

THE FRIENDS OF THE WAITE ARBORETUM INC.



**WAITE
ARBORETUM**

NEWSLETTER NO. 70

Summer 2012

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

As seems to be the case these days, another year has slipped by with amazing rapidity. I take this opportunity on behalf of the Committee to wish all a happy and healthy New Year.

Since the Spring Newsletter mailed in late October several successful functions have been held. The interesting afternoon talk on the 16th of November was presented by our Treasurer, Peter Nicholls on his river trip to Lake Eyre, "Up the creek and down the Cooper". He was ably assisted by his wife Meg and Cicely Bungey together with numerous photos and even a replicated bush camp. The occasion proved to be very well attended with ever more chairs being brought into the drawing room to handle the numbers as they kept arriving. The Committee felt that the response was so good there was good reason to favour having some of our meetings in the afternoon without the problem of going out at night. The other afternoon function was the Christmas picnic jointly held by FWCR, FUH and FWA in place of the usual Urrbrae House party. This 5pm gathering held on Sunday 4th December proved to be big success. A few further details appear in this newsletter.

In Urrbrae House on Tuesday 29th of November we had the long anticipated launch of the book on Peter Waite written by one of his descendants, James Waite Morgan. Titled "The Premier and the Pastoralist" the book also covers the involvement of James's other forebear, William Morgan in various early joint enterprises.

On Wednesday 23rd November retiring U. of A. Vice Chancellor James McWha hosted a late afternoon function, "Big Top in Bonython" attended by a number of FWA people in the Bonython Hall as a thankyou to volunteers who are involved in so many areas of university life. The theme was based on a range of circus acrobatics performed by an impressive amateur group.

Moving on to the Arboretum, Jennifer will report on the successful selection of a new grounds person to and the progress of the new tool and equipment shed.

A good number of new plantings has been established and of course needed watering in the bursts of hot dry weather over the last couple of months. This has meant an extra day of work for Jennifer with the assistance of a volunteer.

At the last Committee meeting the subject of commemorative seats was raised; there are now 32 in the Arboretum, 15 in the Gardens and 5 in the Reserve. The point being made was that contributions to further seats are welcome, but the eventual number would be limited.

Following the death of our Patron, Sam Jacobs, a number of welcome donations have been made, for which we are very appreciative.

The other extremely sad news was the passing of our iconic supporter, David Symon. The Arboretum without him can never be the same. After being diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour the day after his 91st birthday, it was only a matter of weeks before he finally succumbed. Never one to waste a spare moment, almost right to the end, he was planning, writing and directing those around him with his ever creative thoughts. Reflecting his involvement I note in past Newsletters the significant number of articles which bear his name. Just prior to you receiving this Newsletter "The Celebration of David's Life" gathering on Saturday 14th January will have taken place by his favourite Dragon Tree (the one which features his 90th Birthday plaque) in the late afternoon.

Looking ahead, the next event will be the Fringe Basketry Exhibition again held in Urrbrae House. Following its success in previous years and run in conjunction with Basketry SA "Morphing Nature" this year's title, promises to not disappoint. Keep the dates 24th February to 4th March in mind and help promote the exhibition by sharing the postcards enclosed with this newsletter. In connection with this the FWA Committee is especially grateful to Mitcham City Council for their kind donation towards advertising and promotion.

An eagerly anticipated tour of the Plant Breeding Centre is planned for Wednesday 28th March. A fundraising concert performed by the Loreto Choir has been booked for Sunday 22nd July and another afternoon talk, possibly by Peter Nicholls is being considered for later in the year.

Over the years, the Committee has endeavoured to promote itself and the Arboretum by showing its presence at various garden and similar exhibitions. It is felt that for the time and effort involved, the success is limited. As a new avenue we are prepared to attend one or more monthly Fullarton Markets and gauge the effectiveness of this type of venue.

In conclusion, I wish to remind everyone of the AGM to be held on Monday 16th April.

Henry Krichauff

IN THE ARBORETUM

FROM THE DIRECTOR

It is with great pleasure I welcome Andrew Walters to the position of Arboretum grounds person. Andrew comes with a sound knowledge of horticulture, especially plant propagation, and a great enthusiasm for the Arboretum and its activities.

