

Newsletter

SUMMER 2019



Website: <http://www.mckaygardens.com.au/>

Email: contact@mckaygardens.com.au

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofMcKayGardens>

Instagram: @McKayGardens

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

Registration No A0050996B

President's report

The McKay Memorial Gardens were once notable for their annual floral displays of chrysanthemum and dahlias that attracted visitors from all over the country. At a recent Brimbank City Council Business Breakfast attendees (including the Friends) were introduced to the latest thinking on the economic role of tourism. Tourism, both local and international, forms a significant part of Victoria's economy and parks and gardens are our number one attraction. With BCC's new perspective, the McKay Gardens have an opportunity to once again play a significant role in both the social and economic well-being of our community. Not only are we Brimbank's only heritage listed garden but we are perfectly situated within easy reach of public transport and the food and cafe hot spot of Hampshire Road. While we have achieved much in the last few years, there is still much to do to restore the Gardens to their former glory and to make us stand out as a truly desirable tourist destination. In the coming year members can expect a series of events and activities that will continue to promote and improve the horticultural and social heritage of the Gardens. We thank our members for joining in this task.

Catherine McDonald

Summer flower show

Some of the blooms on show at the Gardens in January 2019 (photos by Michelle Edwards)



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Visit to Kyneton

The New Committee had an informal meeting and get-together on Sunday 9 December 2018 at the Kyneton Botanic Gardens, where Catherine, Helen, Ros, Speroulla, Michelle, Russell and Melinda met and had a tour of inspection in steady rain.



Kyneton Botanic Gardens, c.1923 (State Library of Victoria)

Everyone then moved on to Melinda and Russell's property just out of Kyneton where we had an afternoon tea among the greenery and inspected the rose display and summer show of flowers.



(l-r) Roslyn Savio, Speroulla Christodoulou, Michelle Edwards, Melinda Mockridge, Catherine McDonald, Helen Reid (photo by Russell Smith).

Upcoming development of adjacent land to the south of the Gardens

The land adjacent to our heritage-listed Gardens is proposed for private development, some 350 multi-storey housing units at 112-116 Anderson Road, Sunshine/Albion, being land formerly referred to as 'Chaplin Reserve'. The Friends have responded to the latest round of the Town Planning community consultation process by outlining, in a formal submission, that the Gardens seeks a 'good neighbour' relationship between the heritage Gardens with the proposed development and its newcomer residents. We have also raised some design/layout concerns, including:

- There are opportunities to better reflect the HV McKay 'garden city' legacy within the development and its elements;
- That the Council Heritage Advisor should make a report at each stage of the development planning, in relation to any impacts on the Gardens amenity;
- That further Heritage Victoria approvals will be required for any works involving or impacting the Gardens on their southern boundary, at the northern boundary of the development site, that is, along the declared 'Heritage Interface' spaces;
- That the Council Planning Permit must ensure that there is NO buildings or works located within the Heritage Interface, other than landscaping ..eg no balconies or building overhangs, no protruding awnings, no fences, no BBQ or suchlike outdoor setting structures;
- There should be buffer landscaping between the proposed Development northern pathway and the site boundary ...the planting should have regard to the adjacent heritage Gardens, which are in restoration phase. Therefore the plantings should be reflecting the Edwardian gardenesque nature of the area .., as outlined/described in the 'H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens Management Plan 2017 Management Plan', and could include low hedge planting (trimmed to 90cms), perhaps at the eastern end, as part of the proposed Pocket Park, that is, hedging similar to that which is currently planned for the north-west corner of the Gardens and the Anderson Road boundary of the Gardens;
- The site border fencing, that interfaces with the Gardens, except for two gateways, should not be concrete blocks or as similarly shown on draft plans ... what is needed is an access-restricting fence, to protect the historically defined edge of the Gardens, suchlike as black mesh or similar, to about 1.2 m in height, and there should be no other uncontrolled access into the Gardens. The gateways themselves should have bollards included as per the church entrance to the Gardens, as planned for elsewhere, as outlined in the 'H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens Management Plan 2017 Management Plan';
- The concept of a 'pocket park' located on the north-east corner of the development site is supported, that is, directly adjoining the Gardens south-east corner and adjacent also to the McKay Footbridge. However, the park design should include unique infrastructure reflecting the character of the Gardens and the McKay legacy ...the design and equipment should not be 'suburban standard';
- Two pedestrian crossings/connections into the Gardens area are supported ...(in addition to the Pocket Park), being the existing 'gateway' area location and one other, with both of them being located opposite the existing points in the Gardens' pathways where there is a north-south connector, near the Church ... public lighting will also be needed at these points.

We have also included a side note suggesting that funds from the Development Contributions collected by the Council, from this or future developments in the area ... (some 340 units to be constructed at this site, equals the equivalent of approx \$1M in Development Contributions to the community) could have been directed to a % of the necessary works identified in the 'H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens Management Plan 2017', if they had been foreseen in the relevant Schedule, last updated in 2013. We have requested to Council that a Planning Scheme Amendment be undertaken in the year ahead, to update the Development Contributions schedule, and that it must include contributory expenditure on programmed works within the Gardens.

If you would like to view the Friends submission in full, please contact member Neil Head at neilandjosephine@bigpond.com.

Everyone is most welcome also to lodge their own Submissions to Council on the publicly exhibited plans.

Neil Head
Member of FOMG and President 2018-19 of the Ablion & Ardeen Community Club Inc., a local community advocacy group.

