

Newsletter

AUTUMN 2021



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Registration No A0050996B

President's report

As President of the Friends of H V McKay Gardens for 2021, I recently looked back on my involvement with the Gardens over the last 12 years. When I first noticed them, as I drove to my teaching job each day along Anderson Road during the drought years of 2007 to 2009, what called out to me were the glorious Algerian oak trees, suffering so badly from lack of proper watering. A number of these beautiful trees did not survive those years.



Picnic during the 2018 McKay Gardens Festival being held under an oak planted in 1909

It was those trees which impelled me to join the Friends group, when I heard about the 2009 Centenary Celebrations of the establishment of the Gardens. Not knowing anything about *their* history, though a little about the history of the area, I was immediately 'sold' on the need to support the Friends' efforts to advocate and care for this community asset. I was also impressed with the passion and determination of the founding members, particularly Catherine McDonald, Helen Reid and Bill Bampton, and Festival organiser *extraordinaire* Speroulla Christodoulou, and others who've worked hard over many years to keep the Gardens as a viable community asset, and cared for piece of Australia's history.

These include the first curators, S.G. Thompson, James Willan and Harold Gray and our new

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curator, Alice Pyers. As well, Council staff such as Tony Menhennit, Christopher Cook, gardener Paul Frigo and consultants Jill Burness, John Hawker and Ros Savio, have all contributed to our 'green oasis' in the heart of a dense, urban environment.

Unfortunately, I believe we can't take our eye of the ball, despite how good the Gardens currently look. This newsletter sets out some of the ongoing and new challenges facing the Gardens - now even more we need community support to preserve and advocate.

Melinda Mockridge

New members are always welcome!

Tell a friend about the Gardens, take them there, and join them up now!

The annual subscription is just \$10.00, and you can join by contacting the Secretary, Neil, at: friendsofhvmckaygardens@gmail.com Simply send an email to Neil and make an electronic funds transfer to:

Name: Friends of the McKay Memorial Gardens
Bank: Westpac; **BSB** 033-085; **Account** 385640



Farewell Christopher Cook

We were saddened to hear that Park Services Unit Manager Christopher Cook is moving on from Brimbank Council at the end of April. He takes up a position in the Open Spaces Project Team at the City of Port Phillip.

The Friends would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment that Christopher has shown to the Gardens over the last six years. From the beginning we have valued his experience working with community and appreciation of the unique nature of this 'heritage' garden. He's been through the hard yards of putting in watering systems, answering our phone calls and letters and getting rid of rats!

We thank you, Christopher, and hope you keep in contact. Good luck with your new horizon.



Christopher Cook (left) with member of the Strategic Management Group, Tony Menhennit, in the Gardens in 2019

Developments in the Gardens

McKay Gardens curator Alice Pyers has been working with the assistance of Council staff to continue the reinstatement of the original northern section pathways. Rock edging, the same as was there originally, is currently being placed. Alice has been working with the assistance of an apprentice and Working for Victoria participants to improve the lawn area (formerly the Bowling Green) to create a

less spongy grassed area, with better drainage.



Curator Alice Pyers



Plantings continue and are beginning to resemble the massed effects which we are aiming for.



The Friends would still like Council to consider giving a dedicated section to the original plantings of chrysanthemums and dahlias. We will continue to advocate for this at the McKay Gardens Strategic Management Group of Brimbank Council.



Thought to be Curator, Harold Gray, in the Gardens, c.1930 with the display of chrysanthemums

The sculpture in the Gardens – *Good News*

Brimbank Council is currently in the process of engaging a consultant to complete a scoping study for the commissioning of a public art work for the Gardens. This was a proposal put to Council by the Friends and included in the H V McKay Gardens Strategic Management Plan in 2017. It was not included in the current Cultural Strategy 2018-22, but all indications are that there is a commitment to implementing this idea in the next plan.

It is planned that we will take part in initial consultations, and be part of a PCG (Project Control Group). The PCG would decide on the shortlist from the artist proposals, see the presentation from the shortlisted artists and decide on the final piece to be commissioned.

We are hopeful that while a contemporary artwork, the final choice will reflect, in some way, the heritage and history of the Gardens – a Giant Chrysanthemum??! (joking). Why should Coffs Harbour have all the fun... Perhaps something which reflects McKay workers' efforts to gain a fair day's pay.

An example: Percival Ball, *8-hour Day Monument*, Carlton, 1900-1903. This recognised the 8-hours movement and the struggles of working men and women to achieve a work life balance.



