

OPERCULUM – FEBRUARY 2017

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Getting Ready for the Big Event

With less than 2 months to go, planning is well underway for our major annual fundraising event. The **SHBG Autumn Gardens & Plant Fair** will be held this year on the weekend of Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd of April.

As a reminder, and as the name implies, the weekend will include 6 magnificent Southern Highlands town and country gardens for you to visit as well as the monster Plant Fair held on site at the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. (*Photo below, as featured on the flyers, shows autumn colours on the lake at Dragon Farm.*)



In addition to strong local support, we expect to welcome visitors from Sydney, Canberra, Goulburn and the Illawarra, as well as far afield as Maleny on the Sunshine Coast. Our reputation for showcasing Highland Gardens and offering quality plants for sale is far-reaching!

Funds raised by the Autumn Gardens event have continued to rise. In 2015 the Autumn Gardens event raised around \$80,000 and more than \$90,000 was raised last year. Can we get over the \$100,000 threshold in 2017?

With the generous support of the owners, this year we are opening 3 Town Gardens and 3 Country Gardens.



The Town Gardens are all only a few minutes drive from the Botanic Gardens. These include *Retford Park* which was recently included in the National Trust of Australia register, and the delightful private garden of Merryleigh Brindley, *Carisbrooke* in Bowral (photo above) and *Yarrowin*, the family home of the late Paul Ramsay AO, at Burradoo.

The Country Gardens will necessitate a 20 to 30 minute drive through the picturesque Southern Highlands to Wildes Meadow (*Wildewood* and *Dragon Farm*) and

Avoca (5th Chapter). These large acre gardens are sure to surprise and delight visitors.

Despite the unusually hot and dry summer, recent much appreciated rain and the onset of cooler weather will ensure that all the gardens will be a joy to visit.

Visiting gardens is not only a joy in itself, but always provides us with ideas to incorporate into our own gardens.

The Friends Committee is working with the owners and their gardeners and will call upon Friends and supporters to assist with entry ticketing, parking guidance and general assistance to visitors. We will also be looking for help from Friends to distribute flyers in a letter box drop in early March. Further details of this will be made available soon.



Autumn Plant Fair, and more, at SHBG

Building on the success in 2016, the Plant Growers Group (PGG) will coordinate the 2017 Autumn Plant Fair at the Botanic Gardens.

Visitors will be able to buy plants from some 10 different marquees focusing on specialist areas including Salvias, Succulents, Blooming Bulbs, Bird & Bee Attracting Plants, Natives and Collectables. Experts will be on hand to offer help and advice.

Autumn Open Gardens – Call for Volunteers

This year we initiated a new system to streamline the call for the many volunteers that are needed to ensure the success of the weekend. Registration on line for those with email addresses seems to be working very well. All concerned are pleased to see the level of response and would like to thank you for offering to support the Gardens in such a generous manner.

Shandra Egan or Di Grant will be in contact to let you know your roster times and place.

For those who receive Operculum by post you may have already been contacted by either Shandra, who coordinates the Open Gardens roster or Di Grant who is in charge of the Plant Fair roster. You will also find a registration form with your copy of Operculum. Please fill out this form and mail it to PO Box 707 Moss Vale, NSW 2577.

Thank you for your help.

Plant Growers Group

The Plant Growers Group (PGG) continues to provide support to the Gardens through production of plants for use in the gardens and for plant sales.

The group is now well advanced in preparing around 4,000 plants for sale at the Plant Fair. Apart from the plants being housed on site, contributions from other individuals in the Plant Growers Group, it is expected that an exciting range of plants of various types and sizes will be offered for sale at the Autumn Plant Fair.

Being part of this team is a great opportunity to share your skills and expertise, and have some fun, with other Southern Highlands gardeners while making a material contribution to the SHBG fundraising efforts.

The Plant Growers Group is always looking for pots. We particularly need 5" and 6" (12 to 15 cm) pots at the moment. Please drop off your empty pots (without the plastic labels that they often come with) at the Supporters Centre in the Gardens.

"Laurel's Blue Trailer"

In the nursery at the Botanic Gardens are some pots without name labels. They have been there for a couple of years and thus could not be offered for sale. They were known by the Growers as "Laurel's Blue Trailer".

Scientists at the Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney have recently identified them. A stem with flowers was provided to Herbarium by the grower, Laurel Cheetham.

The identification was made by Dr Peter Wilson and Ms Seanna McCune on Thursday 16 February, 2017. The mystery plant is *Veronicastrum villosulum* var. *villosulum*, (Family



Plantaginaceae, formerly *Scrophulariaceae*) a native of Eastern China.

