

# Fagus

**February 2024**

The Quarterly Magazine of the Friends of the Royal Tasmanian  
Botanical Gardens



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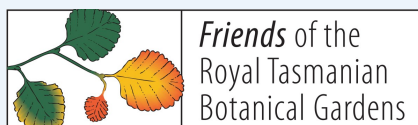
Kay Hayes

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## **From the Editor's Desk**

Welcome to 2024. The Gardens are looking great and are buzzing with activity; people and bees taking advantage of the warm weather to make the most of the summertime offerings. Flowers are blooming to please the bees and to give visual delight to visitors, there are plays and performances happening in various parts of the Gardens and green lawns are available for picnics and play.

Many of the articles in this first edition of *Fagus* for 2024 seem to look back to 2023, a gathering of breath before moving on to what the new year will bring. However, the Director's report is looking forward. You will be able to read about the refurbishment of the visitors' centre with images to make it clearer. More will be revealed as the year progresses. Our President looks at what is happening in the Gardens and welcomes two new members to positions on the Committee.

David Reid, Horticultural Coordinator at the RTBG, writes a fitting tribute to Lorraine Perrins who retired from the Gardens August 2023. Many of you will have worked with Lorraine, and remember her cheerful smile and her ability to share her conservation and propagation knowledge with all.

Aina Dambitis continues her series about the home gardens of the horticulturalists who work in the RTBG to make it the excellent showcase of plants it is.

There are three travel articles to widen our horizons. Members of Friends who travelled overseas last year have contributed words and images of very different places and gardens for our enjoyment. Nicole and Stuart Clutterbuck travelled to Morocco; Suzanne and John Brown visited England and Susan and Lee Cole travelled through Europe.

The Significant tree I write about is the final in the series and hardly needs an introduction as the lovely Cork Oak is, I am sure, a favourite of many.

An assortment of images captures the friendly faces of staff, Friends and volunteers at a thank-you morning tea provided by the RTBG.

In Friends' News we look back to Events in December 2023; our Christmas gathering and General Meeting as well as the results of the photo competition. I encourage you to see more of the photos that were entered in the competition. They are on display in the cottage.

Thanks to the people who contributed articles to this edition of *Fagus*. Thanks also to Kay Hayes for her expert layout and collation of these articles which results in such a high-quality magazine.

I invite everyone to have a go; I feel sure that the skills and interests of many of our members could result in articles that would be of interest to the rest of us. Articles do not have to be long, 500 to 1000 words, preferably written about garden or plant related matters, but not restricted to these subjects. For the next publication (May 2024) **the cut-off date is 22 April 2024.**

***Fran Alexis***

# Director's Report

Hello Friends,

I am taking this opportunity to share with you an update on the Visitor Experience Project, a project that will deliver much anticipated (and needed) improvements to our beloved Gardens. Below is a summary of the update:

## Visitor Centre Refurbishment

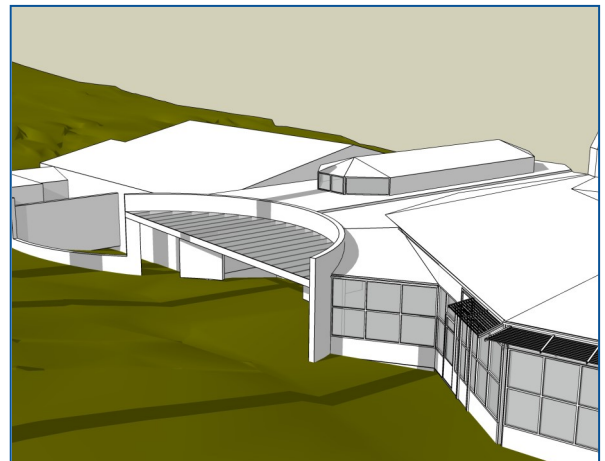
Refurbishments to the Visitor Centre will include interior and exterior paint, fixtures upgrades, new floor coverings, decking replacement, removal of redundant audio-visual fixtures and air conditioning equipment (from 1988), complete bathroom facilities refurbishments, new improved entrance awning, new patio and path widening near the Visitor Centre.

The awning and path widening will require planning permission and an Aboriginal Heritage Permit. It is intended to submit permit applications in February for these works.

Awning upgrades are proposed to the front of the building to replace the existing canvas awnings. The concept shown below uses a glazed awning to allow maximum light to enter the entrance of the building. A small awning for the takeaway window will also be included.



Visitor Centre existing awning



New awning concept

Paths external to the Visitor Centre will be widened, varied paving materials simplified, and bins outside the Banksia Room will be relocated.

New exterior paint for the Visitor Centre exterior stucco is shown below. Proposed option is Woodland Grey to match the colour of the south elevation.



