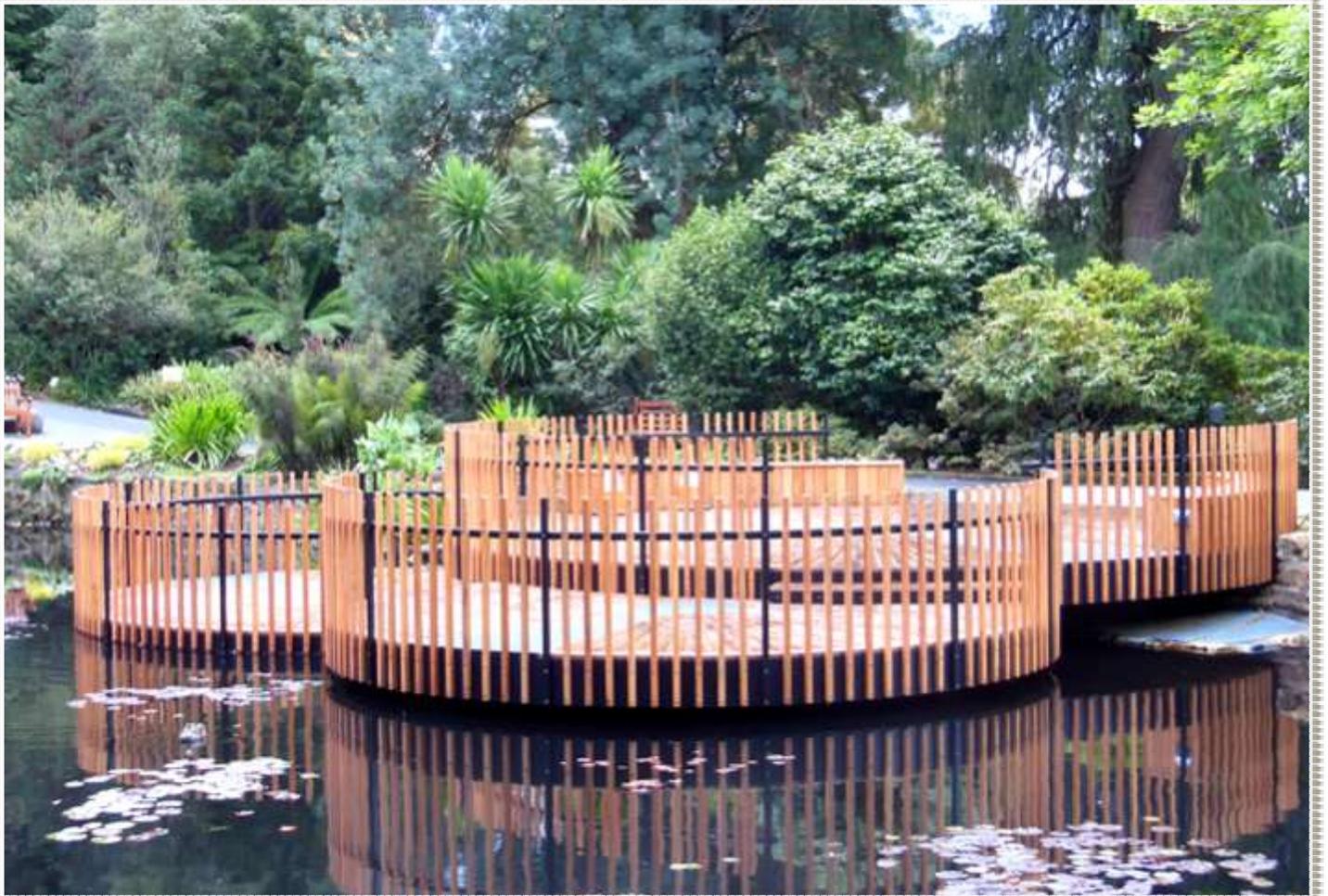


**May 2018**

A cluster of autumn-colored leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and brown, arranged in a roughly circular shape to the left of the word "Fagus".

# Fagus

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



**In this Issue: Director's Report \* President's Report \* More Gardens' History**  
\* Chinese Odyssey \* Gardens in Victoria \* Member Profile \* Bicentennial Gin  
**Launch \* Favourite Garden Icon \* Garden Happenings \* Friends' News**

### ***Committee Members 2017-18***

President: Joan Booth, 0439 007391

Vice President: Eileen Maskrey, 0438 278754

Secretary: Catherine King, 0362341854

Treasurer: Kay Hayes 0429 305437

Public Officer: Jenny Parrott,

Membership Office: Aina Dambitis, 0429 190784

Publications Editor: Mike Maskrey, 0447 278754

Events Coordinator: Alison Mackirdy

### ***Bookings for Garden Tours***

Please contact the Gardens office on 6066 0451

### ***Group Coordinators***

History: Jenny Parrott

Growing Friends: Catherine King

Seed Bank: Kay Hayes

Native Orchid Research: Joan Booth

Begonia Group: Wendy Bowman

Tour Guide Coordinator: Eileen Maskrey

RTBG Liaison: Marcus Ragus

### ***Contributors to this issue***

Joan Booth; Gary Davies; Fran Alexis;

Kristy Booth-Lark; Wendy Bowman;

Aina Dambitis; Eileen Maskrey; Mike Maskrey;

Jenny Parrott;

### ***Our Cover***

Our new pride and joy: the Lily Pad deck.

Photo: Mike Maskrey

### ***Printed by***

Focal Printing

32 Strahan Street, North Hobart

6234 2602

### ***Typesetting and Design***

Kay Hayes

**Friends email :** [rtbgfriends@gmail.com](mailto:rtbgfriends@gmail.com)

**Follow us on Facebook:** RTBG Friends

## **From the Editor's Desk**

Well, we are now thoroughly into the Gardens' Bicentennial year. Events have come thick and fast during the past couple of months. These events are reflected in the reports from both the Director, Gary Davies, and our President of Friends, Joan Booth. Of course, the standout event was the visit to the Gardens of HRH Prince Edward, who unveiled a plaque for the official launch of the Lily Pad deck on April 10th. Another notable event occurred on the following Sunday when the Gardens held a festival around the celebration of 80 years of ABC Broadcasting in Tasmania.

On the evening of Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, an event was held to launch the Bicentennial Gin. Kristy Booth-Lark, the gin's producer, tells her story in this issue and lets us in on what lead up to the release of the gin and what we can expect in the future months. The morning after the gin launch the Friends General Meeting was addressed by Wendy Bowman, who has provided an article based on her talk. Wendy's topic revolves around her travels in China, which she undertook late last year.

Our History Coordinator, Jenny Parrott, continues her story of how the Gardens have evolved over time. Jenny's article in this issue deals with the Gardens under the management of the Royal Society with Francis Abbott as superintendent. The article deals with problems associated with labour, especially convict labour, and funding (of course!). On the positive side, there are many examples of progress during this period, including the arrival of the gates for the main entrance and the build-up of the plant collections.

