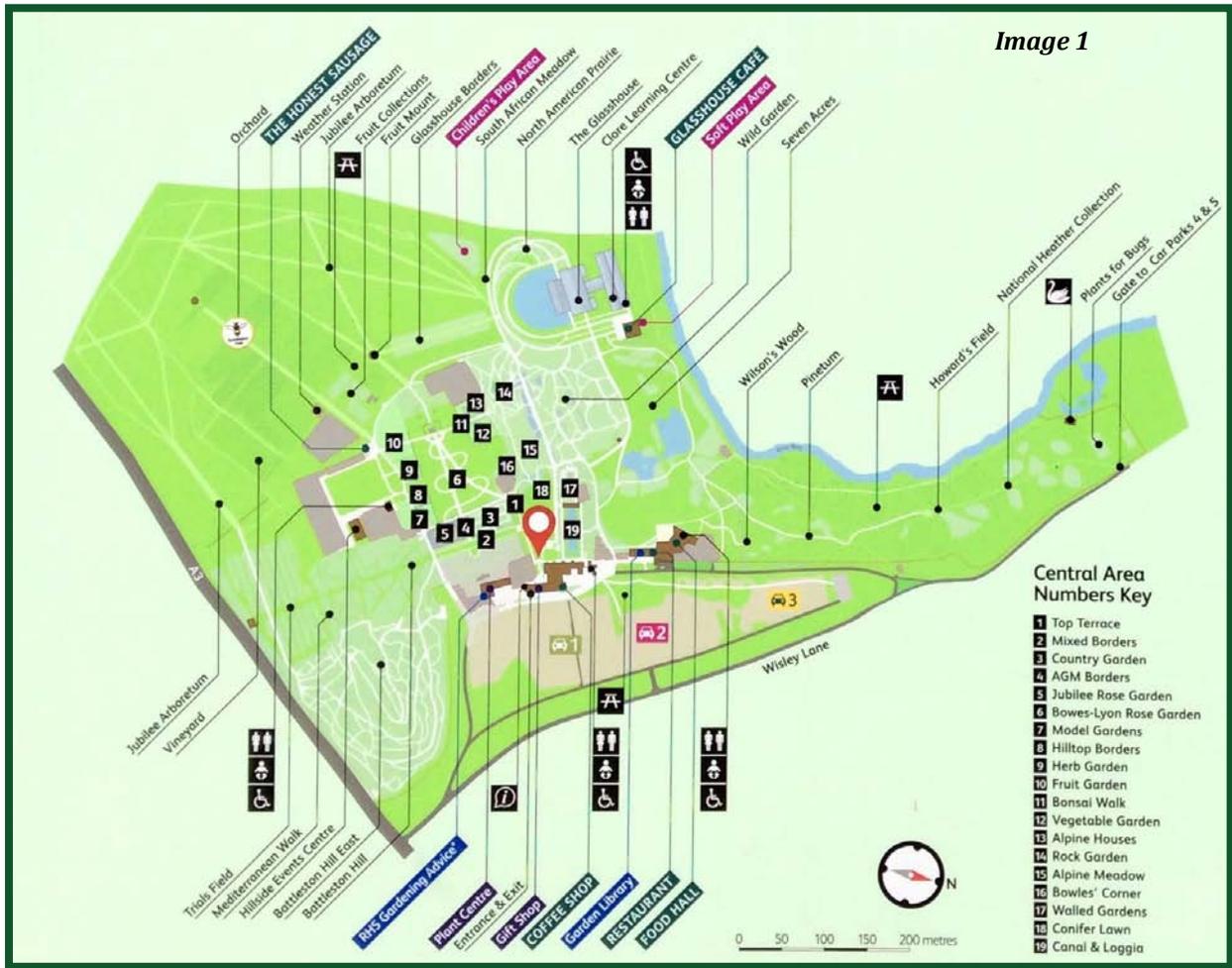




Image 3



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



Image 8

Cacti – Prepare to be Hooked

We live in a world of diversity and change where as human beings we learn to adapt to our ever changing environment. The Plant kingdom is no different as plants learn to adapt to their ever changing environment too.

Cacti belong to the botanical family *Cactaceae* in which there are over two thousand species. Cacti are an example of plants that grow in some of the hottest and coldest regions of the world, from the Arctic Circle to the southern most tip of South America. Many are found in Mexico and South - western United States. Over fifty million years ago these plants were trees and shrubs with evergreen leaves, but after the upheaval of the earth's surface large mountain ranges blocked off the rain clouds and certain areas of land gradually became deserts. During this transformation a species of plants emerged which was drought resistant. Some plants lost their leaves and the stems became flattened and green and took over the functions of the leaves.