On 14th January over 220 colleagues, friends and family gathered at the Dracaena Collection to celebrate the long and extraordinarily productive life of David Symon (see my separate tribute). It was a very special occasion with moving presentations by David's children and granddaughters following the accounts of David's scientific achievements.

In October we noted the death of The Honourable Samuel Jacobs AO, QC, LLB, D. Univ. (Adel.) – Chief Justice of South Australia, highly esteemed Deputy Chancellor and member of the University of Adelaide Council and inaugural Patron of the Friends of the Waite Arboretum. Sam's high stature within the University and his staunch defence of Peter Waite's bequest were invaluable in 2000 when part of the Arboretum was under threat of alienation for a building site. Donations in his memory to both the FWA and the Friends of the Waite Conservation Reserve were gratefully received.

Other recent donations are for a seat in the Rose Garden in memory of Alice Jean Pearce and seat soon be installed in the Arboretum donated by Dr Dennis and Mrs Jess Chambers. I also acknowledge the sponsorship-in-kind by Neutrog of pallet loads of Sudden Impact for Roses which makes our Rose Garden flourish. TREENET generously donated \$4,600, half the symposium profits, to the Friends in recognition of their contribution to the symposium. The symposium would not be as successful as it is without the help of volunteers taking walks and serving food with great efficiency and smiling faces. In the feedback survey of delegates on a range of questions, volunteers topped the ratings with 4.9 out of 5. Well done!

Thank you too to all the dedicated Arboretum guides who conducted 28 walks during the year and the Arboretum and garden volunteers who together contributed in 2011 over 2,800 hours of dedicated effort, undeterred by rain or heatwaves and to the Committee of the Friends for their support and enthusiasm throughout the year. New Arboretum and Garden guides and volunteers are always welcome.

All Waite Historic Precinct forthcoming public events can now be found on www.facebook.com/urrbraehouse so check on concerts, talks, exhibitions and special events. I look forward to seeing you all at the opening of the exhibition "Morphing Nature" and other Friends events during the year ahead.

The Arboretum is home to TREENET and following is a summary of its 2011 activities provided by TREENET Director, David Lawry. In addition to our annual symposium TREENET was also represented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture at Parramatta with a display booth featuring TREENET's research and educational activities and Avenues of Honour Project. The centre of attention was the working model of the TREENET kerb inlet which was recognised by the audience as unique in concept and broadly applicable to urban sites globally.

The first commercial application of the TREENET Inlet, designed to redirect storm water from roadways to benefit street trees and prevent pollutants entering waterways was achieved in 2011 with the sale of 50 inlets to Darebin City Council in Melbourne. Local Governments actively foster relationships with TREENET through Institutional Memberships, attendance at Symposia and workshops, and provision of grants for specific projects. There have been a number of requests from Local Governments for onsite demonstrations of the TREENET Inlet and advice about tree sensitive urban design.

The nursery industry nationally is meeting the increasing demand for the supply of Gallipoli™ rosemary which part funds the Avenues of Honour Project. This year the first new generation Avenue of Honour was completed at Willunga SA with considerable input over 4 years from TREENET.

David Lawry has been invited to address many community and professional groups in 2011 mostly on the topic of the creation of liveable cities in the face of climate change. Trees are in the first line of defence and their ameliorating influence on the effects of heat waves in particular is now increasingly recognised in the mainstream debate on the topic. TREENET has been a leader in articulating an industry and community wide response to the recently amended Significant Tree Legislation in SA through consultation with stakeholders and the direct invitation of the Minister of Planning.

Congratulations to David and his team of postgraduate researchers and volunteers on their achievements and thanks to the TREENET Management team for their support.

Jennifer Gardner



Rhodesian Wisteria *Bolusanthus speciosus* in the Arboretum



detail of *B. speciosus* flowers photographs courtesy Jennifer Gardner

ANDREW WALTERS INTRODUCES HIMSELF



As a trained horticulturist, I bring to this position experience from my private gardening business, working in schools, small residential facilities and domestic gardens. Having trained at Urrbrae TAFE I have been a Friend of the Waite Arboretum since I began my studies there, popping across the road to the Arboretum at every opportunity to explore this vast and fascinating collection of trees.

In the past I have worked as an Accountant in the area of insolvency but decided on a change of career around ten years ago, which coincided with my becoming a father of two boys. From this time my interest and passion for horticulture has grown. I have a keen interest in propagation, citriculture and heritage roses and in addition to being a Friend of the Waite Arboretum, I have been a Friend of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, a member of the Rose Society, Australian Plant Society and The Rare Fruit Society of SA. In the Rare Fruit Society I have been on the committee for the last six years.