Our Member's Profile for this issue features Fran Alexis. Fran is one of our most experienced of our tour guides. She has been responsible for the development of a number of specialist tours in the Gardens, principally based upon the its history and its tree collections. She has also been involved in guiding conferences both in Tasmania and on the mainland.

The Favourite Garden Icon is Marcus Tatton's Monument to the Blue Gum, where we recall Tatton's association with the Gardens. I have also provided an article on two of Victoria's perhaps lesser known botanic gardens – in Williamstown and in Bendigo. All of the above, plus assorted snippets such as the visit from Neutrog representative, Helen Lovel, and the latest Friends' News make for plenty of good autumn reading.

As I shall be absent overseas when the next issue of *Fagus* is being prepared, Aina Dambitis has kindly accepted the role of Acting Editor during this period. I am more than confident that the publication will be safe hands while I am away.

**Mike Maskrey**

# Director's Report

It has continued to be an extremely busy period and the management team have been hard working at finalising multiple projects simultaneously with rolling out the Bicentenary in particular the Royal visit, as well as doing business as usual with the busy season coming to an end.

I would like to thank all Friends and volunteers for their valuable contributions as the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens welcomed His Royal Highness, The Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex KG GCVO, to officially launch the Lily Pads to commemorate the Bicentenary on the 10<sup>th</sup> April. All the preparation and hard work paid off as the entire event was highly successful.

There was significant media exposure in the lead up to the event. A radio campaign on Triple M commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April (as part of a cooperative marketing campaign with Destination Southern Tasmania) and a strip on the front page of the Mercury the week prior invited the community to join the event. A selection of peripheral media articles, particularly a double page spread in the *Tas weekend Magazine*, also created awareness.



Just over 2,000 people attended the Gardens on the day of the event, and although His Royal Highness was late to arrive due to delays at the previous engagement, proceedings ran very smoothly. The core objectives were met, with significant exposure of the Gardens and a true community celebration being experienced.



## Lily Pads

It goes without saying that the Lily Pads Viewing Decks have been completed to high standards and certainly fit into the environment incredibly and were the show-piece of the Royal visit and Bicentenary celebrations.

David Reid, the project manager, managed the building project and landscaping of the project and ensured they were completed during the week of 19 February. A final inspection was undertaken between Macquarie Builders and RTBG staff prior to sign-off.

The pond was filled in readiness for a wedding on the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> February and an evening function of the Emerging Architects Tasmania on the same day. Very positive feedback has been received from the first users of this facility.

Casting of the bronze commemorative plaque (*see page 20*) was also completed in readiness for the Bicentenary launch on April 10.

## **Visitor Numbers and Gate Donations**

Visitor numbers for the first nine months is up fairly substantially compared to last year's figures with a total of 370,000 compared to 357,000 for the same period last year.

Gate Donations received for the same period amount to \$57,000 compared to \$65,000 for the same period last year thus comparatively down. This is of some concern as the visitor numbers are comparatively up. With the front entrance hub now fully operational and thus having a much improved system in place for donations this will hopefully see donations increase accordingly.

## **Staffing and Volunteers**

The volunteers and staff need to be commended for their valuable contributions to the Bicentenary events and general visitation which has been high over the last three months.

On 27th February, we welcomed the commencement of Joanna McEldowney who will be working in the nursery as a Nursery Horticultural Assistant. Joanna has a wealth of experience in the nursery industry where she has focused on the production of plant material used for the Essential Oils industry. This position will undertake fundamental nursery tasks as well as support the current horticulturists and provide additional skills for the production of plant material for retail sales through the Visitor Services Hub.

On 19<sup>th</sup> March, we welcomed Sharron Paul as a new member of the Administration team. Sharron will be working as an Administration Assistant in a newly created permanent Band 2 position, which replaces the trainee position previously occupied by Bridgette Quinn. Sharron brings over 20 years of administration experience with her from both inside and outside of the State Service and will be a valuable addition to the team.

Five staff members from the Gardens Operations Group contributed to the Fruit Fly Response operations in the north of the state during February and March, undertaking various duties as required, each over a seven day period.

## **Marketing**

There has been a focus on marketing and PR in the current period, with the objective to maximise the profile of the RTBG as the Bicentennial celebrations and annual events calendar are delivered. Although there has been a small paid media schedule, the majority of exposure has been earned through coverage on radio, television and print media.

In preparation for the increased attention, the graphic design elements have continued to be implemented throughout the Gardens. There is new signage at both the upper and lower entrances of the Gardens, reflecting the brighter more contemporary feel, as well as further creative elements added to the Hub structure itself. The new large interpretative map has been installed at the main gate (and old infrastructure removed) as well as flagpoles in the avenue to create a welcome with consistent branding. The new donations box has been installed at the main gate with anecdotal feedback that the positioning and bright messaging successfully generating donations by visitors. The autumn version of the Visitor Guide is printed and in circulation. This publication is distributed at the site itself, at the Tasmanian Visitor Information Centre and at airports and on board the Spirit of Tasmania (via the Tourism Brochure Exchange network). In addition to the physical infrastructure, the new brand has been implemented through retail items. A research project on visitor numbers is underway with representatives from EMRS present on site in the final weeks of cruise ship season and over the busy Easter period. The data is now being analysed with a report to be forthcoming.

## **Events Summary**

The autumn period has been the peak for community and commercial events in the Gardens. Despite a few wet weather days for Shakespeare in the Gardens, the overall season was a success finishing on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March.

Variety Tasmania held its annual 'Variety of Gins' event on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> of March which saw the first event incorporating the new Lily Pads, and raising just under \$17,000 for the charity. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, a private wedding was held after hours generating \$2,500 in revenue for the Gardens.

Orienteering Tasmania's annual highlight twilight event was a success on Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, and free tours and a new interpretation sign in the Eucalypt section of the Gardens marked National Eucalypt Day on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> of March.

The Bicentennial Gin was launched on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March with the event commencing on the Lily Pads and moving to the deck of Succulent Restaurant. Although event numbers were small, there was a very positive atmosphere, and with Kristy Booth-Lark addressing the audience and the Gin being showcased in four unique cocktails which sourced Botanicals and garnishes from the Gardens. Over \$1,200 of Gin sales were made on launch night alone!

The Gardens received significant exposure in TV and print media for the *Day on the Lawn*, that was staged on

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> of March, as well as the annual Royal Hobart Hospital Easter Egg Hunt and Family Picnic Day held on Good Friday (30 March).

On Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April an outdoor broadcast in partnership with ABC Radio Hobart provided the opportunity for Peter Cundall to personally launch a range of seeds that are produced by the Gardens with Peter's endorsement. This is another significant milestone for the Bicentenary. The day also incorporated the annual winter plant sale and a cooperative activation with the Tasmanian Canteen Association who used produce from the Community Garden to showcase healthy lunches for school children.

