

**Managing Culturally Significant Landscapes  
Heritage Victoria Seminar Friday 19 July 2002**

**Many hands make light work**

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Come and join me on a walk through some Australian Garden History Society working bees.

One of the aims of the Australian Garden History Society is to actively encourage and support conservation of significant cultural landscapes, historic gardens and plants. Together with our aim to maintain an active advocacy role the Victorian Branch believes we are putting our shoulders where our mouths are by physically supporting our historic gardens and their owners.

Since 1991 the Victorian Branch of the Australian Garden History Society has been conducting regular working bees in a range of our historic gardens. On looking back over these 11 or so years I realise what a significant contribution this voluntary work has made. Personally I used to envy people who inherited and owned many of these gardens, but it wasn't long before that envy turned to pity. What an enormous responsibility they have in caring for our heritage and yes, they deserve some help. All the properties we work at are owned by people who see themselves as custodians and who willingly share their gardens when appropriate.

Often people on hearing about our working bees assume that we are a group of old ladies doing some gentle weeding and generally having a sticky beak and a nice day out in a wonderful garden. I want to quash that perception and tell you what we do at working bees.

Many of the gardens we work in have had CMP's carried out on them and these are invaluable to guide us. At all times we are guided by what the owner wants and if necessary we offer guidance to the owner. I often ask an owner to give us the worst job that needs doing, the job that one or two people would be totally daunted by but a group find a challenge and can achieve great satisfaction doing. Our volunteers are

all garden lovers and many are professionally qualified in horticulture or landscape architecture or design and these working bees provide a wonderful learning environment. Many who attend learn new skills under this expert direction and all who attend enjoy the camaraderie and the satisfaction of knowing they are making a contribution. Any profit the AGHS makes from functions we run is put back into garden support. This small amount of money pays for arborists, professional gardeners, plants, fertilizers and any of the squillion things needed in gardens.

Another important contribution we make is to sponsor a feature article each year in our national bi-monthly journal on a significant Victorian garden. We have now produced 4 of these and run-ons are done and can be sold to raise further funds for the gardens. As you will see these booklets include an up-to-date garden plan and a full plant identification list. A detailed history of the garden and early and current photographs all go to inform people that these gardens are an important part of our heritage and deserve the community's support.

I would love to tell you about all our working bee projects but time does not allow for that, so I will touch on a few.

- **Sandwich board** – We have recently had this sandwich board made to display whenever we are working in a public profile garden.
- **Bishopscourt** – In 1998 the Anglican church lodged an application to Heritage Victoria to subdivide Bishopscourt and we were one of the objectors. When the subsequent application was made in 1999 we were again an objector and appeared along with others at the hearings conducted to resolve the issue. At all times when we were objecting to the subdivision we offered assistance to the church for the maintenance of the garden. The appeal was disallowed. Since then we have endeavoured to put our shoulders where our mouths were and I am proud to say that we have turned this garden around from what was a burden for the church to the asset it is today. The two acre site which is Bishopscourt is the last intact urban estate within the City of Melbourne. The site was selected in 1848 and the house completed in 1853. In recent years the garden has been in decline and only

been kept tidy with very little, if any, real gardening being done. As a result many plants have been lost and many layers of rubbish and ivy and other weeds have built up in each of the shrubberies. The working bees have cleared away much of this and we are now planting and returning the garden to its former glory. Working bees have been held regularly since last July and in October this year we are opening the garden for Australia's Open Garden Scheme. This we hope will generate income that can be put back into the garden and so relieve the church of this financial burden. The working bees are being directed by professional gardener, Shelley Wood. John Isbel is reinstating the vegetable garden. Possum damage is a real problem at Bishops court and we are taking all steps we can to reduce the opportunity for damage. Possum guards have been installed on a couple of special plants that have taken a battering. We are now trialling icy pole sticks dipped in Vicks vapour rub placed strategically around the vegetable garden and hoping they repel these furry creatures who are having regular midnight feasts of our vegetable seedlings. Heritage Victoria funding this year has enabled the driveway and drainage to be repaired, some trees planted and the pergola reconstructed. Management of rubbish is a major problem for large gardens and disposal of it can be costly. When we commenced our working bees we inherited a massive mountain of rubbish which appropriated a large section of the garden. Because this was a mixture of hard and green rubbish it had to be carted away at considerable expense. Since then we have managed rubbish by composting where possible, separating chippable prunings and bagging green rubbish for local council collection. The chipping of prunings has provided valuable mulch and rubbish is no longer a problem. We have engaged a professional arborist to do urgent tree work.

- **Belmont** – settled by James (J.F.) Watkin, the present owner's great grandfather in 1858 who was an English engineer who went there to cut a water race for a Ballarat gold mining company. The first part of the present house was erected in 1861 and the lily pond was made while he occupied the site under a miner's right. He acquired the freehold title in 1865. The garden was laid out in the 1860s and 1870s together with an orchard and vineyard. Distinctive lych gate known as 'the porch' by the family. This picture (1910) shows J.F.'s grandson, Max who lived

at Belmont all his life until he died in 1993 aged 90. Regular working bees, twice a year have been held there since 1991.

- **Turkeith** – 1862, house built 1865. Garden laid out by Guilfoyle in about 1904 for the current owner's grandparents, Urquhart and Janet Ramsay. Between the 50s and 1985 garden became overgrown. In 1986, AGHS carried out a working bee soon after Janet and Lachlan Gordon and their young family moved in and revealed many paths and garden features which had been totally engulfed with a tangled mess of growth. Since 1992 regular working bees twice a year have been held there. A very comprehensive CMP prepared by Marika Kocsis for her Bachelor of Applied Science (Horticulture) degree listed as a short term priority the repair of the freestone wall entrance to this garden. Under the direction of stonewaller David Long, paid by AGHS, working bees dismantled the old wall originally constructed under Guilfoyle's direction in 1904 and rebuilt the new one.
- **Mooleric** – 1841. House built 1871. Ramsay family purchased Mooleric 1899. Guilfoyle designed garden in 1903. Guilfoyle friendly with the Ramsay family and continued to take an interest in the garden until his death in 1912, he is said to have called Mooleric his 'best small private garden'. Property recently was sold after 99 years of Ramsay family ownership. We are now working with the new owners who are keen to follow the recommendations of the CMP written in 1984 by Francine Gilfedder and I think funded by Heritage Victoria or whatever it was called in 1984. I have included these couple of slides to show you Mooleric and in one of them you can see that Karen Olsen who has organised today's Seminar has attended working bees and is prepared to work in the wet.
- We have a new project which we are starting next week at Castlemaine. Tute's Cottage which is on the Heritage Register and which David Bannear has been promoting. An AGHS member, Mandy Stroebel has researched and written a garden re-creation proposal for her Burnley studies. Mandy's work will guide us as we help to re-create a Miner's Productive Garden.

In 2001 a total of 217 person days were carried out and already in 2002 we are up to 147 days. This is a significant contribution and we are proud to be making a worthwhile contribution to the conservation of our gardening heritage. Please come and talk to me if you would like more information or more importantly if you would like to help us.

Thank you