



President's Report for the Annual General Meeting – 22nd February 2018

It is my pleasure to present this Annual Report on the Friends for this, our 35th year.

2017 has been marked by two new events and one non-event.

The first big event was of course the relocation of the former Gatekeeper's Cottage back to the Botanical Gardens. We are grateful to the former owners for gifting the cottage to the Friends, and for ensuring that it was not demolished prior to relocation. One of our members generously funded the cost of relocation and we thank her most sincerely. The Council has been most supportive of this project, undertaking the management of the shift and installation on its new site, as well as funding partial renovations including a new roof and rebuilt chimneys and we thank them for their whole-hearted support.

The other event was the setting up of a new interest group in the Friends, called "Ambassadors". This involves volunteer members being stationed in the Conservatory on weekends to interact with visitors, providing information on the Gardens, and generally making them feel welcome. Since commencement in late April to the end of 2017, Ambassadors have put in 528 hours in total and estimate that they have interacted with over 4,000 visitors who have appreciated the opportunity to have someone to talk to. The project has been managed by Beth Dixon. Donna's botanical support has also been helpful and appreciated. More volunteers however are needed in order to maintain a presence in the Conservatory on every weekend.

The non-event for the year is the Fernery redevelopment. Quite simply, nothing seems to have happened. Council advise that they applied unsuccessfully for State and Federal funding and have indicated a preference for using the available funding simply to refurbish the existing structure. We hope that Council will stand by their commitment, as published in "my Ballarat" Summer 2016, to use their \$1.4 million for staged development of the planned \$4 million project. As I have stated many times, the full realization of the Laidlaw design would give Ballarat a magnificent complex which would be much more than a simple fernery - more a Discovery Centre - of world class significance.

Such projects, with their botanical and educational emphasis, are needed to establish our Gardens as more than just a place of beauty but a place where visitors can learn and appreciate more fully our natural world. New ventures such as the Fernery Development have been overseen by Elizabeth Gilfillan in the role of Project Development Convenor. After ten strenuous years in this role, Elizabeth decided, during this past year, that it was time to step back, so it is appropriate to record in this report our appreciation for her dedication and hard work on our various projects.

Another innovation introduced this year was a revised process for induction of volunteers as required by Council in order to conform with OH&S requirements. Previously this was achieved by occasional group sessions which meant inevitable delays and difficulties in getting everyone together at the same time. I initiated discussions with Council and we now have a more streamlined process whereby our Convenors are authorised to take new volunteers through the induction procedures without delays.

Now to report on our other interest groups.

The **Growing Friends** continue to be the principal source of funds through their nursery sales. Aply led by Yvonne, the work of this dedicated team resulted in sales of \$37,600 for the year including excellent sales at the Begonia Festival and Springfest. This is an improvement on the \$33,000 in sales the previous year. The Plant Trolley continues to prove a great success, having contributed \$14,350 to the total sales this

year. We are grateful to Gardens' staff for continuing to move the trolley in and out of the Conservatory, and to those Friends, especially Rudolf Huebner, who attend to it on weekends and keep it stocked up.

Guiding Group.

The number of tours remained steady – 40 tours in 2017, comprising 18 arranged group tours and 22 Sunday morning tours, with a special Anzac day tour arranged by Lorraine Powell which was well attended. There was no U3A course held in 2017 but one is planned for 2018. The Guides monthly meetings are now organised by various Guides on a rostered basis to share the workload, and are informative and enjoyable. Excursions held during the year have also been very successful in furthering the knowledge of the Guides. Jane Munro is responsible for tour organization and roster management with Terry O'Brien continuing as overall Convenor. Currently we have 15 guides but more are needed for ease of rostering.

Wellingtonia.

Michael Bird continues to do an excellent job editing and producing our quarterly newsletter which must rank with the best Friends' Newsletters. Susan Pilbeam is now learning and assisting Michael. Ballarat Printworks are to be commended for their efficiency and professionalism in printing and mailing out the Newsletters.

Events

Our first major trip, organised by Elizabeth, was to the Colac area visiting three gardens and the Camperdown Botanical Gardens where we were well looked after by the Camperdown Friends. Carole Haines, our Events Convenor continued to organise guest speakers for our meetings and also arranged our other excursion to the Cloudehill Gardens in the Dandenongs – always a delight to visit.