**Gary Davies**  
**Director**



## President's Report

After our Christmas break, the committee returned in mid-February, refreshed for the year ahead. Behind the scenes there has been plenty happening and the year is already proving to be a busy one!

The Cruise ship tour season has come to an end and whilst there has been a decrease in the number of tours booked this year, our Tour Guides co-ordinator, Eileen and her able assistant Wendy, along with our valiant band of walking tour guides have been quite busy. Unfortunately, Bob Wood, the company which organises the on shore tours, changed their computer/booking system and Eileen was kept busy, often right up until the last minute, with numbers fluctuating and some tours not going ahead because of low numbers.

This created some minor problems with the uncertainty of knowing how many guides to call in and also asking guides to be available at the last minute. Nevertheless, Eileen kept her wits about her, and managed the season extremely well under the circumstances. Wendy Bowman stepped in for Eileen for the last few weeks of the season and also did a remarkable job. Both need to be commended for their patience, and great work in organising and co-ordinating the tour guides. In addition to the walking tours within the Gardens, some of our guides were involved again this year with conducting tours of the Government House Gardens as part of

Epilepsy Tasmania's fundraising event for Epilepsy month. I can vouch for the fact that a good time was had by all.

Thanks also to Chris Watts, for his coordination of the studio volunteers and explorer drivers. I'm sure that Eileen and Chris would agree with me that all our volunteers involved in offering these services deserve our heartfelt thanks for their dedication, commitment and time. Chris has now stepped down from the role. With the opening of the new visitor hub, a new visitor services coordinator was appointed. Esther Beecroft is the new appointee and has already started with good information sharing and liaison between RTBG visitor services staff and volunteers. She has also taken on the role of co-ordination of the studio volunteers and explorer drivers.

Our first General Meeting of the year, in March, was well attended. Wendy Bowman, a long standing member of Friends, was our guest speaker. Wendy shared what she called: 'a layman's view of plants' from her recent trip to China. The presentation left us all wondering how soon we could organise our own trip to China!

April has been exceptionally busy. Early April saw the launch of the RTBG Bicentennial Gin, produced by local distiller Kristy Booth-Lark using on-site botanicals harvested from the RTBG Community gardens.

The gin was served in a number of cocktails and matched to food created by Succulent's Executive chef, Johannes Frais. For those of you who did not get the opportunity to attend, Kristy will be the guest speaker at our June general meeting. Kristy will talk about the process of making the gin from the produce she collected and will also possibly be offering sample tastings. (see pp.16-17 for Kristy's article).

April 10<sup>th</sup> was the official opening of the Bicentenary and the newly constructed Lily pond viewing platform. The Gardens looked splendid and the autumn colours are truly magnificent. The Earl of Wessex, HRH Prince Edward, conducted the opening and unveiled a plaque which will be set into the centre of the largest platform. Eileen and I were fortunate to be invited to the official 'meet and greet' in the Conservatory (image 1: DPIPWE staff photographer, Graeme Harrington). We got to shake HRH's hand and chat with him for a few moments about Friends. He was intrigued by Eileen's accent and commented: "That's not a local accent I'm hearing". Members of the committee and one of our longest standing members were also invited to a reception hosted by the Chairman of the Board and the Board of Directors of RTBG. The weather was perfect and HRH a fitting personage to officially open the Bicentenary.

From the 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> the gardens hosted the production **Crawl Me Blood** ---a radio drama (a morbid tropical tale) with video installation designed to take place in a Botanic Garden setting at night. It was inspired by the modern classic *Wide Sargasso Sea* and told the story of three generations of Caribbean women. It was amazing to walk around the Gardens in the dark, following the low glimmer of the globe light held by our guides.

On Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April, ABC radio's Chris Wisbey, conducted an outside broadcast of his regular Sunday morning program from the RTBG Community Garden/ Sustainable Learning Centre Pod between 10.00am and 12 noon. The event was also to celebrate 80 years of

ABC broadcasting in Tasmania. The Friends of ABC have set up a display of radios and other memorabilia in the POD. The occasion provided an opportunity to highlight the new banner prepared for Friends by Kay Hayes (image 2: Aina Dambitis). During the event Peter Cundall launched a range of seeds especially prepared and packaged for the Bicentenary of RTBG. Many of our

members provided invaluable assistance during the event. Friends assisted at the plant sale, some disseminated information about Friends, others assisted with the sale of the "Gardens" book and the Bicentenary Gin and some of our walking guides offered free tours (a tour of the Tasmanian collection and a history tour). The weather was not the best; the rain held off for most of the morning but it was quite cold and blustery

during the morning. Thank you to everyone who gave up their Sunday to assist.

Concurrent with these activities has been the redevelopment of the Sustainable Learning Centre and the placement of new signage and interpretation around the gardens.

For the month of June we will be mounting a display, to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of RTBG, in the Kingston LINC. This will include information about the Gardens, Conservation projects, Friends and volunteering in the gardens. If you are in the area during June, pop in and have a look.

There are lots of other projects and activities planned for the rest of the year, some are still in the planning stages, but keep checking the RTBG website and the media.

Cheers  
Joan





## A Man of Credit and Ability

The Gardens that Francis Abbott Jnr (*pictured*) took charge of were described as being "endowed by nature with great fertility

of soil...(and) a genial climate...(that) allowed plants that at home required the shelter of a conservatory or being forced into unnatural production by the artificial warmth of a hot- house flourish with the same luxuriance and blossom and arrive at maturity in the open air as in their native climes. There were trees, shrubs and plants from every quarter of the Globe as well as those from "home".

Abbott jnr. had learnt his horticultural skills from Francis Newman to whom he was apprenticed in 1851, at the age of 17 and the Hobart Town Advertiser fully supported his appointment, believing that it would be fully justified as..." Mr Abbott's intelligence, energy, and industry will maintain the reputation the Garden has attained under the late Mr Newman."

By the end of the 1860s the financial situation of the Gardens was precarious and the Council of the Royal Society held a Special meeting. The Grant of £400 had been increased to £600 and was to be reduced back to £400 and the Colonial Treasurer had informed them that no more money was available but that there could be an increase of prison labour in lieu; if this was not acceptable then the Royal Society would have to .."resign the gardens altogether into the hands of Government". At the General Meeting, Abbot spoke forcibly against the use of prison labour. the boys were useless as they had to be under strict control or they ran away: the class of labour was of little advantage for eight months of the year: it could lead to the destruction of plants and shrubs. Other members felt that it would detract from the value of the place for public recreation and would create anxiety if ladies went there unprotected. Prison labour was only suitable for rough spade work and would require the employment of an overseer at a cost of £70 a year. A motion to accept the use of prison labour was defeated.

Abbott also pointed out that when the initial Grant of £400 was given, the Gardens comprised some eight or nine acres of land containing nothing but fruit trees. Now there were 17 acres and the number of plants, trees etc. had greatly increased. Initially labour was available in abundance for 10s a week, now it was 24s. He also believed that no other National Garden sold plants, fruit and seeds to make up the shortfall in income.