Current Colour

Left



Woodland Grey

Right



>>>>>

Internal finishes palette will include natural gardenesque colours and materials.



Floor covering replacement is a key element of the upgrades. Existing floor carpets and tiles in the Visitor Centre are in poor condition and will be replaced. Floors and doors are proposed in timber-look vinyl and timber-veneer doors.



Existing flooring



New timber-look flooring, Tas Oak veneer doors

The Visitor Centre bathroom upgrades will include fitting and fixture replacement, floor and wall lining replacement and modification of doors to increase access and compliance.



Visitor Centre bathrooms finishings

The deck on the restaurant space will undergo a refurbishment, including decking replacement, replacement of balustrades, and painting of steelwork.



New Spotted Gum decking with new balustrades

### **Carriageway and Bus Drop Improvements**

Access and safety improvements for pedestrians accessing the Gardens via Lower Domain Road and the Carriageway. Engineering consultant Aldanmark are investigating two concepts for bus pull in to alleviate this problem. A concept for pedestrian and vehicle segregation within the Carriageway is also underway.

### **New Welcome Point Amenities**

New amenities near the Main Gate have been proposed to include a gift shop, café and bathrooms. The location and scale of these amenities must be carefully designed to fit within the fixed budget for this area and to minimise impacts to Aboriginal heritage, cultural heritage, heritage trees and viewpoints. Work is ongoing to carefully finalise scope for the new amenities.

All these works are due to start in 2024 with the refurbishment to the existing Visitor Centre planned to begin in the coming months. I am looking forward to sharing further project updates with you as the plans progress.

Kind Regards,

***Yann Gagnon***

***Director***

***Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens***

# President's Report

Another Tasmanian summer and the vagaries of weather certainly keep gardeners active: will I, won't I water today, should those pots have another soak before we head off for a few days? As I write this it's raining again and the garden is thriving. Campers and holiday makers may not be as delighted as gardeners but at least it's not cold (as I write) and the hydrangeas are loving it!

Performances in the gardens are attracting great attendances so make sure you do not miss *As You Like It*. Take a picnic, settle back and be entertained by this interpretation of William Shakespeare. Big Monkey's panto Pinocchio drew plenty of end of year interest and appreciation from schools and childcare centres and continues into January.

Take a wander and inspect the new views of the superintendent's cottage from the olive lawn adjacent to the Pod. I hope you are keeping an eye on the developments in the former easy access garden area. The removal of unsafe paving and retaining walls, along with the ailing Jacaranda, has revealed some sandstone bedrock. The proposed cactus garden redevelopment will be greatly enhanced with a donation from Friends towards advanced plantings.

Our AGM attracted 23 members and, while we did not elect a full committee, two members have stepped up and expressed interest in joining the committee. Welcome Andrea Gerrard and Phil Watson.

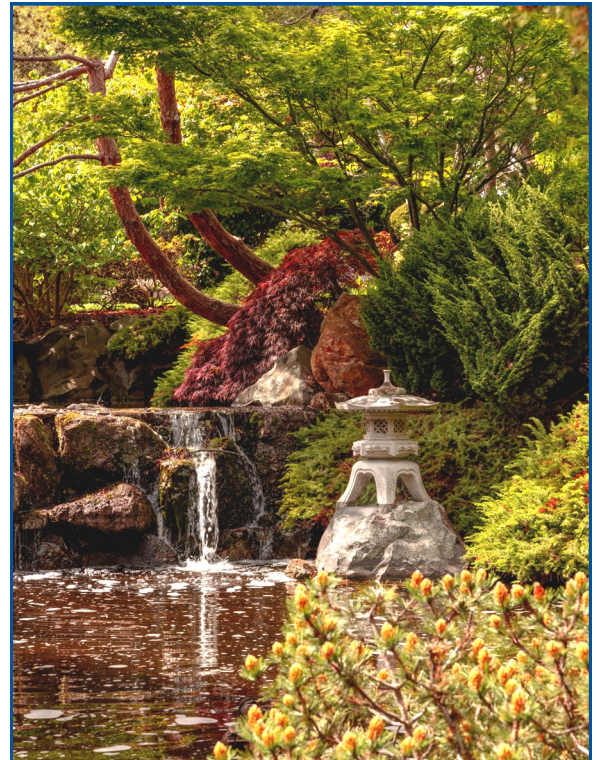
Thank you to those members and friends who entered the photo competition. Winners have been displayed in the foyer adjacent to Sprout and the Garden Shop. A selection of more of the photographs entered in various sections is currently on display in the Gate Keeper's Cottage so make sure you don't miss the opportunity to vote for your favourite photo in the People's Choice. Keep snapping for next time. Many thanks to Nicole Clutterbuck and her helpers for coordinating this event.

