

STORIES, SNIPPITS AND BRIEF HISTORY WB GARDENS

The following is taken from the Friends newsletters and the WBG1995 Management plan

Overall, the gardens are highly valued by the community for their recreational and cultural associations from the past and their potential for the future. (1995 MP)

For its ability to demonstrate a nineteenth century context of hardship and effort (hence cultural values) in establishing a public garden at the time e.g. primitive watering system, horse-powered maintenance, on-site seed germination, the unknown acclimatisation problem of distance in obtaining plant material and problems of dealing with grazing animals and unknown acclimatisation.... (1995 MP)

WBG Web site <https://wbgardens.com.au/>

WBG Management plans <https://wbgardens.com.au/the-gardens/masterplans-2017-1995>

Guilfoyle

It should be noted that William Guilfoyle's 1877 plan and report for the gardens have not been found and were supposedly last seen in 1947. It is hoped that this valuable record might one day be relocated and returned to the City of Warrnambool.

Guilfoyle's philosophy was that botanic gardens should realise a dual role of pleasing landscape effect and scientific arrangement of the various species of different orders of plants

Curators

Through the 115 years from 1872, four Curators attended to the Gardens. Charles Scoborio was the first of this remarkably long-serving succession, being Curator from 1872 to 1905. William Donald held the position from 1906 to 1931, Duncan Leitch from 1932 to 1958 and Laurence McPhee from 1959 to 1986. Terry O'Sullivan from 1995 and now John Sheely 2007

STRUCTURES

Memorial Gates at the Entrance

After the death of King George V in 1936, the Mayor of Warrnambool Cr. R. V. Philpott opened an appeal for the public to subscribe to a memorial Fund.

On the motion of Miss Lake it was decided that the best memorial to the late King George V would be ornamental memorial gates at the Botanic Gardens.

The Mayor suggested that the present gates at that time be removed to the other entrance in Cockman Street. The Town Clerk, Mr H J Worland, mentioned that it was little known that the existing gates were the Queen Victoria Memorial gates and should also have an inscription.

Urns

October 1895

The ex-Mayor, Mr J. Ward, has set an example which is worthy of emulation by presenting three handsome vases to the gardens. These stand about 7 feet in height, and are alike handsome and substantial, and make splendid adornments for the gardens. The vases have been placed in positions near the main entrance, and probably other citizens will also give works of art for beautifying this well-kept park.

Well and Windmill

The well was constructed in 1882 and is approximately 18 metres deep (60 feet)

With the sinking of the well and construction of a windmill, water became available to the gardens which proved invaluable in establishing and maintaining new plantings.

Well

1882 was originally served by a windmill, later replaced by a gas pump, housed in a tin shed. Once the town water supply was connected the well was no longer used and the shed became overgrown with creepers

Describing Warrnambool Botanic Gardens in 1884 “The Vagabond” wrote’

...A good deal of money has been spent here by the town council, and a very large amount will yet to be expended before the gardens will be thoroughly representative of the wealth and importance of the town, although even now they form a pleasant resort. A windmill has been erected over a well and tanks provided to store water for irrigating purposes, the waste being conducted to a lake which occupies the lower portion of the ground

The Argus, 6th December 1884

From curators Scoborio to Sheely, from rain water tanks to Rain bird irrigation, our Gardens have been defined by water.

In the beginning the only source of water was rain water, stored in tanks and hauled by horse or man to the newly planted trees. When a well was sunk in 1882 and a windmill erected soon after, it was possible, by pipeline and hose, to better water the flower beds and lawns, but the work was exhausting. Scoborio reported to the Town Council in 1898

Rotunda

This historic building with its elegant, octagonal-shaped design and roof of Marseilles tiles, will be 100 years old next year. It has been an important feature of our Guilfoyle gardens, a centre for our activities and enjoyed by thousands over the years. Some might remember the outside staircase with its “speakers’ platform” which sadly had to be removed for safety reasons.

It was opened in 1913 –

Cottage

Over the years there have been hints and stories of ghosts that visited the Curator’s Cottage in the Warrnambool Gardens. Most tell of friendly unthreatening ghosts.