Catering

Doff Kemp took over catering responsibilities from Carole and, with her excellent team, has looked after us very well throughout the year, culminating in a well-attended "drinks and nibbles" in November.

Botanical Art Group

Valerie Richards runs the enthusiastic group of botanical artists with 19 on the books and 8 regular attendees who enjoyed some guided art sessions to assist them develop their skills. They have commenced a project featuring the growth cycle of Begonias.

Western Bedders

Bill O'Driscoll advised that the highlights for 2017 were, firstly, the makeover and replanting of the Sensory Garden. With assistance from Vision Australia, new signage makes provision for the visually impaired to identify all the plants in this Garden.

Secondly, the native garden was fully removed and a new plant-out undertaken of the native beds, based on native species growing in a 50 km radius of Ballarat. This assists visitors to the gardens to identify plants common to this region which is most important and also enables Ballarat residents to identify species which might grow well in their own gardens.

The group continued to work on a regular basis in the monocot beds and the grasses there are simply outstanding and frequently commented on by visitors. We also did regular maintenance in the Sensory Gardens.

History Group

Lorraine Powell's band of enthusiasts continues to plough through the records at the Public Record Office of Victoria.

As well as this the team has created an exhibition related to the Gardens and Gardeners in WW1, and also an exhibition highlighting the history of the Ballarat Zoological Gardens. These exhibitions were displayed in the Robert Clark Conservatory. The team also celebrated the Gardens 160th anniversary, joining with the City in creating a series of panels showing the Gardens down the decades. This was displayed both at the Conservatory and at the Ballarat Library. The major project for the year was the development of a booklet on Ballarat's Begonias, due to be launched at the AGM.

The **BotaniKids and Education Group**, under the tireless and enthusiastic guidance of Julie Bradby, again achieved much during the year. Highlights were:

- Celebrating the Gardens 160th anniversary with a children's party, attended by Mayor Samantha McIntosh;
- Again active at the Begonia Festival with 3,500 children creating a decorated terracotta pot and planting a marigold in it;
- Commissioning two professionals to produce a series of curriculum guidelines for learning programs when studying the Gardens and Lake Wendouree precinct. This was funded by Rotary and Council grants as well as funds raised from BotaniKids events;
- Regular events with children to encourage appreciation of nature and the Gardens.

Julie is keen to acknowledge the support by Gardens staff, especially Peter and Christian for these events. The annual **Spring Gardens Luncheon and Open Gardens Weekend** was again a great success with inspiring speakers and some most interesting gardens on display. The combined events generated a profit of \$11,615 of which \$9,606 was allocated to our Ballarat Friends with the balance allocated to the Buninyong Friends. Helen Todd and her committee have consistently organised these events most professionally. However, after ten years, members of this committee are retiring to a well-earned rest. At the time of writing, we have no volunteers to take their place, so the future of this event remains in doubt. Joy O'Brien continues to print **plant labels** as required, and we are grateful for her reliable attention to this important activity.

Our **Treasurer**, Bruce Holland, continues to meticulously and accurately record all financial transactions, whilst Sue Rattray as well as assisting Bruce is our very efficient **Minutes Secretary**

Membership was 353 at the end of 2017 an increase of 18 over 2016.

Susan Pilbeam continues to be of invaluable help in her role as **Administrative Assistant** and we thank her for her reliability and willingness to help whenever needed.

Thanks are due to the members of the various groups who work so hard during the year, also to those members who assist when called on to help at such events as Springfest and the Begonia Festival, as well as those who quietly assist behind the scenes such as in watering the nursery plants.

The total hours put in throughout the year by members with all our various activities has been estimated for the year as 7,850 hours. Using a conservative figure of \$20 per hour, it could be said that we have contributed in the vicinity of \$160,000 to the people of Ballarat in promoting and supporting our magnificent Botanical Gardens.

The Friends are again pleased to acknowledge the great work done by Peter and his dedicated team to maintain our Gardens in such great condition and are to be congratulated. The Conservatory displays also attract much favourable comment from visitors.

Finally, I again extend my thanks to Elizabeth, for her guidance and support when called on, and to my wife, Beth for her continued help in the performance of my duties as President.

So to conclude this report, I again thank one and all for helping us to support the Gardens.



Raoul Dixon
President