I am excited to be joining the Waite Arboretum and have already been impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm of the volunteers who turned up on a 39-degree day in my first week. I count myself very privileged to be working in such a marvellous setting amongst such passionate people.

CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF DAVID ERIC SYMON D.SC. WAITE ARBORETUM 14 JANUARY 2012



On 14 January 2012 in perfect weather, more than 220 people gathered near the Waite Arboretum Dracaena Collection to celebrate the life of David Eric Symon – highly respected botanist, visionary curator of the Arboretum, Arboretum guide, educator, conservationist, scholar, intrepid plant collector, friend and loving family man.

David touched many lives in his incredibly productive 60 years as a botanist and it was lovely to see so many of his past

colleagues, students and friends come together to acknowledge his achievements, share memories and reminisce about old times over delicious refreshments provided by the family.

David began his long and extremely happy association with the Waite Agricultural Research Institute, first as a lecturer in the Agronomy Department and then becoming Botanist at the Waite in 1957.

When David was appointed Botanist, part of his responsibilities was as to curate and develop the Arboretum. At that time at the Waite there was great interest in the concept of bioclimatic zones and David turned to homoclimates such as the Mediterranean, southern California and South Africa to source new material. A few years later, David made the bold and profound policy decision not to water the trees after establishment, an experiment of increasing relevance as the Arboretum demonstrates which species have performed well for up to 50 years on rainfall alone. David was delighted to see the results of this long-term evaluation now informing the selection of trees for our streets, parks and gardens through the TREENET research and education project based at the Arboretum. TREENET, in collaboration with Local and State Governments, is propagating, promoting and trialling successful Arboretum species in streets.

Two genera were of particular interest to David for their suitability for our climate viz., ornamental pears *Pyrus* spp. and dragon trees arborescent *Dracaena* spp. David developed these collections by corresponding with people around the world to obtain wild collected seeds. Some of these species e.g. *Pyrus tadshikistanica* and *P. korshinskyi* are listed as critically endangered in their native habitat and the Arboretum specimens have become very important sources of propagating material. David's 30+ years of accumulated pear flowering data have also proved useful and are being analysed by Ph.D. student Fran MacGillivray in her project examining the effects of climate change on flowering phenology. An academic at the University of Melbourne, also researching the effect of climate change on flowering is interested in David's 30-year data set on the Arboretum eucalypts. So his records are still a rich source of information.

After his retirement, David continued his involvement in the Arboretum as a very knowledgeable guide. In our annual survey of volunteers last July to a question asking "What would help improve your volunteering experience?" David responded "Two new legs". At the TREENET National Symposium in September, despite increasing unsteadiness on his feet, David joined a walk and with characteristic enthusiasm couldn't resist the opportunity to add his impromptu commentary to that of the designated guides.

David was always on the lookout for new and interesting material for the Arboretum and until just a couple of weeks before his death, was still sourcing seeds of rare or special dragon trees and waiting with great impatience for them to germinate. He was a staunch supporter and foundation member of the Friends of the Waite Arboretum and contributed many thought provoking articles to the Newsletters. David was awarded Life Membership of the Friends in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Arboretum.

Jennifer Gardner said that she first met David in 1959 when she did her Grade 7 project on the Waite Institute. David talked to her enthusiastically about the Arboretum. 27 years later, when she was appointed Curator of the Arboretum, David helped her find her feet and continued to share his knowledge, insights and ideas for the Arboretum until his last days. Jennifer says that there was only one area where their views differed. During the prolonged drought she installed drip irrigation to extend the life and promote the health of our heritage-listed Elm Avenue. David, with characteristic forthrightness said "Let them die!" as he visualised a unique and spectacular avenue of 70 dragon trees taking their place. That was David: always looking to the future.

David shared his passion for botany with everyone from children to retirees at U3A, from students to eminent colleagues. He will be very fondly remembered as an outstanding scientist, inspirational mentor and man of vision.

