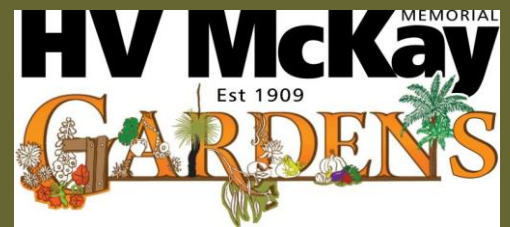


Newsletter

WINTER 2026



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Public Art *Birds* flying in soon



Work in progress: *The Birds* (Sunshine), May 2026

The Birds (Sunshine) is a series of sculptures commissioned by Brimbank City Council for the H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens. Collaborating artists, Jen Berean, Callum Morton and Linda Tegg are making these artworks to address an avian audience by providing water for local wildlife. Here they describe their progress to date.

‘Through our research into the Gardens and the Sunshine Harvester works, the global reach of Sunshine Harvesters struck us, exemplified by the marvellous Sunshine Harvester catalogue of parts that H.V. McKay Massey Harris produced for duplicate parts of their various harvesters. These component forms describe both the ingenuity of industrial production and the scale of the company's production and international presence. Indeed, the establishment period of the Sunshine Harvester Works in Sunshine coincides almost precisely with the celebration of the machine age in Modern Art, particularly the periods of Cubism and Futurism in Europe’.

‘With this in mind, we scoured the parts tables for forms that aesthetically evoke bird parts, then assembled them as if they were Cubist collages—expanding perspectives in the time of the climate emergency, reconfiguring these mechanical shapes to provide water and shelter for birdlife’.

‘We've chosen to reinterpret the parts with basalt from Wurundjeri land and granite from Dja Dja Wurrung Djandak, and discussed the significance of these materials and their use with Traditional Owners. We've joined authors Dave Witty (What the Tree Sees) and Darryl Jones (Be)Wilder, along with the Brimbank Parks team, to discuss citizen science and the marriage between wildlife and infrastructure in a panel discussion 'Reading Nature', for the Brimbank Writers and Readers Festival. Over the past year, we've also spent time with the gardening team to understand the gardens better and consider how the sculptural works will integrate with plant life to support birdlife. At this stage, the basalt and granite have been cut by local stonemason, John Henderson, and await assembly this spring’.

One of the artists, Callum Morton, in an interview with Ariela Bard in the *Weekend Australian* on 2 May 2026, p. 9, explained that ‘public art is often terribly underfunded’. He went on: ‘We get the best results when the money is right and when we trust good artists to take risks without obstructing them too much. . . Art in public can do interesting things when it's good. It can uplift us like a great building might. It can interrupt our daily lives to make us reflect critically on our world. It can unnerve us as well. It doesn't have to be an object or a thing, it can be ephemeral: a column that disappears, a light on the water, a sound in a garden, a row of trees, an absence of something or a puff of smoke. It could be a walking path or a word floating in the sky’.

Coinciding with the installation, and supporting its objectives, Catherine McDonald writes: ‘the Friends will be conducting a number of bird counts and are encouraging visitors to the Gardens to download a free Bird Count app from <https://ebird.org/home>. We will be aiming to do a bird survey both before and after the installation of the sculptures - since these have bird baths attached and we want to see if it increases the number of birds in the Gardens’.

Recent developments



There have been many developments at the HV McKay Memorial Gardens during the first few weeks of winter! On Saturday 9 May 2026, the Friends Group met at the Gardens for a 'Tour and Tea' at which Catherine McDonald gave a thorough and informed commentary as the small group, including one new member, braved the cold conditions for a Tour of the whole Gardens. Looking in beautiful, lush condition following recent rains, it was an excellent opportunity to meet up and see what was on show in the Gardens. It was good to see some colourful flowers in bloom as well as the lawns and trees.



Our President, Speroulla Christodoulou, has also recently applied to Brimbank City Council for funding so that the Friends can, once again, host the annual Community Festival. This entails considerable work that we hope will again be successful so that we can continue to hold the Festival that is enjoyed so much by the hundreds of locals and others who attend.

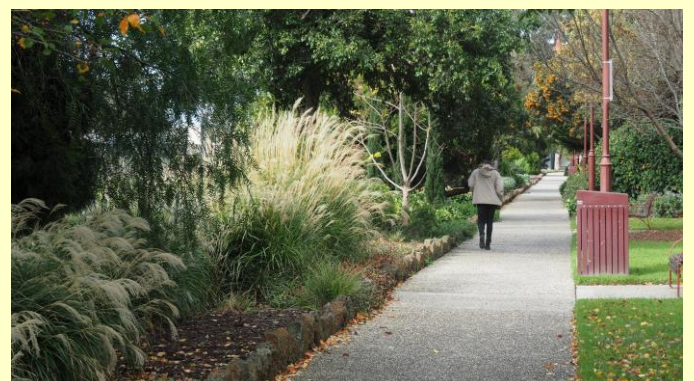
The Straight Six Saga . . .