The development at 112 Anderson Road

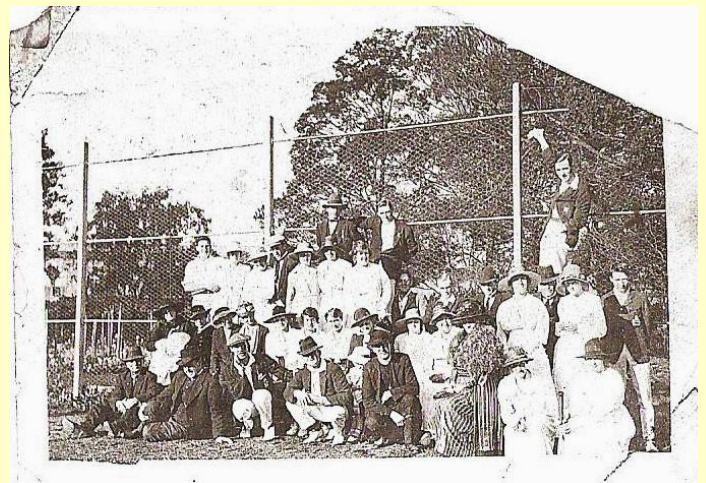
The Friends undertook a consultation on 16 March with the developers of the Anderson Road (formerly George Cross Reserve) site, adjacent to Gardens and Church. The development now includes a multi-storey hotel as well. We discussed the appropriate fencing needed to indicate a clear separation between the development and the Gardens,

reflecting a characteristic of the Gardens noted in the Victorian Heritage Registration description.



One of two remaining posts from the original Gardens' fencing.

The Friends advocated for fencing in keeping with its Edwardian heritage and the 'down to earth' and functional nature of the early Gardens' infra-structure, such as cyclone wire fencing around the tennis courts (a section of which remains near the Church) and the make do attitude seen in the one remaining fence post, made of metal from the factory.



Gardens' Tennis Court, c. 1920 with cyclone wire fencing

We have not heard further and anticipate that this might be an ongoing issue. It is unclear whether the Planning Department of Brimbank Council supports the Friends' position on the fencing.

Airport Rail Link – it's coming!

Friends met with staff from the Melbourne Transport Infrastructure Authority on the 23 March to hear about some aspects of what is planned. Megan Cusack, Deputy Director, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, Melbourne Airport Rail and other staff spoke on what will be happening over the coming years as this project is rolled out and how it will impact upon the Gardens.

We anticipate further meetings in coming months. It is the Friends' current understanding that the new rail to the airport cannot move closer to us because of the av-gas pipeline along our Southern border. So, hopefully we should lose no land here. The tough bit will be the Anderson Road overpass. The community may well lose the bike/pedestrian path to make way for the additional rail, and thus the Gardens' connection to Albion.



Friends' Secretary, Neil Head

At this stage it is unclear whether or not the transport authority will make another land grab in this corner. So far, the major impact on the Gardens seems to be the height of the rail which will partially block views to the bulk store and therefore the old factory site and increase sound interference in the Gardens. It is not as yet clear what will happen with the McKay bridge. Our current understanding is that there may be disruptions of various sorts to the Gardens over a number of years until its planned completion in 2029.

Already there is local community opposition to aspects of the proposal particularly the 'flyover', a raised section of rail which may start its rise adjacent to the Gardens and overpass Albion Station. There is concern around its impact on the heritage registered Darling Flour Mill, Albion Station and Albion residents' amenity, and which may partially block views from the Gardens across to Sunshine and the Harvester Factory remnant buildings.

Visit of AGHS members

Members of the Australian Garden History Society will visit the Gardens on 7 May and the Friends are delighted that members of this important group, which has supported the Friends on a number of occasions over the years, are able to make a visit. This was something organised a few times over the years, but unable to be conducted. As the Gardens are looking great, we are pleased they can come at this time.

National Trust Festival Tours

The Friends are running two tours of the Gardens during the National Trust Heritage Festival this year. These are on Friday 14th and Saturday 15th May. They are FREE and run from 11.00am to 12.00noon. Meet at the Church Hall, 120 Anderson Road, Sunshine. More info: https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/ahf_event/discover-sunshines-unique-mckay-gardens-a-different-kind-of-industrial-heritage/

Sunshine 2050

The Friends were pleased to be invited to make a submission to Council recently on the *Transforming Brimbank - Sunshine Priority Precinct Vision 2050 - Leading with Vision: A City Ready to Shine* This is a link to the final strategy document - *Sunshine Priority Precinct Vision 2050* <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/advocacy-initiatives/sunshine-priority-precinct-vision-2050>

There is specific mention of H V McKay Gardens in the document on p. 28: Hampshire Road is a civic heart that celebrates our multicultural identity:

'H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens provides a green refuge from the urban life within the Sunshine CBD. Heritage buildings and the history of McKay is celebrated across the centre, creating a heritage tourism experience'.

In regard to this, the Friends are currently working with Council, the Sunshine and District Historical Society and Overnewton Castle to develop tours of the heritage of Sunshine.

Keep in touch with the latest news with our new email address:

friendsofhvmckaygardens@gmail.com