

INDIGENOTES

*View of Bursaria spinosa looking over the Observatory Buildings towards Melbourne City skyline.
Photo provided by Public Programs Division, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.*

Indigenous Remnants in the Spotlight at the R.B.G Melbourne

Melbourne's world renowned Royal Botanic Gardens are about to undergo their most significant enhancement since William Guilfoyle designed their acclaimed sweeping lawns and winding paths in the late 1800s.

A major new development of the Old Melbourne Observatory site, which has been managed by the Royal Botanic Gardens since 1992, will increase the total size of the land under the Gardens management by 10 hectares, and provide new world-class visitor facilities and plant displays to complement the historic Gardens.

Built in 1863 and situated between the Kings Domain, Government House and the Shrine of Remembrance, the Old Observatory is very much one of Melbourne's "forgotten corners" because with the exception of occasional telescope viewings, the Observatory has seldom been open to the general public.

The project involves the restoration of Observatory buildings dating back to 1861, the construction of a new visitor complex, and soft landscape development which includes an Indigenous Grassy Woodland, scheduled for completion late in 1998.

A number of elements of native vegetation also survive on the site. Almost all of the canopy species from the original vegetation on the site have been lost, with five

old trees of *Bursaria spinosa* being the principal possible survivors. One of these trees is located north-west of the Caretakers Cottage, with the others south and south-west of the Magnet House. Other possible canopy remnants include a single specimen of *Eucalyptus melliodora* (west of the gate to the Astronomer's Residence) and several of *Acacia implexa* (along the Government House fence line). Both the *Bursaria* and the *Eucalyptus* are listed on the National Trust Register of Significant Trees. The *Bursarias* are likely to be either remnant specimens, or progeny of remnants now gone.

The trees are undoubtedly old, their size not increasing significantly in the past 15 years or so which suggests the plants are probably at the very least 60 years old. Photographs taken of the site during the late 1800s show no trees or shrubs likely to be *Bursaria* in the area. However, the exact position of the present trees is difficult to establish. It is possible anyhow that the *Bursaria* plants could have been maintained as low coppice under a not-too-rigorous mowing regime. The species certainly has the ability to persist in a stunted form through heavy grazing or browsing. Alternatively they may be progeny of other nearby remnants now gone (several old trees, also listed on the Register of Significant Trees, remain in the grounds of Como House in South Yarra). Similarly, both the *Acacia implexa* trees, and the single *Eucalyptus melliodora* appear to be either true remnants or progeny of other indigenous remnants, also now gone.

Elsewhere on the site are specimens of *Themeda triandra* (Kangaroo Grass), occurring with several other native species, including *Drosera peltata* subsp. *peltata*, *Tricoryne elatior*, *Microtis unifolia* and the sedge *Carex breviculmis*. As part of the landscape design, a selection of Melbourne's indigenous plants will be featured around the five *Bursaria* and the *Eucalyptus melliodora*.

The concept involves the creation of an Indigenous Grassy Woodland with a pathway through it, consisting of plants which would have existed on the site. With a small planting of indigenous grasses and herbaceous flowering material, the character and form of the *Bursarias* will be more greatly appreciated.

Historic records of other species that once occurred on or near the site within the same community have been consulted to compile a list of other species to be included in the woodland plantings. Sources for this information include specimen data from the National Herbarium of Victoria, published historic accounts of the original vegetation of Melbourne, and recent surveys of remnant vegetation in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

The first stage of the work has been to carefully transplant all remaining indigenous *Themeda triandra* and other herbaceous species such as *Tricoryne elatior*, *Carex breviculmis*, *Microtis unifolia* and *Drosera peltata* subsp. *peltata*. We have now over two dozen plants of the *Themeda* (Kangaroo Grass) and eleven *Carex* in the RBGM Nursery.

When we were preparing to dig up the two mature plants of *Tricoryne*, we discovered over twenty five young seedlings which had emerged from the parent plants. These seedlings and parent plants are now securely potted in the Nursery ready to be replanted on the site in spring 1998.

As the *Bursaria* are so advanced, Nadia Polikarpowski from the Nursery has collected seed and cutting material from them to ensure that their genotype is protected. Even though *Bursaria spinosa* occurs everywhere throughout Australia except for the Northern Territory, these are regarded as the closest still surviving to Melbourne's Central Business District.

One of the challenges of the site is successful and total weed control. As the area has been managed as exotic turf, and includes a large percentage of *Oxalis purpurea*, the spraying of the area to kill these plants prior to planting is imperative.

Our aim is to develop and manage the area with as few introduced weeds as possible. In view of this we will be using Jute-mat, a biodegradable product that will suppress weed growth for up to two years.

We are excited that these remnant plants have rightly been given a priority in this new high profile Observatory Gate project and that Melbourne's indigenous plants will be given another opportunity to thrive in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following people for their generous assistance in compiling this article; Neville Walsh, Wendy Williams, Richard Barley and Jo Mayall from the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

We would also like to thank George Stolfo from the Society for Growing Australian Plants, Maroondah Group for kindly allowing us the use of his illustrations in this article.

**Written By: Stuart McIntosh and Therese Turner (Horticulturalists)
Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.**

From The Age 28 May 1998

From the Editor:

It's been another busy month but I am finally getting something out that I think you all will enjoy.

Alot of this month's issue is material cut and pasted from one of my favorite publications: *Whole Earth*. *Whole Earth* is publishing descendent of the *The Whole Earth Catalog* and *Coevolution Quarterly*; they have been publishing information about "tools" for living for over 25 years. This quarter the material they have included varies from stories about the long wave of economic growth to restoring natural systems to the wierd consumer culture that has emerged in Chile. I consider *Whole Earth* a must read to stay on top of the issues that face us in this worls of ours on the ecological brink. So, if I don't get much original local material you will get stuff that I think is interesting from elsewhere.....

I will again ask for more material and feedback.... Most of what I hear about my work is positive but sometimes I wonder if everyone out there thinks so... Tell me what you think and send storeis indigenous flora and fauna and restoring our natural systems etc. whenever you like.

Again, my new email address is:
lwkern@i-o.net.au

Please use my P. O. Box in Preston for all snail mail...it gets to me quickly as well.

Correction for the next Flora of Melbourne Info

A few months ago we had an announcement asking for updated information for another edition of the Flora of Melbourne. Marilyn Grey is still working on the project and is asking for more info on locations of more plant species in the Melbourne area. She also reports that over 100 new species have been found in the Melbourne and will need to be included in the new addition.

However, you may find that her Email address is not working. Marilyn's correct address is:
marilyngrey@hotmail

IFFA activities:

IFFA (Vic) Meeting:

No meeting for May

General Meeting

Venue:

SPIFFA

Public meetings are on the first Monday of every month at 7:30 pm at the Waterfall Gully Community Centre, corner of Bayview Rd. and Nixon St., Rosebud.
Contact: Jon Greening (03) 5985 5561.

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Contributions to *Indigenotes* should be sent to the editor — the deadline for the next issue is October 15th. Contributions can be typed or hand written but computer disk copies on PC-compatible format is preferred.

The views expressed in Indigenotes are not necessarily those of the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association.