The Straight Six Garden Bed is located close to the works that are being carried out in connection with the first stage of the Airport Rail Project that has required the Jet Fuel pipeline to Melbourne Airport to be de-commissioned prior to further works on the rail line itself.

Owing to this work and the presence of a 'temporary exclusion zone', re-planting of the garden bed to the East of the Straight Six pathway has been halted. This section of the Gardens, which is along the Straight Six Path next to the footbridge, has remained unplanted for more than a year due to the impending works. Friends Group Member, Rainer Linz, has provided this photo of its current condition.



The Friends are keen to have the area replanted as soon as possible as it presents something of an eyesore to visitors at the elevator entrance, and is unworthy of a heritage garden. Responding to a question by Friends' President, Speroulla Christodoulou, the Mayor has pointed out that the land between the Straight Six path and the railway fence is owned by VicTrack and not Council. Even so, it is covered by a Heritage Overlay as part of the Gardens proper, and has historically been part of the Gardens since their establishment in 1909. The Friends were informed that works on the land will involve decommissioning the pit of the underground jet fuel pipeline that runs along the rail tracks, and that this may require full access to the entire strip of land along the Straight Six path. Thankfully this work is due to be completed before the end of the year. We expect that the replanting work will begin shortly afterwards and should, eventually, look something like this Artist's Impression when it's completed!



The Development Saga . . .

After years of delay and changes in ownership and altered plans to develop the Chaplin Reserve land to the south of the Gardens, work has finally commenced, with ground works and an elaborate steel framework in the process of construction.



Catherine McDonald's photos show clearly the size and height of the development when seen from the Gardens and the Footbridge (below).



The development will include 14 town houses looking directly over the southern pathway in the Gardens that will provide views right across the Gardens. Completion of this stage of the building works is scheduled for December 2026.



Harvest Sunshine

As the construction of 'Harvest Sunshine' continues, the proposed town houses are now being advertised, with 9 still available. Those facing the Gardens are available for \$1.1 million for four bedrooms, 3.5 bathrooms, and a two car garage over three levels. The listing states: 'floor-to-ceiling glass slides open to reveal a large balcony drenched in northern light, ideal for alfresco entertaining with tranquil garden aspects to enjoy every day' (Artist's 3D impression below).



Further details of the town houses are at: <https://www.allhomes.com.au/unit-5-112-116-anderson-road-sunshine-vic-3020>

The Friends Group has had discussions with both the Council and the developer concerning the interface between the buildings and the Gardens that, it appears, will have a black wire chain fence next to the southern border of the Gardens. The outlook across the Gardens has been highlighted in the advertising material for the north-facing apartments and is clearly a sales feature of these homes. Friends member, Ros Savio, reports that the developers have agreed to retain more trees than required near the border and the trees in the Gardens will not be disturbed for service connections as the existing lines have been decommissioned.



Melanie's moving on

The Friends Group is very sad to report that Melanie Abdeen has decided to formally resign as Media Officer for the Friends of the H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens. Melanie has been enthusiastically involved in all our media and online work as well as helping with many other duties, particularly the annual Community Festival where she has worked closely with President Speroulla. Melanie explained about her decision at the last meeting.

'My involvement with the group began two years ago, inspired by a conversation at the Legacy Foundation's centenary dinner with Garry Browne. When he asked not what I did for work, but what I contributed to my community, his question stayed with me'.

'Reflecting on where I could make a meaningful impact, I remembered my university days, when Speroulla first invited me to help in the Kids' Corner at the annual community festival in the HV McKay Gardens. Volunteering there each March and watching families come together to play, dance, laugh and enjoy the gardens had always filled me with joy. It became clear that joining the Friends of the McKay Gardens was the right way for me to give back to my Brimbank community'.

'During my time on the committee, we have delivered wonderful festivals and hosted our first Christmas Carols and Karaoke in the Gardens. Bringing people into the gardens we all cherish has been a true delight. It has been an honour to serve as Media Officer, and I look forward to seeing the group continue to thrive'.