Since the fleshy stems were attractive food for hungry plant eating animals, the cacti developed spines to protect themselves. After hundreds of years seeds of the cacti that had developed in the desert were carried back to the lush jungles by birds. These seeds would fall into decayed leaf matter in the fork of trees which became a species of cacti known as epiphytes, or air plants.

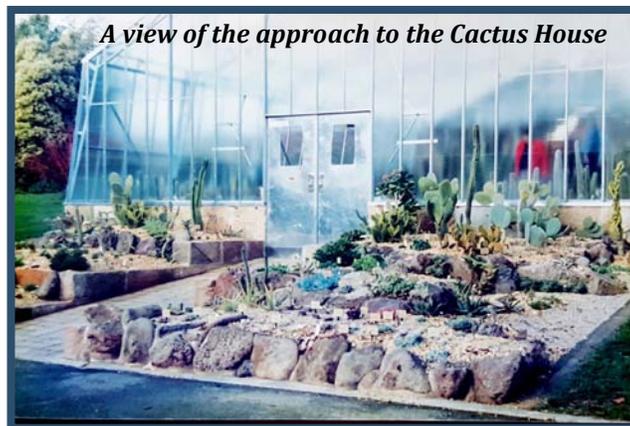
I became interested in cacti when a piece picked up from the ground at a local fair was given to me many years ago. The piece was placed in a pot with some river sand and to my joy it began to grow. My family lived nearby to a plant nursery that had been given a collection of Cacti which I often visited. When I saw this collection I was hooked and amazed at the variety and beauty of these unusual plants. Some were large, others small but they captured my attention, with their different spine formations and their brilliantly coloured flowers. I was allowed to take pieces off some of these cacti which I

shoved in my pockets and took home. I soon learnt that putting them in pockets was not such a good idea. As the cacti began to grow, I became more and more hooked so they had to be relocated out of the house.

In 1980 a group of cacti enthusiasts met together to discuss starting a Cacti Club for those interested in growing them, with the inaugural meeting held at Elizabeth Matriculation College on April 29th 1980 with approximately fourteen people present.

The first official meeting was held on the 31st July 1980, and soon after I attended a meeting and became the first junior member of the club. The meetings were comprised of lectures on the growing of different cacti and succulents. Plants were able to be purchased at the meetings, and there were often visits arranged to other people's collections, plus other social activities which helped raise money for the club.

My knowledge and success grew in growing these plants and soon I had to find more space for my ever expanding collection.



The Southern Tasmanian Cactus and Succulent Club later became affiliated with the Australian Confederation of Country Cactus Clubs (known as the 4Cs). The Cacti Club soon grew in numbers and after six months, the membership had grown to thirty-six, with the membership increasing to seventy by 1982. After a

period of five years it was the fastest growing club in Australia with the membership increasing to over one hundred.

The first show was held at the Mt. Stuart Hall on 22nd and 23rd November 1980. With the success of this show others followed, with the Cacti Club being invited by Ald. Ron Excell to stage the next show at the Hobart Town Hall. This show was held on the 22nd and 23rd October 1982 and was a great success. The show continued to be held at the Town Hall the following years.

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The Executive met in May 1982 with the Superintendent of the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens Tony May to discuss the setting up of a Cactus House in the Gardens. Tony May was also the Patron of the STSC Club and was interested in setting up a place where the Cacti could be displayed.

In May 1983 the Botanical Gardens Board of Trustees decided to go ahead with a glasshouse and cactus garden to give the 250,000 visitors annually to the gardens an opportunity to view a variety of these plants in the one place.

Plans were drawn up by Landscape Architect, Dr Joseph Vitesnik, and in July 1983 foundations and ground were excavated to construct a 30 feet by 40 feet Cactus House, with the glass being put in place in November 1983.

It was planned to commence the planting out of the cacti in March 1984 but on checking the pH level of the soil it was found to be too high, with a high salt level, so planting was delayed until the soil was at the correct level.

The Cacti Club donated many cacti and succulents to the gardens from members' private collections. Other cacti were sought from other specialist nurseries and private growers within Australia. Many of the plants were purchased from the Arizona Cacti Nursery in Victoria, with the Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney gardens also supplying plants.

After many months of hard work by private people and Garden Staff the Cactus and Succulent House was officially opened by Geoff Davis on Saturday the 30th of June.