After much heated debate two resolutions were passed, even though many members felt that the Society had insufficient influence to bring to bear upon the Government and if the Government was to take over the maintenance they would '... "make it merely a playground for women and children as the Launceston gardens were."

Despite the opposition to convict labour it appears that the necessary increase of funds was not forthcoming and the Society was obliged to accept it.

The Gardens continued to procure new and rare plants with seeds of the China Grass *Boehmeria nivea*, which if cultivated successfully would " confer a valuable boon on the colony, seeing that there must arise an unlimited demand for each a such a fabric (as grass cloth) on the continent of Australia..." and seeds of the Umbrella Pine from Japan-*Sciadopitys verticillata* [*image 2*]

Early in 1873 work on the Main Line Railway had begun and it was reported that the works interfered considerably with the beauty of the Botanic Gardens. However, a few months later it was suggested that the increase in the number of visitors could be attributed to the interest taken in the construction of the railway works in the Gardens. A substantial ornamental bridge had been put across the line and planting had commenced on the nearby ground.

A reduction in prison labour resulted in little work being done on the new entrance but two small, inexpensive houses had been completed in the propagating yards One was a house heated by a hot water tank and the other an intermediate house.

>>>>>

It is seldom that anything of real horticultural interest is reported but in the Press but in 1874 the following appeared:

"A plant of *araucaria imbricata* (The Chili Pine or Monkey Puzzle) about eight feet -high, but of stunted growth, has produced two cones, from which about one hundred seedlings have been raised. This fact is very interesting, not only on account of the smallness of the plant, but also because it is generally understood that the genus *araucaria* produces its male and female flowers on separate plants, and that properly fertilised seed can only be obtained when the plants are growing in proximity to one another. In this case, however, we have a small isolated plant producing flowers of both sexes, and fertile cones from which seedlings have been raised. It is probably the first time *araucaria imbricata* has produced fertile cones in the Australian colonies"

Plants continued to be received and difficulty was experienced in finding suitable locations in some cases. ' are invariably destroyed through the carelessness of the prisoners, on whose labour we are in a great measure dependent for the performance of all ordinary operations. It is to be regretted that this class of labour cannot be entirely employed on works of extension or permanent improvement, for which it is best adapted. Much of it now supplied is quite unfit for any work requiring the slightest exercise of care or thought. Abbott's reservations were justified. The Society was also believed to be influential in matters of conservation as they received a letter concerning the need to restore the rapidly diminishing stock of the most valuable timber tree the *Eucalyptus globulus*.. The tree was not only being cleared for ship building, but young trees were being felled in order to export the seed to countries where the tree was grown not just as an ornamental and useful timber tree but for medicinal qualities of its leaves, the oil they produced and the shade the tree gave. The letter concluded that "we, in Tasmania seem to be doing our best to render it extinct.."

An article written by a Melbourne newspaper that concluded with an appreciation of Francis Abbott.

"Mr. Abbott deserves great credit for the way in which the garden is kept; ....he is not one of the kid-glove class of gardeners..." Abbott provided his men with an example of "industry and demeanour" and his "practical knowledge of botany is of a very high order."

The Tribune did not let the matter of understaffing and shortage of funds rest and stated that only three men worked the gardens plus the gang from Government, which was so small and inefficient as to be almost worthless.

By the end of the 1870s trouble over the inadequacy of the grant was raised again. The new entrance was being delayed largely due to lack of funds, repairs to tools and buildings was being delayed and it was only through the 'most rigid economy' that the gardens had been kept in a 'state of efficiency.' By the end of the 1870s the new entrance was completed and 'added to the general appearance and great convenience to the public and an increased appreciation of the Gardens.'



In 1878 new Gates for the Entrance (pictured left) had finally been erected and the Society was forced to acknowledge the value of the 'gang of prison labour' for their assistance in 'rough work' and admitted that without them maintaining the Gardens in a good condition or undertaking improvements or extensions

would be impossible.

The 1880s brought about new challenges amid concerns about the lack of money and shortage of labour. At a Meeting in 1881 a paper was presented to the Society - "Notes on the proposal for establishing a 'Class Ground' for typical plants, in the Society's ." Abbott spoke against the suggestion. He pointed out that the proposal had been raised before and he did not believe that the time was right. A Class Ground was valuable for education but should be accompanied by a good library, herbarium and lecture room. It would be of little value to the general public unless used for the advancement of botanical science. The cost would be between £100 and £150 and would need men with plant knowledge to look after it that would be an extra expense. He considered the formation of a Collection of Tasmanian Plants of primary importance.

Mr Charles Grant agreed with Abbott - the time was not ripe. There were too many demands on Abbott's time and the want of skilled labour. Grant had been to Kew Gardens and noted that the Class Ground was of limited interest to the public and supported establishing a Tasmanian Native Plants which would be interesting, instructive and of much greater interest to the public.

The Government Grant for the upkeep of the Gardens continued to fluctuate from year to year making it very difficult and in 1881 an increase in wages and salaries had resulted in the dismissal of the only skilled assistant that had been "detrimental in the highest degree." Over the next couple of years though the Gardens continued to send and receive plants. A large collection of rhododendrons had been received, some American vines (suitable for grafting) and plants of *Pinus Australia* (Georgia Pitch Pine) that had very durable wood and produced a quantity of pitch and turpentine. In 1883, 9,000 plant labels were produced by the House of Correction. This had involved much time and expense, but they would be of much educational value and interest to the public.

The following year a report stated that Abbott had been hampered by the lack of suitable labour in getting the Gardens ready for the summer. Abbott himself was the only skilled person to look after the nursery and tend to the plants and many of the alterations and improvements had not been carried out during the year. This Report goes on to state that even so several hundred bulbs, from Belgium, over one hundred different varieties of Chrysanthemums, and fifty roses had been added to the Collection. The wisteria and many other herbaceous plants were in bloom and the Camellias in the greenhouse were already flowering.

In 1885 the Society had to consider a proposal to incorporate and endow the Museum and Bot. Gardens. It was found that although the Royal Society had been making rules and regulations for the Gardens they had no power to enforce them as the ground was not vested in the Society that had only been authorised to take the land over by a despatch from the Secretary of State of about 40 years ago and had no legal title.

The proposed Bill would make both the Gardens and Museum National Institutions and most at the meeting felt it would be better if the Museum and Gardens were

nationalized. The Society would still have great control over both institutions as they would have members on the Board of Trustees. Members present agreed to affirm the general principles of the Bill and at last Lt. Col George Arthur got his wish when the Gardens would henceforth be called the Botanical Gardens, and in April 1886 the Society opened the winter session under altered conditions.

