



Iconic River Red Gum, Australian Native Garden Photo David Tamall

ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP INC. NEWS BULLETIN NOVEMBER 2010

The Australian Native Garden - a Jewel in the Crown of the Royal Park

Behind the screen of trees along Gatehouse Street and Royal Parade, Parkville, there lies one of Melbourne's few urban indigenous gardens - the Australian Native Garden (ANG). By the early 1970s, this area had become the site of a council workers' depot with iron sheds littering the Park. Fortunately, a number of pre-settlement river red gums, originally on a creek through the park, survived the occupation, as did the historic Walmsley House. This had been used as a shed until "discovered" and saved from demolition by RPPG. It was later included on the State Heritage Register. Also saved was the nearby Golden Elm now on the Victorian significant tree register.

In 1974 a far sighted City of Melbourne administrator commissioned Grace Fraser, a well known landscape architect, to undertake a "*Study for the Australian Native Garden*". (Sadly Grace Fraser died earlier this year.) There was, at this time, an awakening of interest in Australian indigenous plants. Grace Fraser constructed the ANG as an informal garden where Melburnians could enjoy a display of native plant species and as an introduction for overseas visitors to the Australian landscape. Tullamarine Airport had just been opened and the Melbourne Council intended that visitors could take a quick trip around the ANG en route to the delights of the metropolis. Unfortunately Grace Fraser's plans were only partially implemented.

The 1987 Royal Park Master Plan provided directions for the restoration of Royal Park, including the ANG with indigenous bushland landscapes. The vision faded, however, when commissioners took over the City of Melbourne in the early 1990's and the revegetation of Royal Park was accorded a low priority. Kevan Gosper, Chief Commissioner, was responsible for clearance of 10 hectares of parkland around the Zoo, including avenues of Moreton Bay Figs and elms. Royal Park became progressively degraded. Revegetation only resumed when Councillors Martin Brennan and David Risstrom established an Implementation Committee to progress the projects established under the Royal Park Master Plan (revised in 1997.) A Vegetation Management Plan Sub Committee was formed with Council staff, landscape architects and horticulturists plus representatives of community groups - including the North and West Melbourne Association; the Parkville Association; and RPPG. This Sub Committee worked on the ANG intensively in keeping with the original vision of Grace Fraser. It was hoped that the regenerated ANG would encourage the return of birdlife with flocks of ibis and ducks at the billabong.

Unfortunately failure to control dogs and foxes in the Park has meant that wildlife has not been protected. After years of RPPG lobbying Council, a policy banning dogs in the ANG, together with other wetlands, was passed and it was finally gazetted in October 2010. Several years ago, the billabong was relined and a swale constructed through the ANG. Unfortunately under Lord Mayor John So, the Royal Park Committees were disbanded and so the community involvement in planning and oversight of changes in the Park has come to an end. The south garden bed on Gatehouse Street is soon to be replanted as the first part of a new regeneration plan.

Julianne Bell RPPG Committee Member

Recent Event:

Sunday 29 August 2010 "Wattle Day" Community Spring Planting in Royal Park

A well attended day for planting of indigenous grasses and wattle trees was held in Royal Park near Macarthur Road. It was heartening to see that the community is still being involved in the regeneration of the Park. Acknowledgement was given to traditional owners of the land. Koori representatives had a camp fire going, had a didgeridoo concert and a boomerang throwing exhibition along with a display of macro invertebrates (water bugs), reptiles, baby dingos and emus. There were information stalls on the plantings in Royal Park, free wattle trees and ethnic and western food for lunch. The African Women's Group from nearby Flemington had face painting for children and a traditional coffee ceremony. Many thanks to the City of Melbourne for this wonderful cultural, social and ecological event! Paul Prentice (RPPG Committee member.)

Coming Events:

Candidates Forum North and West Melbourne Association Tuesday 16 November 2010

Event: The North and West Melbourne Association is holding a forum for the community to meet candidates in the election for the Lower House in the State seat of Melbourne. This will be your last opportunity to ask party representatives important questions on election issues including Royal Park. (The East West Link through Royal Park is now back on the Brumby Government's agenda and will apparently be linked with the WestLink Tunnel through Footscray.)

Time and Date : 7:30 pm Tuesday 16 November 2010

Venue: Meeting Room first floor North Melbourne Town Hall (Art House) on the corner of Queensberry and Errol Streets North Melbourne. (The Town Hall has lift access to the first floor) Melways Map reference: 2 A J9

Transport: On-street parking available. Tram up Elizabeth Street to Errol Street, North Melbourne.

Candidates: These include ALP Candidate Bronwyn Pike, former Education Minister in the previous Government, Greens candidate Brian Walters SC and Luke Martin Liberal Party candidate.

Enquiries/Contact: Bill Cook info@nwma.org.au, www.nwma.org.au Mobile 0404515763.

Royal Park Protection Group Inc. AGM 1 December 2010

Event: Royal Park Protection Group Inc. 2010 AGM.

Time and Date: 6:45 pm for 7 pm Wednesday 1 December 2010.

Venue: Flemington Community Centre Debneys Park Flemington.

Speakers: Adam Bandt, MHP Federal Member for Melbourne, and Brian Walters SC, President Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc. and candidate for the State seat of Melbourne on "A Green Vision for Melbourne's Parks and Gardens."

Election of Executive Committee: Proceedings will include election of the executive committee for 2011 and development of action plans for 2011. Stay to supper and meet our celebrity guests and representatives of other community groups.

Contact: Anne Phefley RPPG Secretary Phone mobile 0412 279 156 www.royalparkprotect.org.au

Convenor's Message for 2011: *"As we approach 2011, the threats to our wonderful Royal Park are more real than ever. The East West Link freeway-in-a tunnel through Royal Park is still on the agenda; the old buildings of the Royal Children's Hospital still have to be demolished to return the old site to parkland; and the plans for a private hotel in the park next to the RCH must be fought. Our park is not a cheap development option but a priceless resource and legacy. Help us to preserve it for future generations to enjoy."* Paul Leitinger (RPPG Convenor.)

Vale RPPG Member:

We are very sad to have to report the passing of Jack McRae from West Parkville, a RPPG foundation member. We were very fortunate to have had his help over the years.

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