Some describe a lady in old-fashioned dress with a black cape, others a pretty fair haired girl about five or six years old, who wore a pink sash, and others of piano music, lovely melodious sounds that were hard to trace.

Curators cottage

Donald lived with his wife and five children in the Curator’s cottage, which after some time was enlarged to better accommodate them. Mrs Donald and her daughters, on occasion, served afternoon teas from the cottage veranda.

Donald was a Scottish horticulturalist. He had worked at Mount Macedon before coming to Warrnambool.

Sundial

The first known reference to the sundial is Scoborio’s record book entry of 1904 (62). The existing inscription indicates that it was presented to the gardens by W.J. Hickford, Mayor of Warrnambool 1895-1897.

Maze

The 1896 plan of the maze was based on the design of the Hampton Court Palace maze, London (Figure 15). It was built as a series of timber lattices supporting a single species of creeper. Mrs. Anderson, daughter of William Donald (curator 1906-1931), recalls the maze creeper to have been Virginia creeper (63). In 1904, near the end of his working life, Scoborio recorded: “..... at the maze the creepers are doing well, the whole of the fences are nearly covered. It’s a great source of amusement to visitors to the garden, especially strangers

Aviary

In December 1888 the Gardens Committee proposed that “..... the aviary be erected between the two cages at present in niche near the windmill” and that “..... a fernery be erected at the site selected by the curator and approved by the Committee to be 30 feet by 60 feet in 3 terraces, the roof to be in 3 steps” (51). (MP 1995)

Aviaries

Apart from the aviaries already mentioned, animal enclosures are believed to have been located at the circular promenade west of the depot area (60), and a Kangaroo is known to have been kept opposite the rotunda at the eastern end of the lake (61). (Figure 14)

Menagerie

On 28th April, 1927, Council notified the curator to set about the disposal of the menagerie. Warrnambool Rotary Club identified the continued presence of at least one enclosure in 1938: “At the last meeting of the Rotary Club of Warrnambool, the plight of the lone captive emu in the Botanical Gardens, was discussed We feel that no useful purpose is being served by keeping this bird in its confined and unnatural quarters and we urge the City Council to have it liberated in its native environment as soon as possible” (14).

Lake 1895

The efforts now being made to fill 'the lakes' with water will probably be successful. For some years the excavations made for this purpose have interfered with the appearance of the gardens, as the water would not remain there, but run away through the porous soil. The town surveyor, Mr Ross, is making experiments, and it is likely that the lake will shortly be filled with water

The Lake and Bridge are key components of the Scoborio/Guilfoyle development period, the lake appearing to have altered little in shape and size since. The bridge, however, gained a stone-faced balustrade in 1942, replacing the earlier timber version. Now, both lake and bridge have developed the patina of age which adds to the intrinsic appeal of the water, coupled with the attraction of water birds and aquatic plants. The lake is possibly the most popular single feature of the Gardens, being enjoyed by all age groups.

The Bridge 1884

The windmill permitted the construction of the lake which began in December 1884 (49). Photographic and documentary evidence suggests that the lake, early bridge, lake fountain and the rockery-enclosed fountain at the south east entrance were all complete by 1886.

By 1913, the picturesque character of the bridge had been enhanced by rustic latticework applied to the balustrade and carefully chosen roots and branches applied to the lower central span.

Fencing out cattle

On 27th July 1916, the Department of Lands and Survey wrote to Council approving: “..... the expenditure of Three Hundred Pounds, out of the surplus of fees derived from agistment of cattle on the Warrnambool Municipal Common in fencing, planting and improving the Botanic Gardens” (23).

Paths

The curator continued to maintain the pre-existing “limestone” walks, as indicated by the aerial photograph c.1929 (Figure 17) and the report book entry for April 1912: “I would also like to make another section of the main walk this winter, and to do this I will require to get some rough stone and some screenings from the crusher to finish with” (22).