The above tribute to David by Jennifer was followed by, Robin Graham who summarized David's work at the Waite Agricultural Institute. His early research involved subterranean clover and *Medicago* spp. In 1956 David was appointed Lecturer in Systematic Botany at the Waite and it was then that he assumed responsibility for the Arboretum. David contributed greatly to systematic botany in both Australia and overseas. He made many contributions to the new 'Flora of Australia' as well as writing a number of books either on his own or as a co-author. His careful and detailed documentation of our flora at that time will serve as a benchmark against which to measure future change.

When he retired in 1985, David took the Waite Herbarium collection to the State Herbarium.

W.R. (Bill) Barker from the State Herbarium emphasized David's boundless enthusiasm for the Australian flora and said that David lived his life in botany, science in general, in conservation, in community engagement and in the arts. He played a significant role in the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia and his participation in botanical surveys and publications was instrumental in the declaration of a number of national parks in the '70s. He served a term as President.

His interests in plants were wide ranging; they centred on the systematics of Australian plants, native and naturalised alike, but ranged into useful plants and world views. He revised several Australian genera including *Cassia* (now *Senna*) and *Solanum*. His work on *Solanum* led to major revisions of Australian and New Guinea representatives and to his renown amongst the workers in the global family Solanaceae.

David's interest in cultivated plants, so greatly reflected in his huge investment in the nurturing of the Waite Arboretum, was reflected in two projects in particular. Lifelong were the Rosaceae. where probably his major achievement was setting the ground work for a new look at one of Australia's top 10 weeds namely blackberry (*Rubus* sp.). David realised that differences in responses to weedicides and rusts might reflect a greater diversity of microspecies than had previously been thought. He collected 600 specimens of *Rubus*, and met local weed botanists. His special care to represent and document vegetative and floral features is a legacy adopted today by Australian collectors. Following further studies many microspecies were recognised for the first time and Australia-wide, management policies and procedures were documented.

Another continuing passion in cultivated plants has been the Dragons Blood Tree. His knowledge was great and ever much in demand and his scientific achievements were reflected in the award by the University of Adelaide of his D.Sc. in 1996.

David oversaw the assemblage of 70,000 plus specimens in the Waite Institute Herbarium which following his retirement was amalgamated with the State Herbarium. His own collections were massive – he figured in 23,912 collections now housed in the State Herbarium. They were not confined to his substantial collections of Rosaceae, Solanaceae and Leguminosae, but ranged widely across the vascular flora. They also include some hundreds of specimens (with information about their wild provenance) that were the results of growing cuttings and seedlings to flowering and fruiting in his garden in Tusmore.

POT POURRI

THE JOINT CHRISTMAS PICNIC

On a pleasant balmy early summer evening our first gathering in this new format was held on Sunday 4th December. The venue was on the southern side of Urrbrae House where guests could either relax on the lawn or sit under the shade of the surrounding trees. With everyone so scattered it was hard to estimate the number but at a guess there must have been around 50.

The highlight of the evening was the wonderful Onkaparinga Capella Choir and their high standard rendition of many of the popular carols and other items. With the beautiful sound drifting over the area, one had to feel that it was indeed a special occasion. We have to thank Lynette Zeitz, Manager of Urrbrae House, for organising their appearance and for her part in their performance. The use of the verandah, with its commanding aspect meant that the Choir was not only easily visible but the sound could be well projected. Because of this the various family and other groups could wine and dine seated at their tables or otherwise, with virtually unobstructed vision.

During the interval the respective representatives of the three Friends groups referred briefly to their years' activities, which, as usual, is a good way of rounding off the year.

We were lucky with the weather, but considering the success of this form of end of year activity, most people were in favour of trying it again.

Henry Krichauff

'ROCKET FUEL' - A NEW PRODUCT FROM NEUTROG

'Rocket Fuel' is a BFA-Registered organic fertiliser which has been developed by Neutrog, specifically for growing healthy organic fruit and vegetables. If it is applied once in each season it will ensure that your fruit and vegetables have access to the nutrients they need for optimum performance.

Rocket Fuel is a result of Neutrog's involvement with many primary schools and their vegetable gardens. A partnership with the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation led to its development. As I am sure you know, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation was developed to engage and educate young children in growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing their own food. Its mission is expressed through the Kitchen Garden Program.

'Rocket Fuel' is supplied free to participating Primary Schools and part of the proceeds from sales of the fertiliser are donated to support the Program nationally.