Veronicastrum villosulum is described as a herbaceous perennial having loose arching long stems with deep blue flowers. More information on this plant

can be found at the Flora of China website http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=200021386.

Laurel has provided photographs of the flowers and a specimen plant to the Herbarium. This plant is to be retained for the herbarium collection.

Congratulations, Laurel. Your enthusiasm and efforts have reaped an exciting outcome. Laurel is now wondering how she came to have the plant in the first place, as it is not listed anywhere on Australian websites as being available here.

A selection of this rare plant will be available for sale at the Autumn Plant Fair.

Camellias for the Botanic Gardens

Have you noticed the japonica camellias on the western side of Station Street above the Bowral station carpark? Plans to realign the road so that it becomes the 'main road' (instead of Bong Bong Street) put these camellias at risk.



Recently, Dr Stephen Utick, a Director of the International Camellia Society, visited the site with other members of Camellia Ark to take cuttings of the 17 camellias there.

Les Musgrave and Laurel Cheetham, members of both the Australian Garden Society (AGHS) and the SHBG Growers Group also took cuttings.

The camellias include *Camellia japonica* 'Rosa Mundi' 1827, Europe, 'Prince Eugene Napoleon' 1859, Europe, 'Orandako' 1739, Japan, which is a rare formal double, 'Aspasia Macarthur' 1848, one of the Camden Park camellias, 'Virginia Franco', 1858 Europe, 'Contessa Woronzoff' 1858, and 'Odoratissima' 1867. They are believed to have been planted by Claude Crowe for State Rail in the 1950s/1960s.

More information on these camellias will be covered in a future edition of *Operculum*.

If the cuttings are successful they will be offered to the SHBG by the AGHS as a collection. It is expected that by that time there will be a suitable location in the Gardens for them.

Other camellia cuttings taken by Les Musgrave in 2013 from the Berrima Bridge Nursery include 'Prince Eugene Napoleon', 'Queen of Denmark', 'Mrs H Boyce', 'Mrs Harriet Beecher Sheather', 'Chandleri' and 'Miniata'. These cuttings are being cared for and grown at the SHBG awaiting future planting out.

(Thank you to Laurel Cheetham for this article.)

Friends of the SHBG

The Friends provides an opportunity for those within the local and wider community to demonstrate support for the establishment of a Botanic Garden.

The annual donation made by Friends is greatly appreciated as is the work done by Friends at the monthly Working Bees.

The Friends provide the core of the volunteers for SHBG events including the Autumn Gardens & Plant Fair.

The Friends of SHBG Committee is Chris Webb (Chairman) Lyn Barrett, Chris Blaxland, Ian Dwyer, Shandra Egan, Susan Hand, Judy Keast and Peter Scott. Email: friends@shbg.com.au

Working Bees – Volunteers Welcome
First Tuesday of the Month: 10am – Noon



Bring comfortable clothes, hat and gloves. Enjoy a friendly chat over morning tea. **Dates are: 7th March and 4th April** As the weather cools and we prepare for the Autumn Gardens weekend we may need to call on volunteers for additional working bees. Thank you in advance for your support. It is always appreciated.

Are we making progress?

Almost 18 years ago, The Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens “seemed like a good idea”. Since that time there has been a great deal of work done by a dedicated group of supporters. Some of those people have served on the Board and various committees. Individuals and organisations have provided financial support. Friends and others have given their time and effort as volunteers to work in the Gardens, support fund raising events or give donations.

Now might be a good time to review some of the progress towards the goal of an established, financially secure Botanic Gardens serving the community. Has that goal been reached? No, not yet. Can we see clear progress towards the goal? Yes!

While some of the corporate and financial progress is hard to show, we can look at photos of the Gardens themselves to remind ourselves of what has been achieved even since the official opening of the Gardens in 2013.



The photo above shows the Supporters Centre in July 2013. The photo below, taken some 3½ years later in November 2016, shows the Supporters Centre, the Amenities Block & Storage Room, the Shade House and the Pioneers Square under the shade sail. The Commemorative Plaque, unveiled at the official opening of the Gardens on 8th December 2013, can be seen on the right hand side.

Yes, we are making progress.



In addition to the buildings, there has been substantial work on the gardens. The next photo was taken at the July 2013 Working Bee looking west from the area in front of the Supporters Centre.



Compare that to what we see today as shown below. The electricity pole can still be seen in the background, but we now have green lawn, maturing gardens and the fence is hidden by substantial planting. The commemorative plaque unveiled by the then State Governor and the Mayor is shown in the foreground and the Bowral Garden Club park bench can be seen in the background.



