

OPERCULUM

MAY 2017

Autumn Garden Glory



Nothing could deter the visitors enjoying the fabulous Autumn Gardens at the weekend. The very unfortunate incident of our tent being stolen from Wildewood on Thursday night was soon rectified with the delivery of another one and the show went on. Nor was the enthusiasm of visitors dampened by the thunderstorm on Saturday afternoon; they just put up their umbrellas and donned their raincoats, despite the police closing the road at Carisbrooke.

The crowds were unbelievable at all the open gardens on the weekend. Cars and buses parked up and down the roads and people wandered around the spectacular gardens enjoying the lovely weather and beautiful autumn colours. The gardens had all been primed to perfection and delighted everyone with their magnificent colour, lovely vistas, wonderful surprises around corners, interesting nooks of

hidden splendour and great places to walk and enjoy.

Kids were fishing for tadpoles at 5th Chapter Estate and Wildewood (wherever there was water), people were relaxing with a coffee and cake at Yarrowin and, at Carisbrooke, visitors were playing croquet on the croquet lawn and others enjoyed being involved in conversation with the owner Merryleigh Brindley, who loved showing people her charming conservatory.

A bag piper, fully kitted out in a kilt, entertained those waiting for the bus at Wildewood. And at Dragon Farm, the original owners who had planted the garden, returned to look at how it had developed since they had left in 2012.

On Sunday, the crowds had not diminished. People were enjoying the lovely drive in the countryside and all the gardens were very enjoyable.

From the Chairman

The overwhelming success of our seventh annual Autumn Open Gardens and Plant Fair is a tribute to the dedication and selflessness of our volunteers. Total sales were \$124,000, and a net income of a record \$110,000 is a credit to all.

Over the weekend 172 volunteers were directly involved manning gates, directing traffic & parking, providing expert garden advice and selling plants. Not to mention the generosity and hard work of the garden owners and gardeners themselves who worked diligently planning and manicuring their gardens to ensure they were at their peak for this weekend.

Throughout the year our volunteers work tirelessly planning and preparing for the weekend. Thank you to the Friends Committee, the Plant Growers Group and the working bee volunteers who seamlessly bring the weekend together.

I would also like to give a special thanks to 3 retiring Friends' Committee members. To Ian Dwyer, who has been on the committee for 7 years; Susan Hand who has also been the editor of our newsletter; and to Lyn Barrett – thank you for your contributions to the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens.

Planning has begun for 2018! In the meantime, we look forward to a very exciting second half of 2017, with the architecture competition. See separate article.

Charlotte Webb OAM

How Do You Measure a “Successful” Plant Fair?

What a buzz the Plant Fair was on Saturday 22 April - right up to the thunder and lightning in the early afternoon.



It started with a glorious Highlands sunny autumn day when several hundred people walked through the gate at opening time, keen not to miss a bargain at the hottest plant sale in the district. All the wheelbarrows and plant trolleys were gone within minutes as people loaded up their purchases and headed for the checkout. One couple walked out with what they called an “instant garden” of tall maples and other small trees, only to come back an hour later with a huge trolley load of smaller plants. Their smiles were very



wide. The Crèche was filling up with Tristram guarding the entry while people went to get more plants to add to their purchases. Did you see the “coffee shop”? Lots of people gravitated to the

tables and chairs positioned on Pioneer Square under the shade sail to take a rest out of the sun



and enjoy their coffee and muffin purchased from the Coffee Culture tent. The really indulgent ones enjoyed an egg & bacon roll! The check out queues were getting longer as people struggled to wheel their loads through as they were tallied up. The bulbs were all sold.

People were getting all sorts of advice from the expert growers who were happy to impart their knowledge on what plants to grow where. All the garden seats



were sat on, all the wheelbarrows, trolleys and trays were in constant use, all the boxes were used and we had to get more.

The car park was full to overflowing; with the parking attendants being kept constantly busy and making



sure everyone was safe and securely parked. Anyone driving down Kangaloon Road on Saturday would have been amazed to see the huge number of cars at the Garden. But the storm didn't deter people from walking around and continuing to check out the plants for sale. It wasn't cold, just wet and getting quite muddy in parts. The number of people did dwindle, but they left reluctantly as they could see, when they looked at the weather radar, that the hot spot of the storm was just over our beloved garden and kept raining down on us.

The large contingent of volunteers hung in there and chatted quietly under the umbrellas. Volunteers this year included a lot of newbies as well as the tried and true. They all did a great job and managed to enjoy the

weekend. And on Sunday the people were back. Not in the hordes that came on Saturday, but they were still keen to get a bargain. What a great weekend!



Architects Galore!

Having just finished a fabulous weekend with the Plant Fair and the Autumn Garden weekend, the SHBG board were back in the thick of it.

The Garden needs a magnet that will bring people through the gates every day of the year. We all know that the development of plant collections can take decades, with incremental changes being seen in the garden between visits.

The board is keen to develop a visitors' centre that will be iconic in its own right, will be a talking point in the region and a "must see" for all visitors to the Highlands. We want to enable local groups, such as garden clubs, to become more interested in visiting and participating in the garden. We want to have the garden used as a research facility and to

introduce an education program for children that will focus on all the sciences, including botany, maths, writing skills as well as drawing and photography.