Botanico will be returning to the Cottage with another display of Botanical art – an exhibition not to be missed.

As always please pass on ideas and suggestions for displays, visits and guest speakers for future general meetings.

Looking forward to catching up at our next one.

**Lee Cole**



**Two highly commended entries in the Photo Competition. See Winners on page 23**

**Top: Japanese gardens by Pamela Parks**

**Bottom: The bridge to the water mill by Lesley Wickham**



# Lorraine Perrins

Back in August 2023, we farewelled Lorraine Perrins, whom many of you may have had the pleasure of working alongside while volunteering either in the nursery or the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre.

Lorraine was employed as Curator, Conservation Collections & Subantarctic Flora based in the RTBG nursery, undertaking the roles of propagating plants for the Gardens' horticulturists as well as growing and maintaining plants in our Subantarctic Island Display House.

A key component of Lorraine's work was to maintain the RTBG conservation collections as either exsitu plant collections or as seed orchards for our Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre (TSCC).



Macquarie Island Plants at the RTBG

Lorraine commenced as a nursery horticulturist at the RTBG in 2006, coming to us with diverse skills and experience in horticulture. Originally undertaking a horticulture apprenticeship at Birmingham Botanical Gardens in the United Kingdom, Lorraine continued her studies by undertaking the Kew Diploma in Horticulture at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in London. Lorraine credits being exposed to the work of botanic gardens early in her career as being critical in her development of a deep understanding of botanic gardens as both educational and scientific institutions.

During much of the 1990's and early 2000's Lorraine worked as a horticulturist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. Whilst there, Lorraine was

seconded for 18 months to work on an environmental aid program working with indigenous medical practitioners, focussing on propagating and sustainably harvesting locally significant medicinal plants in Northern Vietnam.

Following this experience, Lorraine completed the Diploma of Plant Conservation Techniques at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. A component of this course required students to initiate a conservation project, which, for Lorraine, focussed on the transfer of vegetative propagation techniques and facilities to staff at Kebun Raya Botanic Gardens, Bogor in Indonesia. This work assisted the garden to build up stocks of *Amorphophallus titanum* (Titan Arum), which at the time was being harvested in its native Sumatra for the plant trade.

Moving to Tasmania in 2006, Lorraine commenced as a nursery horticulturist and progressed to the role of Curator Conservation collections and Subantarctic Flora in 2010.

Lorraine embraced this new role with diligence and enthusiasm and became a highly regarded contributor to RTBG plant conservation programs, the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre (TSCC) and work in the wider plant conservation community.



Lorraine preparing cuttings 2021

Lorraine's work on the development and establishment of a seed orchard for the *Azorella macquariensis* (Macquarie Island cushion plant), on Macquarie Island was a major accomplishment that was undertaken with the technical and logistical support of the Australian Antarctic Division. This work continues on the island with over 50 plants growing successfully in a way that is considered as an essential method towards conserving this species with the goal of harvesting large quantities of seed to be stored in the TSCC.



**Seed collecting on Tasmanian alpine area**

Lorraine's work in managing and maintaining the Subantarctic plant collection at the RTBG saw her become a champion for this unique flora and an educator on the threats that a changing climate is bringing to the plant communities of the Subantarctic islands.

Lorraine contributed to the work of the RTBG in many other ways including regularly contributing to Threatened Species Day programs, field work for the TSCC, research work on *Lomatia tasmanica* (King's Holly), coordination of the production of plant material for translocation programs and authoring articles for this very publication!



**Lorraine and King's Holly**

Lorraine's ability to engage stakeholders from a range of plant related institutions and her skill in disseminating important messages relating to her work were highly regarded in the promotion of the RTBG as a key contributor to plant conservation. Now enjoying retirement, Lorraine continues to contribute to the work of the TSCC as a volunteer both in the laboratory and in the field.

We wish Lorraine well and acknowledge her wonderful contribution to not only the RTBG, but to national and international plant conservation programs.

**David Reid**



# Clutterbucks in Morrocco

Members Nicole and Stuart Clutterbuck toured Morocco for three weeks in September, 2023.

Our itinerary was in an anti-clockwise circle as below:

Casablanca  
Marakesch  
Fez,  
Chefchaouen  
Casablanca

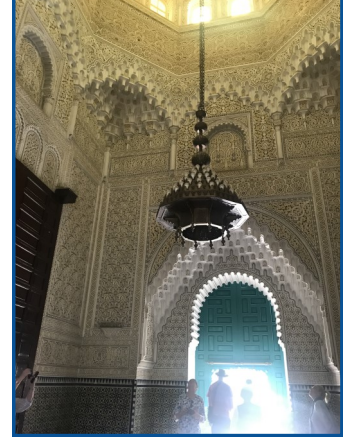
Morocco is currently experiencing a six-year drought so many gardens were the worse for wear both in and around the hotels and in the major parks.



