

Friends of the HV McKay Gardens



WINTER 2016 NEWSLETTER

August 2016

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Post: Friends of the McKay Gardens, PO Box 154, Sunshine, VIC 3020

President's message

The Friends lost one of its founding friends on 13 July, when Isabel Grace Bell passed away to be with the Lord. It was Isabel who graciously offered the use of the church hall for our meetings which gave us a home. We've been grateful to Isabel on several occasions since. We offer Gilbert, her husband, and her family, our deepest sympathy on their loss. Incidentally, this was a day after Isabel and Gilbert celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary.



Isabel was a former local school teacher who had a passion for Christian Schools, being instrumental in the beginnings of the Sunshine Christian School, and the Belgrave Heights Christian School. She was a secretary of a group that sought to found a Christian Tertiary College also, but that one just couldn't get off the ground.

There is much more to know about Isabel, and a lot of it can be found in her autobiography, copies of which were given out at her memorial service at the Sunshine Presbyterian Church on 18 July.

Vale Isabel Bell. You will be sorely missed.

Helen Reid, President

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Budget update

The Friends are over the moon with our result from the 2016/17 Budget submission to Brimbank Council. As some of you may know, 2015/16 has been extremely trying. The installation of the irrigation system took much longer than anyone anticipated and did much more damage to the Gardens than we anticipated. In addition, the Council budget for this year was proposing a measly \$15,000 for restoration and further development in the upcoming financial year. As a consequence, the Friends submitted a formal response to the draft budget hoping to get a better outcome.

And, after nearly ten years of effort, and innumerable submissions to Council, the Friends believe we have finally got a result that will enable the restoration and redevelopment of the Gardens to make real progress. Not only have we managed to achieve an increase in infrastructure funding to \$50,000 but we believe that there is a real possibility that the Gardens will finally have a full-time gardener permanently based in the Gardens.

Further, after many decades of being incorrectly and inappropriately listed as a suburban park, the H.V. McKay Gardens will finally be listed as a heritage garden. So, the Gardens now have an operational irrigation system, (hopefully) a permanent gardener and sufficient funds to make headway on the implementation of the our new management and strategic plan. We look forward to the upcoming year with real anticipation. We also thank Council officers who were actively involved in this outcome.

Catherine McDonald, Vice-President

Irrigation system report

The watering system for the Gardens was finally completed in late April, meaning that future plantings in the gardens can be maintained through hot, dry conditions.

The Friends have been campaigning for a watering system for many years and were finally successful with works commencing on the watering system last July (2015). The watering system was due to be completed in October 2015, but due to delays in securing power and water supply, did not come online until April.



One delay was caused by the contractor not even knowing where the water supply was coming from! We also had to wait for over 6 months for Council to resolve its issues with PowerCor!!



This was very frustrating as we had a particularly dry summer this year that led to a die-off of many plants in the Gardens. We also had to cancel a proposed visit from the Australian Garden History Society due to the generally poor conditions of the Garden resulting from the lack of water.

While the watering system will help to secure the long-term future of the Gardens, in the short term Council has many repairs and replanting that need to be done as a result of the irrigation contractor's works.



This was really disappointing to see and frustrating that Council couldn't manage the contractor to reduce the destruction of parts of the Gardens. The Friends are now putting the painful experience of the watering system installation behind them and are looking forward to commencing re-planting once the damage is rectified.

Angela Ganley, Secretary



New tree planting

Brimbank Council has undertaken to plant four new trees in the Gardens during the current planting season - a London Plane, an Italian Cypress, a Grey Poplar and a Brush Box. These will supplement the eight trees planted last year (two each of Italian Cypress, Southern Magnolia and Bhutan Cypress, a Pepper tree and another London Plane). The new trees will replace previous replacement trees which have disappeared due to drought, neglect, vandalism and old age.



The trees of the HV McKay Memorial Gardens are one of its major features, not only from a historical perspective, with the five 100-year old Algerian Oaks being the most significant, but also from a design point of view, as they provide strong visual structure to the Gardens. These and the many other trees of various species and age (more than 100) also help biodiversity and climate alleviation by providing animal habitat and shade.



Trees have been planted at different times in the Gardens throughout its 107 year history. Unfortunately trees have a limited life (it is hoped a long one) but disappear for a variety of reasons. In addition to those mentioned previously, theft and removal / introduction of infrastructure can be included. Numerous trees in the Gardens have suffered this fate over the last few years, sometimes for a second time after replanting.



In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to replace and plant more trees, some of which were to restore the historical character of the Gardens, some to provide shade and others to enhance the visual character of the Gardens such as to define its edge. The Council's Capital Works projects of 2009 and 2011 were part of this effort, and in 2010, the Council undertook a succession planting to replace trees which were reaching the end of their life. Also, as part of the 2009 centenary, descendants of HV McKay planted a Bunya Pine and contributed to the cost of two other trees, Kurrajongs, planted near Anderson Road. The Rambler Ladies of the Lyceum Club also contributed to the cost of another tree, a Firewheel tree, after the publicity of the centenary of the Gardens.

Ros Savio

Oral history project

Our Oral History project is progressing well. We have contacted 22 potential interviewees since receiving the grant and been able to interview 14 people with a range of backgrounds and connections to the gardens.

One interviewee, Brian O'Reilly, now 84, of the Sunshine and District Historical Society, has lived in Sunshine all his life. Brian has memories of Sunshine Gardens when he and his friend used to stand on the McKay footbridge and watch the cricket matches on the adjacent reserve which he recalls was called the 'Gardens Reserve'.

Another interviewee, Tony Menhennit, previously Deputy Superintendent of Parks and later Deputy Director of Parks at Sunshine Council during the 70s and 80s has had a more formal connection but also early personal memories of the Gardens. Most of the interviews have been transcribed, and the audio files will be edited and gradually put online on our newly revived website so all can learn about the Gardens and what they were like.

Melinda Mockridge, Coordinator, Oral histories



An unusual perspective of the gardens taken at night from under the McKay pedestrian bridge. Winter 2016. Many people find the Gardens at night a threatening place, but actually, they have their own charm at night. Catherine McDonald - photo & text

Why not join us?

New members are always welcome!

The annual subscription is just \$5.00, and you can join by contacting the Secretary, Angela at:

Email: contact@mckaygardens.com.au
 Post: Friends of the McKay Gardens
 PO Box 154, Sunshine, VIC 3020

New Friends' Website

Michelle Edwards has recently migrated the Friends' Website to <http://www.mckaygardens.com.au/> It serves as a resource for people to learn more about the Gardens, and to find out about regular (and irregular) activities the Friends are undertaking. You can also read through past Newsletters and view/listen to our multimedia files. Some interesting places to visit on our website include:

- Bill Bampton's article [*The H.V. McKay Gardens: An industrial garden 100 years on*](#)
- Catherine McDonald's article on [*The Historical Significance of the Gardens*](#)

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AGM on 6 August, 10am

The Friends of HV McKay Gardens AGM will be held on Saturday 6th August at 10am at the Sunshine Presbyterian Church Hall, 120 Anderson Road, Sunshine. The AGM will be followed by a regular Committee meeting (which are held on the first Saturday each month at 10am). All are welcome to attend.



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