Meet the Gardens Curators: *James Willan - 1930-39*

While many of us know the story of how Hugh Victor McKay commissioned the gardens for the recreational use of his workers in 1909, less is shared about the many gardeners employed over the years to care for, plan, maintain and improve the Gardens. We'll focus on one each issue.

James Willan was born on 25 Jul 1870 in Kirkby-Lancaster, Westmorland, England to Elizabeth Lancaster and John Willan. James was still living there when he married Elizabeth Ann Hodgson on 7 Sep 1892. While no dates are available, there are records of James working as a gardener for 10 years at the Army and Navy School in Wales. He was subsequently shown to have undertaken all the private gardening at Llay Place - an estate in Gresford, Wales with a stately country home, greenhouses, woodland, summerhouse, kitchen garden, pond, orchard, conservatory and pinery.



In 1912 James, Elizabeth and their 8 children set sail on the *Irishman* for Australia, sadly losing their youngest child, Eric, to measles during the journey. When they landed James got to work growing fruit for 5 years before returning to formal gardening when employed by Samuel McCulloch to look after the 70 acres of parklands and gardens that made up the family's estate, *Woodlands*, near Stawell.



Woodlands Estate - The driveway was 7km long!

After a stint running his own business in Avoca (a butchery!), James was appointed as the curator (head gardener) at the 'Sunshine Gardens' in 1930. He had a staff of 4-5 men at any given time and over his ten-year tenure they created beautiful floral displays in the Gardens, and also maintained hundreds and hundreds of potted plants that could be hired out for a very small price. His chrysanthemums, dahlias, roses and other flowers won many prizes at horticultural events held in Sunshine, the Melbourne Town Hall and throughout the State.



McKay (Sunshine) Gardens circa 1935

An article in the *Sunshine Advocate* in 1934 noted:

"The blooms at present in flower beggar description... Mr. Willan and his staff have excelled themselves. Chrysanthemums, in some instances ten inches across, are blended in magnificent colourings---and the beautiful border plants, combined with the green carpet like lawn, make an entrancing scene."

Aside from overseeing the Gardens, James became an active member of the community, joining the Sunshine Progress Association and serving as its President for 6 years. He was also a prominent figure in local church circles, associated with the Sunshine Methodist Church as a lay preacher.

James came to the rescue in 1933 when the Lady President of the Shire of Braybrook held a reception at Sunshine Town Hall for 350 ladies and the shire gardener, Mr Barlier, became 'indisposed'.

James Willan 'practically denuded' the Sunshine Gardens of its pot plants and foliage to create an indoor garden for the event.

James Willan, 1930-39 (continued)

The Sunshine Advocate wrote:

"... All the ingenuity of master crafts-men in floral design had been used to decorate the hall. In the foyer tiers of pot plants met the eye, and the entrance to the hall was through an archway daintily arranged with all the flowers that bloom in the spring. Suspended from the ceiling were baskets of clustered roses, and one might well say 'Thank God for a garden.' ...The floor in front of the stage and also the stage itself were bedecked with tiers of plants of all varieties and hues. With music being dispensed from such surroundings, and the aroma of flowers reminded one of what a fairyland might be".

4767 Willan, Eliza, 8 Kororoit st., Sunshine, home duties, F
4768 Willan, James, 8 Kororoit st., Sunshine, gardener, M

1942 Electoral Role extract

James retired after the winter of 1940 at the age of 70. While a newspaper article about his retirement mentioned a plan to move to a new home built in Chelsea, James and Eliza continue to appear on electoral roles living at 8 Kororoit Street in what is now Albion.

SUNSHINE ADVOCATE

Worthy Citizen to Relax

MR. J. WILLAN'S RETIREMENT

Residents of Sunshine district will learn with regret that Mr James Willan, who has been in charge of H. V. McKay's gardens and nursery at Sunshine for ten years past, will be severing his connection with the district next Spring.

Mr. Willan has been an active

James died on 2 Jan 1955 and is buried in Footscray Cemetery, in what is now Yarraville.

Read this article and the sources on our website:
<http://www.mckaygardens.com.au/history/the-curators/>

Courtesy of Michelle Edwards.

The Heritage Garden Festival

Sunday 3rd March 2019 from 12pm-5pm
H. V. McKay Memorial Gardens
120 Anderson Rd, SUNSHINE



This year, featuring the **Christine Ayres School of Irish Dancing**. The Christine Ayres Irish dancers are the current World Champions, claiming the title earlier this year in Glasgow. Dancers and teachers within the school have toured the world with shows such as Riverdance, the Guinness Celebration of Irish Music, Cherish the Ladies, The Chieftans, and were the guest artists in the Emirates Marquee for the Spring Racing carnival!



Come to the Gardens for a day of fun and entertainment for the whole family! Activities include: facepainting, games, wizards, fitness activities, history, multicultural music & dance.



“Feel the serenity!”

Better than Bonnie Doon, come to the Gardens in the late afternoon in summer to feel the serenity.



Meetings

Meetings of the Friends are held every two months at 7.00pm on the 4th Tuesday of that month as follows:

2019 - 22 January, 26 March, 28 May, 23 July,
24 September, 26 November

Meetings are held at a rotating location in the Sunshine Area - contact us for the location before each meeting: contact@mckaygardens.com.au, or 0435 602 075

New members are welcome!

The annual subscription is just \$10.00, and you can join by contacting the Secretary, Michelle at:



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



or send an email and electronic funds transfer to:
Name: Friends of the McKay Memorial Gardens
Bank: Westpac; BSB 033-085; **Account** 385640



or send your name, address, phone and email with a cheque for \$10.00 payable to: Friends of the HV McKay Memorial Gardens c/- PO Box 154 Sunshine VIC 3020

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