In early 2016 the Oak Rondel was still just a circle outlined in the grass.



By the end of last year, the Oak Rondel had been formed, seats had been installed and the birch woodland trees between it and the Supporters Centre had grown to the point that they almost hide the view of the Supporters Centre and the *Wings of Love* sculpture.



Significant changes have also been made on the corporate side of the SHBG. The incorporated association structure adopted in 2003 was replaced in 2013 by the current structure of a company limited by guarantee. Many of the current directors were appointed in 2015. The board is now

working on the DGR-1 status for the company so that it can accept tax deductible gifts. A new Constitution, with revised Objectives, was adopted in December 2016.

For the Diary

- SHBG Working Bee: Tuesday 7th March
- SHBG Working Bee: Tuesday 4th April
- **Autumn Gardens & Plant Fair: 22nd & 23rd April**
- Botanic Gardens Open Day – Sunday 28th May
- National Tree Planting Day – Sunday 30th July
- **Harpers Mansion Plant Fair – 29th October**
- Bowral Tulip Time Festival – 12th – 24th September

Chairman's Column

Rarely is there such a special and extraordinary time as when I and fellow Board members, Lyn Collingridge and Chris Webb, met with world-class Australian artist John Olsen last week to accept his donated sculpture which will indeed set the standard for our gardens.

A renowned international artist, John Olsen OBE has donated to us a sculpture "Leaping Frog" which we will install within the main building precinct.



At more than 2 metres tall, this mega-sized bronze frog sculpture will be a surprising sight for all who visit our garden. It fuses artistic statement with the recognition that these creatures play a huge part in our environment and as a reflection of the health of our ecosystem.

John Olsen is recognised as one of Australia's most significant and accomplished artists. He is also a long time advocate and

appreciator of frogs and tells us:

"Many years ago on a field trip I was handed a tree frog and was asked to illustrate it - it was the first frog I ever illustrated. I have spent my life ever since illustrating and modelling frogs. You have no idea how many frog fanatics there are out there!!"

As we move ever closer to the design and building of our visitor centre, it is wonderful that we have a world-class sculpture already destined for its precinct. This sculpture will set a standard that will guide and inspire our architects, designers and builders, landscapers, friends, volunteers and supporters on our journey in developing the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens.

If frogs reflect the health of our ecosystem then our new mega frog must indicate we are in an extraordinarily healthy situation.

Charlotte Webb OAM, Chairman

Arboretum

An **arboretum** is, in a narrow sense, is a collection of trees. In its broader application, it can be used more generally to refer to a collection of plants cultivated for scientific, educational and ornamental purposes.

The Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens will be a park-like area to be enjoyed by local community and visitors. But, as a true Botanic Gardens, there will be an important scientific objective for the Gardens including its role as an arboretum.

SHBG believes it already has one of Australia's largest collections of *Betula* (birch) and an extensive *Buxus* collection. Both these collections have been given *National Collection* status with the Garden Plant Conservation of Australia Association (GPCAA).

As the Gardens develops further, it is expected that other significant collections will be assembled across a range of trees and plants. The SHBG will then play an important role in the preservation and scientific study of the collections.

Garden Design – New Signs

Visitors to the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens will now be greeted by a new sign outlining the proposed design for the "growing a cool climate botanic gardens for the community". This is the design prepared by Taylor Cullity Leathlean Landscape Architects. There is a similar sign on the existing bike path at the eastern end of the Gardens.



Propagation Workshop

About 20 people including Friends and new supporters, attended a workshop on 17th January on learning about summer propagation and preparing plants for the autumn sale. Fun was had by all even though it was an extremely hot day. The shade sail came into its own and the tea break was much appreciated. The SHBG hopes to be able to hold more training workshops on a regular basis in line with the goals of *education* and *community involvement*.

New People for SHBG

After consultation with retired architect Phillip Taylor, the Board has now engaged Annabelle Pegrum to manage the next stage of the development of the **Visitors Centre**.

Working with the Board, her task will be to develop a design brief, invite proposals, evaluate submissions and assist in the selection of an appropriate design. It is hoped that this process will be completed by mid-2017. SHBG will then be in a better position to present a specific proposal to Friends, donors, financiers and Council.

Also, long serving bookkeeper **Sue Oberman** has resigned due to new work commitments. She will remain a Member of SHBG Ltd. We thank her for all her help over many years and wish her well. Local accountant Peter Baillieu has stepped in to offer his services to assist in the next stage of SHBG's development.

More Information & News: www.shbg.com.au

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**Next Operculum will be after the Autumn Gardens.
The deadline for material is 5pm on Wed 26th April.**