The following Board of Trustees was appointed for the Tasmanian Museum and Botanic Gardens:

The Chief Justice, Chief Secretary, Minister of Lands and Works, President of the Legislative Council, and Speaker of the House of Assembly;

Crown trustee: Mr. Matthew Weal, named by the Governor;

Trustees elected by the Council of the Royal Society: Messrs. James Wilson Agnew (Chairman of the Board) James Barnard, Justin McCarty Browne, Charles Henry Grant, Alexander George Webster, and Russell Young.

During the 1860s the Society placed emphasis on trialling plants that could have an economic value to Tasmania. These plants were not only trialled by Abbott at the Gardens but many members of the Society carried out similar projects. One of the earliest projects was to grow Mulberry trees for silk-worms in order to establish a silk industry, followed closely by experiments with tobacco plants and the Rice paper tree (*Tetrapanax papyferum*) which by the mid 1860s was about 6' tall and 5 years old. Besides the experimental plants the Gardens were being stocked by new trees and shrubs, 400 of them during one year including conifers from China and Japan. Plants were received from Dr. Mueller (Melbourne Botanic Gardens) and A.Verschaffreit, in Belgium, who also received 3 large tree ferns and others, including bulbs. A short paragraph noted - "...That one of the Norfolk Island pines ..in the Gardens was bearing both male and female blossoms which was the first time it was observed: the same plant bearing flowers of both sexes, it having been considered to be strictly dioecious," By the end of the decade the Pinetum had been laid out and planted, despite the difficulties of cultivation due to steep banks and rocky ground.

**Jenny Parrott,**  
**History Coordinator**

# Chinese Odyssey

## My layperson's glimpse of plants and gardens in China

In November 2017 I went on a fifteen day organised tour to China with my daughter. The tour guide was English-speaking, Beijing-born, and fellow travellers were Australian, Canadian, or American. We flew from Melbourne to Beijing via Shanghai; flew from Beijing to Chongqing; had three days on the Yangtze River from Chongqing to Jingzhou, through the locks of the Three Gorges Dam; travelled by coach and bullet train on to Shanghai; then flew home out of Shanghai.

I take walking tours in our gardens, and meet people of different nationalities. I wanted a reality-check-taste of what it is like to visit a country where English is not the first language, and where customs are different.

Perhaps a trip to China would help me to understand why visitors behave as they do when they are here.

Several of my favourite exotic plants originated in China – peonies, roses and irises; one of my favourite garden plants is the Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) and its story; and I also volunteer in the nursery, propagating begonias. I was going to take note of anything botanical and gardens-related that came my way.

Our hotel in Beijing was the centre for the 9<sup>th</sup> China (Beijing) International Garden Expo in 2013. Countries and cities created exhibits, including buildings and

gardens, over a 513ha site on the banks of the Yongding River. Huge wetlands are a legacy of this expo, as are gardens representing each Chinese province. Other areas have fallen into disrepair but were fun to explore as a wind-down from our long flights.



Erosion around a tree (*image 1*) shows how the trees were, and still are, planted. The roots are bound in the nursery and remain that way. It is usual to have each tree braced with timber stakes to ensure that it grows straight. Preparations in progress for winter include draining waterways; pruning and binding trunks with thick twine; covering vulnerable trees with shade cloth, within a timber framework; and digging up plants over a metre tall, complete with the planter that they are growing in.

Next year China will celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Peoples Republic of China. Under construction, near Beijing, is an international horticultural exhibition covering 960 hectares. The theme is Live Green Live Better - showing the beautiful life to the whole world. In the greening of China thousands of military personnel have had their tasks reassigned – they are planting trees.

Hutongs originally surrounded the Forbidden City. Though some have been demolished for roads and modern buildings, the remaining are now valued as important to China's cultural history. We explored alleyways in Lingdang Hutong, formed by the courtyard homes of residents, and visited a home of a family who are sixth generation on the same site. There were thriving small gardens in pots at entrances to several courtyards. However, the tenacity of the lone fruiting tomato plant, trussed up with electric cabling, in the dusty heap, impressed me (*image 2*).

The Shibaozhai Precious Stone Fortress is now in the Yangtze River, surrounded by a coffer dam and accessed by a pedestrian swinging bridge. Nine levels of timber stairway were built in 1819 to more easily access the temple built in 1750 on the top of the rocky outcrop.

A further three levels of stairway – not a nail in the whole complex - were added in 1957. Prior to then access was via steps cut into the rock, with metal chain for support. Today's gardeners use environmentally-friendly brooms, created from plants, with a little recycling for extra strength (*image 3*).

The only garden visit on our itinerary was to the Liu (Lingering) Garden in Suzhou. The term “garden” refers to the entire complex, including the buildings, and the history of the Liu Garden reveals its significance. It was a classical private garden built in 1593 on 23 hectares. A calligraphy lover owned it from 1798 and left his legacy in some of the buildings. In 1823 it was opened to the public as a resort. By 1911 it had been abandoned and in 1937 was an area for the army’s horses. In 1949, the year that the Peoples Republic of China was established, the Suzhou government took it over, and in 1954 it was re-opened to the public. As it was Autumn there was a chrysanthemum exhibition within the gardens, with amazing trails of them overhanging water features. Signage is always interesting in its translation, and in this case its message: *Civilized behaviour of tourists is another bright scenery (image 4)*. The penjing or penzai (larger version of the Japanese bonsai) area was originally the vegetable garden. I was lucky to see the gardeners wheeling their barrows back into the nursery through the keyhole entrance and glimpse the basic conditions in there before the timber doors were closed (*image 5*).

I saw thousands of Dawn Redwoods: by the highways; in grouped plantings in parks; and a sentinel by a canal in the Wuzhen Water Village. There also, in a group planting, was tree number 2 012 021. Our guide on that day did not know about the plant or what that number stood for. *Begonia sempervirens*, the small bedding begonia, was the only begonia that I saw – drooping in single pots in a hutong courtyard; massed plantings in the lawns by the museum in Shanghai; and in raised plantings to create standards in street-scapes. The beautifully manicured plants are the work of some of the millions relocated by the flooding of the Yangtze; rural people are now gardeners in the cities (*image 6*).

As we know at our gardens, a very important stop is the toilet (“happy place” on our tour). In the hutongs we shared with the residents in public toilets, as they do not have toilets in their own homes. We either waited in the queue for the one western toilet at a restaurant or learned to use the squat. We understand the need for tissues and bins – the ancient sewerage systems could not cope with the expectations that we have of our systems. It can be difficult reviewing one’s habits when on a short visit to a foreign country.



And, I took about two thousand photographs with my i-phone. How else could I recall that blur of fifteen days, without the time and date on each photo, and remember where I had been? Recently I smiled at the visitors in Ross taking photos of flowers and buildings on a beautiful Autumn day. I have seen the cities and high-rises that they will return to after their brief visit here. They, too, will want to recall what they have seen and experienced – those amazing things that **are** foreign to them. We were told not to stand back and wait our turn, or apologise if we bumped anyone, as they have no sense of personal space – how else could they survive in their cramped, to us, living and working conditions? If we wanted to see something and photograph it then we pushed in with everyone else, and were not abused for it. Our sense of personal space is so different.