A landmark visitors' centre would provide a great tourist attraction as well as be a popular venue for locals to haunt – both young and old. It would be a trendy spot to meet friends, have a coffee, and celebrate a birthday or anniversary in a beautiful setting of the developing garden. It would be a popular venue for conferences, weddings; the opportunities just go on.

These activities would enable the garden to experience a constant income through retail sales and associated services, as well as offering visitors a greatly enhanced experience.

It is for these reasons that, in early 2017, the Board engaged

Annabelle Pegrum, an architect from Canberra, to advise it on conducting an architectural competition for the design of a Visitors' Centre at the Garden. The building design will be integrated sympathetically with the garden design undertaken by Kate Cullity of Taylor Cullity Lethlean. Board members met with Annabelle a number of times to enthusiastically nut out a brief for this exciting project.

After the Easter weekend, the design brief for the Visitors' Centre was given to five carefully selected and prominent architectural firms from Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. These five were selected from an extensive list of well-known and recognised Australian architects and it was a very difficult decision to get the selection down to five. The architectural firms entering the competition are CHROFI, Fender Katsalidis Architects, Hassell, John Wardle Architects and Tonkin Zulaikha Greer.

So, it was a very exciting day at the Garden on Thursday, 27 April. A number of eager architects were shown around the Garden by Annabelle and accompanied by board members Charlotte Webb, Barry Barford and Chris Blaxland. Chris Webb and Lyn Collingridge also met the group, but did not join the tour, as they are the board's

Continued Page 4



Music in the Gardens
Sunday 28 May 2017, 11am – 1pm
 Featuring local community musicians
 SHACapella, Three for Tea, Women Of Note, Daisy Chain
 Moss Vale High's One Note Longer, Wuka Plukas,
 Oxley College String Orchestra & Bowral Drum Ensemble

Toss in a gold coin (or two) donation on your way in the gate
 Tea, coffee, and hot food will be available for purchase.
 Botanic Garden Australia and New Zealand annual Open Day

Bring your family and friends (No dogs please)



Betula pumila - Dwarf Birch/Swamp Birch/American Birch

Chris Webb
BSc Ag, Assoc Dip Landscape



Perhaps one of the most rare Birch in our Birch collection, *Betula pumila*, is a native to the muskegs and swamps of north America and is distributed across the northern half of the USA and Canada.

Although not suitable for growing in standing water it does prefer damp, moist sites and will tolerate inundation.

Betula pumila is best described as a small suckering tree or large shrub rarely reaching more than 3 metres high and wide. Its leaves are obovate, alternate and coarsely toothed with the underside paler in colour and sometimes covered with fine hairs. Its Autumn colour varies from yellow to burnt orange which makes *B. pumila* one of the most intensely Autumn colouring birches. The upper stems are dark reddish grey to reddish brown but have no exfoliating bark.

B. pumila is monoecious (separate male and female flowers on the one plant). Male catkins which form in Autumn and over winter on the plant are quite long, up to 2.5cm, expanding just before the

leaves and are held upright. Female catkins which appear just before leaf burst are much smaller only reaching a maximum of 2cm. Pollination is by wind and large quantities of seed are produced and dispersed.

We anticipate growing large swathes of *B. pumila* in the areas which we recognise as being 'predominately wet' and inhospitable to many other plants. Our plantings will in fact be almost replicating the appearance of a natural stand of this unusual and rare Birch.

It is interesting to note that when conducting an internet search for *B. pumila* the third most popular resource was our very own Botanic Gardens. Give it a try!! <http://shbg.com.au/collections>

And of course if you want to own your own, we have a good supply in the SHBG nursery.

For the Diary

Music in the Gardens Open Day
Sunday 28th May
National Tree Planting Day
Sunday 30th July
Bowral Tulip Time Festival
12th – 24th September
Bundanoon Garden Ramble
21 - 22 October
Harpers Mansion Plant Fair
Sunday 29th October

BDCU Alliance Bank SHBG's Community Partner

Recently SHBG became a Community Partner with BDCU Alliance Bank.

What this means in practice is SHBG can tap into building a grant fund that BDCU run. The team at BDCU will be supporting us and provide the BBQ at the Music In the Gardens, BGANZ Open Day on the 28 May.

As well as being there to help with the food, they will also have information on hand about their 'My Community Account'. This is a savings account where simply by saving you can help support the SHBG by nominating us as your chosen group.

For every \$ Interest you earn, BDCU will pay additional 15 cents towards helping SHBG in its future programs.

With your support this could build a significant income stream for the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens.

Architects Galore Cont.

representatives on the Jury. The jury, who will judge the designs, comprise eminent members of the architectural profession, a landscape architect and SHBG board members. The winner will be announced at the end of June. So watch this space as we report further.

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**Next Operculum due to be published in August
DEADLINE FOR ARTICLES AND PHOTOS**

JULY 31

Working Bees

First Tuesday of the Month:
10am – Noon

Bring comfortable clothes, hat and gloves. Enjoy a friendly chat over morning tea.

Thank you in advance for your support.