The weather was good and the membership of the club was well represented, with attendance from the various garden clubs. The opening was followed by morning tea in the tea rooms. His Excellency the Governor of Tasmania Sir James Plimsoll (1982 – 1987) was a great

supporter of the club, enjoyed visiting the gardens and was pleased with the inclusion of a Cactus House within the grounds.

One of the problems faced by the Gardens was the theft of a number of plants, so the Gardens asked the Cacti Club to draw up a roster so that the plants could be watched during opening hours. This was done and saw a significant drop in the number of plants being stolen. Over time interest in cacti and succulents began to wane, and the Cacti Club also went into a period of decline. With fewer committed members it ceased operation in 1996.

By 2013 the Cacti House had exceeded its life and was removed to make way for the new Food Garden. The remaining cacti were removed and relocated to their current location. The unusual shapes and forms of these plants continue to grab the attention of locals as well as the interstate and international visitors that visit the Gardens every year. So next time you visit the gardens be sure to check out the cacti and succulent

display. You may even get hooked like I did.

Stephen Ross.



Note added by editor: Those readers interested in cacti at the RTBG might like to refer to the article that appeared in the February 2015 issue of Fagus, pps 10-11.

The Australian Native Plants Society Conference 2018

Lovers of Australian plants look forward to the national conference of the Australian Native Plants Society. It is held every two years, rotating through the states and ACT. Tasmania hosted the conference this January 2018. Delegates were here between the 15th and 19th of January. The conference theme was “Grass roots to mountain tops”.

A pre conference tour went to Mt Field and focused on alpine and subalpine flora. Delegates looked at the sub-alpine woodland walk below Lake Fenton, then alpine flora at Wombat Moor, then the alpine plant communities around Lake Dobson.

The RTBG has always had links with this society, from their close involvement in the development of the Tasmanian Native Garden in the 1990s to their generous funding of some seed collecting trips of the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre (TSCC) and the RTBG’s Macquarie Island Cushion Plant Project, and so we were happy to provide speakers and a site visit for this particular conference. Mark Fountain’s topic was 200 years of the RTBG. James Wood gave the AJ Swaby Lecture about the TSCC.

Delegates went to five excursion sites: the RTBG, Mt Wellington, Inverawe and the Kingston Wetlands, the Tasmanian Bushland Garden and the Lauderdale salt marshes. This is a useful list to keep in mind when next entertaining botanically minded visitors.

Here at the RTBG Mark Fountain welcomed each group and then staff conducted the tours. David and Megan

Marrison presented our unique plants in the Tasmanian section. Natalie Tapson introduced the Subantarctic House and some lucky people saw the endangered Macquarie Island Wind-Swept Helmet orchid (*Corybas dienemus*) brought out for a brief showing by Lorraine Perrins. James Wood explained the work behind the scenes in the TSCC. Lorraine Perrins walked people through the Nursery Seed Orchards to see the critically endangered *Lomatia tasmanica* and explained why it is so rare and difficult to cultivate. They spoke with their usual enthusiasm and love of their work and passed this on to their listeners. Because the groups were large, a volunteer helped out, making sure everyone arrived and left in good order. Fran Alexis, Aina Dambitis, Wendy Bowman and Joan Booth volunteered and enjoyed listening to our experts as much as the visitors did. The RTBG received very good feedback from the Society and were delighted that the Friends were able to provide invaluable assistance to the staff during the week.

Aina Dambitis



Images provided by Marcus Ragus

Friends' News



Final General Meeting for 2017

The final Friends' General Meeting for 2017 was held on Saturday, December 2nd. It also served as a Friends' Christmas get-together. We were privileged to have two speakers (*pictured below*) address us on that occasion. Jimmy Corrigan spoke to us on his studies on soil (see the November 2017 issue of *RTBGUS* for his article on the subject). Tory Ross then spoke to us concerning the RTBG activities planned for the Bicentenary.



March General Meeting

The next general meeting of Friends will be held in the Banksia Room, RTBG, on Saturday March 17th, commencing at 10am. Our guest speaker will be a long standing member of Friends: Wendy Bowman, who will share what she calls 'A layman's glimpse of plants', from her recent trip to China.

Neutrog Products

Order forms for Neutrog products can be found in this issue. Please return your completed form by the date specified.

Membership

If you know of anyone wishing to join Friends of the RTBG, they can obtain an Application form by going to the RTBG website (gardens.rtbg.tas.gov.au). The link taking them to Friends of RTBG can be made from the drop down menu under 'Community'. Alternatively contact our Membership Officer, Aina Dambitis (0429190784)

Our Next Issue: May 2018