UP THE CREEK AND DOWN THE COOPER

On Wednesday afternoon, 16th November 2011, Peter Nicholls with the assistance of Cicely Bungey and Meg Nicholls, gave a presentation of their experiences on a Rex Ellis led boating trip down the flooded Cooper Creek, during August 2010, when Lake Eyre was being filled. It was to a packed audience of members and visitors of the Friends of the Waite Arboretum in the Urrbrae House drawing room.

The inspiration for this trip was a 5 minute Paul Lockyer segment on the ABC 7.30 Report in June 2010 showing a Rex Ellis leading a group travelling by boat down the Warburton Creek, and the obvious excitement of the participants in being close to their natural surroundings.

As a result Rex received some 600 enquiries, and somehow he culled that group down to about 25 guests to go on either a July or an August trip down the Cooper. We were fortunate to be able to go on his August trip. We preceded that experience with a flight over Lake Eyre in July from Coober Pedy.

Rex's July trip was literally "up the creek" as he had been obstructed by a major flooded swamp in attempting to go down the Cooper from the Birdsville Track crossing, and so had to extract his party and go up the Cooper from his starting point.

In August he led a very mixed bunch of 13 travellers from all over Australia and 3 assistant boat and vehicle drivers and, of course, his faithful Jack Russell "Billycan" seen here sleeping beside a swag.

Peter led the audience through a pictorial description of their seven days on the waters of the flooded Cooper Creek. Cicely and Meg demonstrated some of the gear we took and described the general daily routine of rising when Rex beat the frying pan, breakfasting, packing lunch, including boiling water for thermoses, loading the boats with all our daily gear, and the evening meal and the ritual résumé of 'The Day'.

The weather ranged from glorious sunrises and sunsets, to teeming rain, and all the while we slept out in our warm swags - no tents. The scenery, when traveling at 8 to 12 km/h plus a strong current at times, was extremely enjoyable and very varied, and never boring, for the desert had in parts been submerged and the remainder had bloomed.



We saw some 70 plus species of birds, from Wedge Tail eagles with chicks in their nests, and the nests of budgerigars or finches hidden beneath these nests, to pelicans, kites, cormorants, stilts and avocets. Pink-eared ducks were less common including this pair on the waters of the Cooper inlet of Lake Eyre and another with two ducklings.



We had rare glimpses of a grey falcon, orange chats on the island, and white winged wrens at the western end of the swamp, upstream from our initial entry point on to the Cooper Creek.

Most of us will not forget camping near these cliffs in the late evening light of a beautiful August day, or watching the yellow wildflowers stretching off in to the distance on the flooded creek interdunal flats.



It took us three and a bit days to reach our destination of an island in the mouth of the Cooper Inlet, which Rex had last visited twenty years earlier. He was delighted that we landed at the same spot. The inlet is shallow and covered with knee deep very soft mud, and when we put a foot down into it, we made a hole which is



treacherous for the next person following. So unloading our gear was quite an operation - fortunately nothing precious was dropped into the water, though a few had an unexpected dip! The mud was no obstacle for some of the party to have their first bath in several days, in the brackish waters of Lake Eyre. We did not carry water - we simply drank the milky but otherwise clean, pleasant water of the Cooper Creek, however the water in the Cooper Inlet of was only just drinkable. However the wine in the evening happy hour was very drinkable and the saltbush mutton roast was delicious.



Sadly, Rex was on this island exactly a year later when he was visited by Paul Lockyer and the ABC 7.30 helicopter crew shortly before their disaster.

Unfortunately in this short report, I am not able to do justice to the extremely interesting and varied landscapes we travelled through, nor to comment on all the elements of the desert and on the bonding and camaraderie of such a diverse group of strangers in the shared experience of a lifetime. However, the audience appreciated the chance to see something of our interior at this special moment in time. Many also approved of the meeting being held in the afternoon and not an evening.

Peter Nicholls



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 25 Feb – Sun 5 March 2012: SA Basketry Society Exhibition, “Morphing Nature” – opening Friday 24 February.

Monday 16 April – Annual General Meeting. Guest Speaker tba.

Sunday 22 July – Afternoon performance by Loreto School Choir.

WHAT’S ON AT URRBRAE HOUSE

Urrbrae House Historic Precinct now has its own Facebook page at

<http://www.facebook.com/urrbraehouse>

Public events at Urrbrae House will be listed on the page under the Events button and there will also be updates on other activities that may be of interest.