By visiting China I have learned first-hand of cultural differences, and of difficulties encountered with a language so foreign to my own. I know the symbols for the numbers 1-9 and the compass directions, from my mah jong tiles! In various fonts and on modern signage they are not always readily recognised. A visitor needs far more than that to enjoy travel in China. I went with an open mind, and trust in a foreign tour company, and was well-rewarded. I hope that in return I can offer a rewarding experience for visitors to our gardens, no matter the language barrier, or their nationality.

**Wendy Bowman**

# Two Treasures of Victoria

## A wander through the botanic gardens of Williamstown and Bendigo

In early March Eileen and I visited botanic gardens in Victoria that were established at approximately the same time and are representative of some of the earliest recorded in that state. They are situated in the beach side community of Williamstown, across Port Philip Bay from Melbourne, and in the central Victorian city of Bendigo.

Williamstown Botanic Garden was designed by Edward La Trobe Bateman, perhaps better known as a painter of watercolours and illuminator of books, but who was also an accomplished draughtsman and garden designer. In all Bateman designed over thirty gardens, including ten public gardens in Victoria and sixteen in his native Britain. Bateman's designs were put in place by William Bull who laid out the gardens in 1856. In its earliest years the Williamstown garden was associated with German-born physician and botanical collector and writer Ferdinand von Mueller, who had been appointed the government botanist for Victoria, and English-born botanist and gardener Daniel Bunce, well known for his connections with Hobart and Launceston gardens.

An early role for the garden was to allow colonists to assess how well exotic (principally European) plants would fare in the Australian climate, but its lay out also made the garden popular for recreation and leisure. One of the dominating features of the design is a north-south orientated central avenue lined with long established palm trees (*Image 1*). At the northern end of the avenue is an ornamental pond surrounded by various species of palms, figs and flax (*Image 2*). There are a number of shady lawns that are popular for picnics, the largest and best known being the Golden Elm Lawn. To the south east corner of the gardens lies the Parker Reserve pinetum.

As well as the trees, lawns and flower beds, there are a number of statues and other structures in and around the gardens. Especially worthy of mention are the entrance gates. The northern entrance point features a

beautiful nineteenth century iron gate, reminiscent of our own at the RTBG (*Image 3*), whereas the eastern entrance way features a very much more modern gateway, though every bit as beautiful in its design (*Image 4*).

Gold was discovered in central Victoria in 1851. As early as 1854 a map shows the proposed site of a garden in the goldfields township of White Hills. The garden was established in 1857 as the White Hills Botanical Gardens. These gardens later changed their name to the Bendigo Botanic Gardens as the town, later city, of Bendigo spread outwards. Early in its history the gardens, like those in Williamstown, were influenced by Ferdinand von Mueller. They also received attention from William Robert Guilfoyle, the botanist and landscaper who is acknowledged as the architect for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

On approaching the gardens, one is immediately struck by the magnificent memorial archway at its entrance, denoted the 'Arch of Triumph' (*Image 5*). The heritage listed archway, a memorial to those who took part in the First World War was built by funds raised from local public subscriptions and was officially opened in May 1925.

Bendigo Botanic Garden has a number of notable features. The centrally located billabong is the last remaining section of the Bendigo Creek that once meandered throughout the gardens. In the 1870's the rest of the creek was canalised and today functions mainly as a wide storm water drain for many parts of the city. The billabong remains as a reminder of the way that the waterway may once have appeared and has been incorporated into the gardens as a wetland area supporting a variety of wildlife. As it relies on runoff from only a small catchment, the billabong is dependent on local rainfall, and Bendigo was experiencing drought conditions in March, so water levels were low. Nonetheless the billabong presented an attractive feature (*Image 6*).

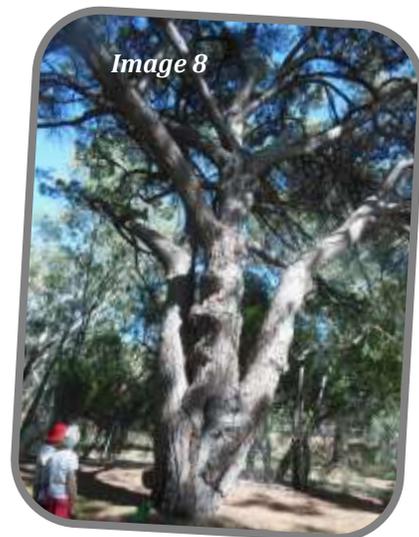
Trees form another dominant aspect of the gardens, (*Image 7*) and three dozen highly significant trees, both native and exotic, are listed. A magnificent stone pine (*pinus pinea*) especially caught the eye (*Image 8*). There is also a heritage listed cottage garden containing plants from the gold fields, first established in the nineteenth century and now undergoing restoration. Also being restored is the 'Grape Walk', a path with a trellised framework upon which grape vines are set to climb. This feature is also a reminder that the Bendigo region is home to a number of first rate vineyards. The gardens now hold the National Lavender Collection, which consists of over 80 cultivars from eleven different species of lavender. The Friends of the Bendigo Botanic Gardens helped grow the collection by propagating new plants from the original stock. There is also a walk through aviary with several species of parrot and pheasant.

Although the Bendigo Botanic Garden relies on the region's past for much of its appeal, plans are well advanced to put into place a 'Garden for the Future'. According to publicity, this new section will include a range of areas for relaxing, gathering and picnicking, as well as a new Visitor Hub building a café, gallery and interpretation centre, function and training rooms.

Clearly, it is not only the big city botanic gardens that are worthy of a visit. It is well worth seeking out some of the smaller treasures around the country.

Williamstown and Bendigo come highly recommended.

**Mike Maskrey**



# Member Profile:

## *Fran Alexis*



When asked by Eileen Maskrey, Guide coordinator, to write about my involvement with the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens I was initially reluctant to do so, but on further consideration I came to the conclusion that if reading about my experience encourages just one person to become a guide or to volunteer in some other form in the Gardens, then that would be a positive outcome for the RTBG who depend on and benefit so much from the input of volunteers.

My connection with the Gardens started at the end of 2001 when I saw an advertisement in the local paper calling for people interested in becoming tour guides so I decided to apply as I have always been interested in plants and gardens. I grew up in country NSW and my mother was a keen gardener, growing flowers and vegetables for our large family (I was one of six). As well as helping Mum I was always allowed to have a little portion of the garden as my own. All through my life I have been attracted to gardens, always calling in to see the Botanical Gardens in the cities I visited or spending time in them wherever I lived, and Hobart was no exception. My husband Peter and I moved here from Queensland at the end of 1996 after travelling for a year around Australia looking for the best place to settle. Hobart had everything we needed; great climate, four seasons, great views and wonderful Botanical Gardens. Employment opportunities were few in Hobart even though we had owned and operated thriving businesses in Emerald QLD, first a bookshop then an office supplies business selling and servicing all kinds of business machines and equipment. Peter eventually found a job in Hobart and I enrolled at the University as a mature age student and became addicted to study. I gained a BA degree, majoring in History and Classics then went on to do Honours, a Masters Degree and finally I gained a PhD in Classical Latin Literature.