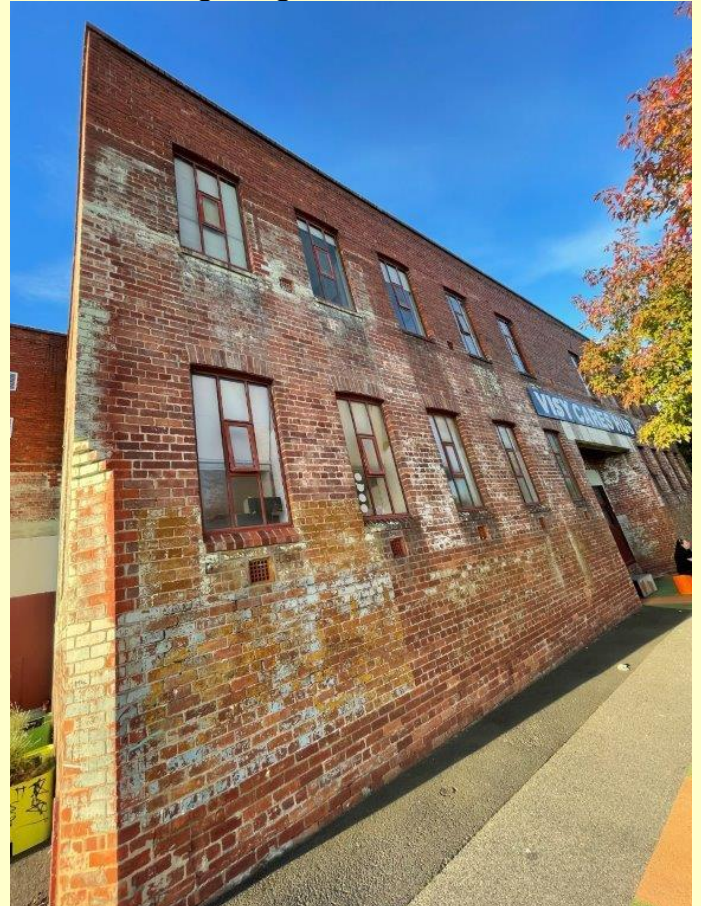
The Committee wishes Melanie, and her fiancée Jake, all our very best regards for the future - that includes their wedding later this year. Thanks again.



The remains of the Factory

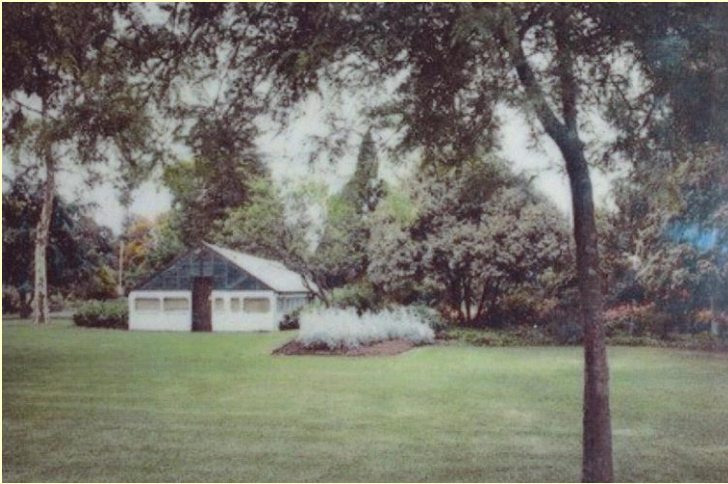


This fabulous painting shows the full extent of the Harvester Factory with the Gardens on the western side of the railway line, just across the footbridge! Alas, not much of the building now remains standing, leaving only the administration block that is now the Visy Hub Community Centre in Sunshine. The architecture of the building, its brick walls and steel-framed windows, deserve special attention, not only from the Gardens side, but also up-close, as the following image reveals. Well worth a look!

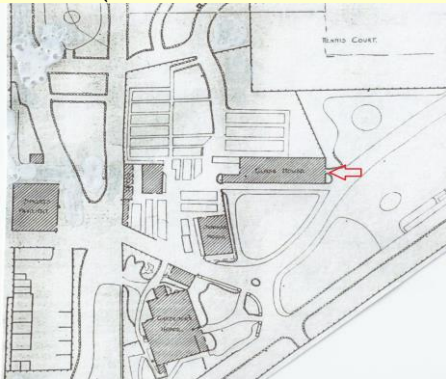


More information is available from our Website
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 or on our Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofMcKayGardens>

When did the Conservatory vanish from the Gardens?



The Friends Group recently received a Website question asking when the Conservatory in the Gardens was removed. The Conservatory (also called the Glass House and Hot House at various times) was located near the Gardener's House in the South-West corner of the Gardens behind the tennis court as shown in the map drawn by L. King dated 17 October 1944 (marked with a red arrow).



It is also visible in the Factory painting (marked with an arrow, right). Bill Bampton wrote in his article for the Centenary of the Gardens in November 2009 that 'vandals burnt the conservatory and it was demolished'. Research into the Conservatory by the Friends was unable to establish a precise date when it was removed although members of the Friends believe it was in the 1970s. Two photos of the Conservatory show its interior in black and white in 1919 and more recently in colour (above). It was an essential part of propagating plants for use in the Gardens for around five decades.



Who damaged the entrance?

It's now been 2-3 months since the entrance to the shared car park was again damaged. A heavy vehicle is suspected to be the culprit. With no witness available to tell us when and by whom the fence was damaged, the unique brick, concrete and steel pipe fence remains looking rather sad, unloved and untidy.



The Council officer overseeing the fencing, particularly the fencing on the south side of the Gardens, Damien Weaver, has begun the process of applying for a permit from Heritage Victoria to widen the entrance to the car park, bearing in mind that a permit is an expensive process. This is the second time the entrance has suffered damage within the last two years. The Sunshine Presbyterian Church McKay Memorial Board members have expressed their opinion that the fence be completely or perhaps partly removed, or widened so that trucks entering and leaving would be able to safely and easily egress the Garden and Church property. The tall palm tree is an obstacle to the work too because it has historical value. Helen Reid, Friends, Treasurer.