Maintenance

In 1937, the gardens changed from “horse machine” to motor mower grass cutting: “..... they have quoted a motor mower at 140 pounds and horse machine at 187 pounds 10

Bird Watch

Eastern Spinebill feeding from a flowering Gynea Lilly

White Faced Herron feeding two fledglings beside their nest on the top of one of the high pines in the pinetum. Many trees are good nesting sites such as the tall pines where, among others, *the white-faced Herons* nest right up in the canopy, the outstretched branches offering good support for their flimsy stick nests that were gathered from the surrounds below, including the willows. *Pacific Black Duck* produce a few clutches each year. *Dusky Moorhens*. *Sacred Kingfishers* are swooping low over the ponds catching dragon flies

Bats or grey nomads

Early in 2003 about 70 Flying Foxes took up residence in the Canary Island Palm near the cannon. By July that year their number had increased to between 300 and 400. Eventually they moved on. A small colony took up residence in the Indian Bean Tree before relocating in the nearby elms

PLANTS

Flowers 1900's

The Mayor said he was sorry to hear of thefts of flowers from the gardens chiefly by ladies who appeared to be under the impression that they could take as many flowers as they wished.

The town clerk said there notices at the gates prohibiting the taking of flowers. The only remedy was to prosecute offenders.

The tallest Washingtonia is know as the 'Sky Duster'

The ginkgo is a survivor. It was here with the dinosaurs and is possibly the world's oldest living tree species. Fossil remains have been found all over the world. From the end of the last Ice Age, its distribution contracted to China. It was grown in temple gardens where today there are trees 1000 years old and possibly as old as 3000 years. The ginkgo was used in Chinese herbal medicine to treat asthma and improve blood circulation, and similar therapeutic claims are made for it today. It is a hardy plant, tolerant of harsh conditions, as those surviving the polluted air of many Chinese avenues attest.

Lone Pine

The [story](#) of the Lone Pine (*Pinus Brutia*) that grows in Warrnambool Botanic Gardens has become a legend, and like all legends, it has developed different versions with repeated tellings. This version we know, from detailed research, to be accurate.

The Lone Pine in Warrnambool's Botanic Gardens is one of Australia's most notable trees. It was grown from the seed of a pine cone collected at the battle of Lone Pine at Gallipoli and is a living memorial to that terrible battle.

Dutch Elm 'Money Tree'

The huge old elm to the east of the lake shades the area most used for community events. This tree was planted in the Scoborio era and must be at least 100 years old.

The tree developed a serious split some twenty odd years ago and was in danger of collapse. Thanks to the generous efforts of the Warrnambool community money was provided to secure the branches with rods and cables. This expensive exercise, undertaken in 1981 and supported by Rotary, led to the elm being known as the Money Tree.

Moreton Bay Figs

'Twin Figs' These are among the most dramatic trees in the Gardens. Their massive spreading roots provide a playground for children who can imagine pixies fairies and goblins hiding amongst them.

Rough-Barked Manna Gum

Eucalyptus viminalis subsp. *cygnetensis*

When work began on the present site of Warrnambool Botanic Gardens in 1866 the land was heavily timbered. Remnant vegetation is still there with three old Manna Gums, *Eucalyptus viminalis* and a Sweet Bursaria, *Bursaria spinosa* surviving.

The old gums provide nesting hollows for the birds, while one is host to a hive of native bees. Recently plants grown from the seed of these original trees and shrubs have been added to the collection.

Sandpaper fig

As the name indicates, the leaves are extremely rough and in the past aborigines used them to smooth their wooden utensils. They also used parts of the tree to treat wounds.

Wollemi Pine

Carrick Chambers, director of Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens said of the Wollemi Pine, This is the equivalent of finding a small dinosaur alive on earth

The tree was discovered in the Wollemi National Park about two hours drive from Sydney. It was a chance discovery by a bush walker, David Noble, who in September 1994 in a remote and isolated valley, found a clump of tall trees he did not recognise.

The Botanical name *Wollemia nobilis*, recognises the location, the discoverer and the stature of the tree. The structure of the leaves is fern like while the bark is bubbly. Mature trees grow to 40m. It is a member of the Araucariaceae family, as are our Norfolk Pines, Hoop Pines and the Bunya Bunya.

Remnant trees

Four specimens of the coastal manna gum (*E. pryoriana*) and presumably one remnant Bursaria spinosa survive as representatives of remnant indigenous species pre-dating site selection in 1866.