It was at the end of my Honours year at Uni when I found some spare time to devote to the Gardens so, having answered the advertisement, I completed a very

rewarding 4-day course in Interpretative Guiding run by Jean Gray who was, at the time, the Education Officer at the RTBG. I was very impressed with her level of knowledge, her skill and her ability to inspire the group to become tour guides and ambassadors for the Gardens. The horticultural staff in the Gardens and the existing tour guides gave of their time and botanical knowledge to explain the history of the Gardens, its collections and ideas of conservation and education to demonstrate just how important Botanical Gardens are in the world. We were encouraged to develop our own 'themed tours' and I really enjoyed the opportunity to learn, extending my long held interest in plants and gardens to focus on the wonderful Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. Two years later I completed another training course run by TAFE to become an accredited Interpretative Tour Guide and I have been taking tour groups through the Gardens for close on seventeen years. It is still a joy to me to be able to share its delights with visitors every time I take a group, whether I walk or drive the Gardens Explorer, the 'buggy'. I continue to increase my knowledge of the Gardens, its plants, history and commitment to conservation, research, education and interpretation as well as its role in providing space for simple pleasure.

Devising and developing many different tours to showcase different aspects of the Gardens has become something I enjoy. One Arbour Day I was asked to take a tour concentrating on trees and this soon became a passion of mine. Our RTBG has a magnificent collection of Conifers, evident in the avenue leading to the main gates, the Pinetum which forms a backdrop to the lily pond and in the area east of the Eardley-Wilmot wall.

Deciduous trees are also well represented and are a joy to behold in autumn and again in spring as the many daffodils are planted beneath the Oaks and Elms make a fine show against the fresh new leaves. In winter the distinctive tracery of the tree branches and twigs against a blue sky is stunning.

History tours, recounting the development of the Botanical gardens from its first form as a Government Vegetable garden on the banks of the Hobart Rivulet, its relocation to its present site 200 years ago and the way the walls, buildings, plants and layout speak to us of the past also interest visitors. A couple of years ago Natalie Tapson, Plant Records Officer at the Gardens, found a Guide to the Gardens, handwritten in 1914 by the then superintendent, John Wardman. Jenny Parrot and I traced his footsteps, identifying that the many trees and shrubs mentioned in Wardman's Guide are probably the same ones that can be found in the Gardens today. Our Wardman's Walk gives an insight into the continuity of aims and goals of the Gardens as it gives evidence that 100 years ago the importance of plant collections, conservation and public pleasure was as central to the role of the Gardens in Hobart society as it is today.

When I became a Tour Guide at the RTBG I also joined the Friends of the RTBG and it is thanks to them that I was able to attend a Conference for Volunteer Guides in Botanical Gardens held in Melbourne in 2005, where I found that a love of learning and passion for Botanical Gardens and Guiding in particular is shared by many. The Friends paid for my Conference Registration that time and I have since been to other cities hosting the conference and each time I have been stimulated and encouraged by the vast effort and knowledge that volunteer guides contribute to Botanical Gardens around Australia and New Zealand. The RTBG hosted the Volunteer Guides in Botanical Gardens Conference here in 2009, and although it was a huge task for such a tiny band of volunteers, the conference was a great success. I enjoyed the challenge of planning and executing a day tour for part of the group to visit Mt. Field National Park to show the great diversity of native plants in their alpine setting, returning to Hobart via Ellendale and Hamilton where the ordered garden of mostly introduced plants at Prospect Villa offered a complete contrast.

Membership of the Friends of the RTBG has allowed me to keep up with the many changes in the Gardens through this publication, *Fagus*, as well as offering the opportunity to join organised excursions arranged by the Friends committee. A trip to Bruny Island to search out native orchids and a survey of revegetation with Alan Gray on the property 'Curringa Farm' near Hamilton which included a trip on Meadowbank Lake, are two such outings which spring to mind. Opportunities to increase my knowledge have been offered by the Gardens too, and I have participated in many of their conferences and projects to raise awareness of Tasmanian Native plants, especially threatened and endangered species. As well as guiding in the Gardens, I have been an active member of the Begonia Propagating Group and work in the nursery every second Friday, ensuring a steady supply of Begonias to display their spectacular foliage and flowers in the conservatory. I was privileged to know Peter Sharp, an expert on growing Begonias in Australia, who started the group with Megan Marrison and who shared his vast knowledge so generously with us. We are a small but dedicated group who work with and learn from both Megan and Lorraine Perrins.

I have made many good friends both within the band of volunteers and among the Gardens' staff and can recommend spending any spare time volunteering in any capacity at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens – it is a great place to be. Tour guiding in particular in the Gardens is very rewarding; you meet such a diversity of people and there is no limit to the opportunities for further learning.



**Note added by the Editor.** Fran attended the 2015 Conference for Australian and New Zealand Tour Guides in Botanic Gardens as the Friends' official delegate. Her report of the conference can be found in the November 2015 issue of *Fagus*.

# A Gin for the Bicentennial

*At an event held on the new lily pad platform on the evening of Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, a gin was launched to mark the bicentennial of the RTBG. It was attended by a number of Friends as well as RTBG staff. The creator of the gin is Kristy Booth-Lark, daughter of distillers Bill and Lyn Lark and daughter in law of Friends President, Joan Booth. The following article is Kristy's story as to how the special gin came about.*

After my parent's distillery was purchased by a group of investors in mid-2013, I worked for them until December 2015 when, while on maternity leave, my position was made redundant. After several months of being approached by various people to help them set up their own distilleries I decided that I wanted to set up my own distillery. Killara Distillery was established in July 2016 with the first new make whisky spirit running from the still in August 2016. Apothecary Gin was launched in November 2016.

I named the distillery Killara as a tribute to my parents and my history. Killara is the street my parents lived on where the first modern distillery was licenced in Tasmania, it is the same place where the still sat right outside my bedroom door as I was growing up and is now the place where I am living again!

I have chosen to use a different still shape to a majority of the other distilleries in Australia. Instead of having the condenser to the side of the still it is on top. This is a similar still to the one that I used when working at my parent's distillery, (which was the one that was outside my bedroom,) though mine is a little bigger and has a few improvements added. It creates a smooth robust spirit that will be enhanced through the maturation process.

I love that I get to make things, that I have control over what I produce, what goes into the still, what comes out of it, how it is made. I love the process, it really is a mixture of science, know-how and a little bit of magic

thrown in for good measure. I enjoy making things that I can share, not only with my family and friends but with lots of other people as well. I am a creative person and for me distilling is a creative outlet where I can get my hands dirty and be involved in the process from beginning to end. It is really satisfying knowing I have made something great that can be enjoyed by lots of people.

Distilling gin is great fun, there are so many botanicals that can be used and I was very excited when I was approached by Tory and Joan to work with the RTBG to come up with their bicentenary gin. The gardens have long been a favourite place for me to visit and I have many fond memories of being there as a child and now I am able to take my children there as well.

All gins have a base of juniper and then you can really add any other botanical. Some things go really well together while others not so much and it is always a balancing act to get the recipe just right. I first walked around the gardens with Tory and Adam and tasted different things in the edibles and herb garden. I took away the last of the tamarillos, cumquats and green tea to distil.



*The gin and its main botanicals*

Once back at the distillery I ran each of those things separately through the 5 litre test still to get an idea of what they tasted like individually. Samples were sent to Tory and it was decided to focus on the cumquat as the main ingredient (apart from juniper) in the gin as it has a beautiful sweet citrus flavour.

Starting with a base of juniper and the cumquat I also added in tamarillo, which has a surprising herbaceous flavour when distilled, lemongrass, coriander, camomile for a little sweetness and orris root to bind all the flavours together. All these ingredients combine to create a well-balanced gin that (in my opinion) is easy to drink on its own, goes great mixed with tonic or in a cocktail. The French 75 that we had at the launch of the gin was amazing and is my new favourite cocktail!

There are several different botanicals I am experimenting with, some of which will be used for the next batch of RTBG gin. The Tassie berry and river mint from the Tasmanian edible section and the green tea are definitely some of the things that will feature in an upcoming gin.

**Kristy Booth-Lark**

**Joan Booth, Gary Davies, Eileen Maskrey and Tory Ross enjoying the Launch**



**Kristy Booth-Lark launching the RTBG Bicentennial Gin on the Lily Pad on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> March.**



*After the official opening of the lily pad on April 10<sup>th</sup>, HRH Prince Edward bore away with him gifts of both the Bicentennial Gin and Kristy's Apothecary Gin.*

## **Garden Happenings: More Birthday Celebrations**

The extension to the Education POD was used by the ABC to celebrate 80 years of Radio Hobart. A display of equipment and archival material opened on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April. The Sound Preservation Association of Tasmania was on hand, as were Friends of ABC, Chris Wisbey, Peter Cundall, Staff and of course the Friends of RTBG. Pumpkins, in all their variety, decorated the outside area. Packets of seed were for sale and plants of all kinds. And the book. And the gin. Friends offered free guided walks. There was a cooking demonstration in The Patch. Sausages sizzled on the barbeque near the POD. Coffee was served from a bus.

Hobartians, undeterred by snow on the mountain and gusts of icy, rainy wind, came in puffer jackets and thermals, enjoyed the moments of sun and felt privileged to be part of the celebrations.

**Text and photo: Aina Dambitis**



# Favourite Garden Icon

## Number 9 - Monument to the Blue Gum



The wooden installation titled “Monument to the Blue Gum” is to be found at the top of the lawn housing the Floral Clock. It is close to the New Zealand native collection. The blue gum from which the monument is crafted is the same blue gum that provided material for the Gardener’s basket (see last issue) and has been lauded in previous issues of *Fagus* (November 2006 and November 2013). An image of the sculpture itself features on the front cover of the November 2013 *Fagus* issue. The creator of the monument, Marcus Tatton, placed it in the gardens in 2008 in an act of tribute to all Tasmanian blue gums. The plaque beside the installation states, in Tatton’s words “This sculpture symbolises reverence for the great forests of Blue Gums in Tasmania which we all inherit when we come to live in this unique part of the world”.

Marcus Tatton has strong associations with the RTBG. In December 2012, in collaboration with American sculptor Peter Lunberg, Marcus staged an exhibition

within the gardens which lasted for approximately 17 months. The exhibition featured many complex and beautifully executed installations, chiefly constructed of wood, but also incorporating stone, metal, plastic, living plants, and most controversially, a repurposed cement mixer! My personal favourite was one entitled *Siege*, shown below as a reminder.



## Garden Happenings Continued: Visitor from Neutrog



On Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup> Customer Relationship Manager for Neutrog, Helen Lovel, spoke to a group of staff and representatives of Friends in the Banksia Room. Helen described the processes used in producing the Neutrog fertilizers and spoke about the latest products.

After the presentation, Helen (second from right) is seen with Catherine King (Secretary of Friends and member of Growing Friends) David Reid (who chaired the session) and Lorraine Perrins (Curator of Conservation). Friends are reminded that their membership brings benefits when purchasing Neutrog products.

*Photo: Eileen Maskrey*

## Tour Guides Finish on a High Note



After a long, and sometimes frustrating tourist season, Friends and Volunteers involved in tour guiding and Explorer driving met for a debriefing on Friday, March 30<sup>th</sup>. Despite the weather on the day, the smiles indicate a job well done!

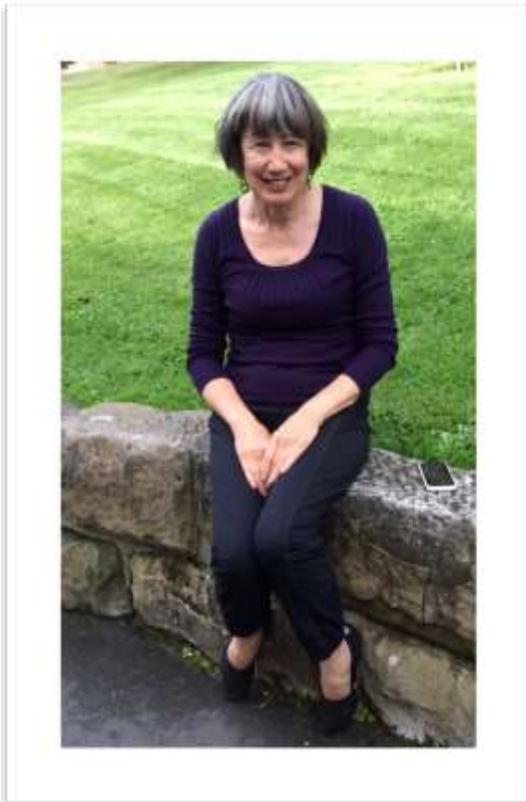
*Photo: Eileen Maskrey*



# Friends' News

## March General Meeting

On Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup> (St. Patrick's Day) our speaker was Wendy Bowman (*pictured*), who provided a fascinating presentation on her travels in China late last year. You can find an article by Wendy, based on her trip, within this copy of *Fagus*.



## Bicentenary Additions to the Gardens



## June General Meeting

The next general meeting of Friends will be held in the Banksia Room, RTBG, on **Saturday June 16<sup>th</sup>**, commencing at 10am. Our guest speaker will be Kristy Booth-Lark, who has produced a gin for the RTBG Bicentennial. Kristy's story can be found in this copy of *Fagus*. The meeting will be well worth attending. There is a rumour that samples may be available for tasting!

## 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](http://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 (0429 190784)

**Our Next Issue: August 2018**