Our first tour in Casablanca was to the Hassan 11 mosque (*below*). This is huge and holds up to 20 000 people. It has underfloor heating, hidden speakers, an electric retractable roof and a laser beam that points to Mecca. The laser is only used occasionally. The weather was comfortable at 28 degrees. We also attended a cooking school and cooked our lunch.

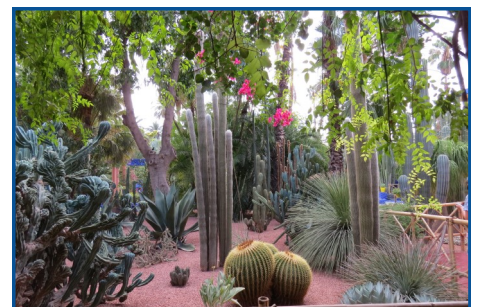
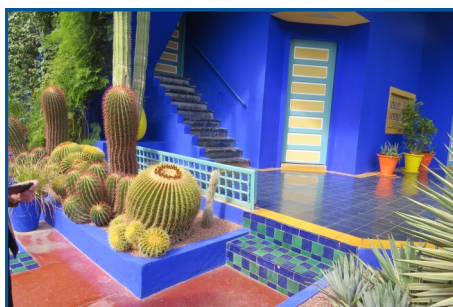
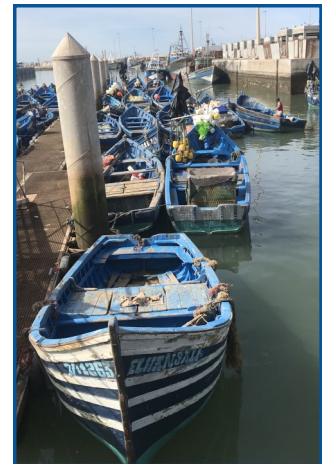


Typically, a Moroccan building is self-effacing from the street with no hint of what lies beyond. This is a Muslim principal of humbleness. Once inside everything changes. We were fortunate to be granted access to the Governor's Residence (*below*) and you can see this difference very well.



Next on our itinerary was Essaouira which is a port city. The primary story here is sardines. The local cat population was very high and not tame but not too wary as they are very well fed. There are no rats in the towns. There were cats all across Morocco and everyone feeds them. We had lunch here in a five-star hotel with the house specialty of sardines on the menu. Lunch was in an internal courtyard which is a feature in many large houses.

We travelled onward to Marrakech and had five nights there. First up was a visit to Majorelle Gardens. (*below centre and right*) This was the home of fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent and has been gifted to the public.



We visited the Jmaa el Fnaa square and saw a Moroccan Storyteller. He is one of only five remaining storytellers included as an UNESCO heritage listed experience.

Whilst we were here the 6.8 magnitude earthquake occurred. Our hotel only suffered minor damage as it had been restored previously. Outside the medina in Marrakech there was very little damage. The 800-year-old adobe buildings were very fragile. Our tour was only impacted for a couple of days. Everywhere we went afterwards the locals were very pleased to see us as they had lost many bookings. People left donations of furniture at every town along the way.



On the way to Fez, we stayed at Ouazarzate (Wazzazat) and saw the Atlas Studios which is where *Gladiator* was filmed. Very early the next morning we journeyed into the Sahara and had a camel ride to watch the sunrise (*below*). The sunrise was not unusual but we did experience a brief rain shower! The locals were amazed.



At Fez we visited the tanneries and wandered through the medina with a guide. He admitted he does not know all the areas yet. We shopped locally and cooked a meal run by a local restaurateur. The parade of tourists taking the bread to the local oven to be baked caused great amusement.



At Chefchouen the colour blue is everywhere (*below*). It is a spectacular city built on the mountainside. We relaxed here for a couple of days and still managed 12 000 steps all up and down.



We visited plenty of markets. There were one or more in every town. These cater for the locals as well as tourists. In the larger cities of Casa Fez Marra there are supermarkets and shopping centres but we stayed in the old areas. At every hotel you are greeted with mint tea and biscuits (predominately almond). The ceremony is normally performed by men. The tile work is spectacular.

Returning to Casablanca via Rabat – the Capital of Morocco we visited the mausoleum of Mohammed V the current king’s great grandfather. There is a person singing in the tomb the entire time every day.

After a farewell dinner it was time to return home. The Moroccans are very friendly and love Australians. We had a great time.

***Nicole and Stuart Clutterbuck***  
***September 2023***



## A Garden on a Steep Slope

### ***Aina Dambitis***

Have you ever wondered what the RTBG Staff do when they go home? Do they sharpen their secateurs and start their mowers and venture out into dream gardens? Do they clip and prune and weed until dusk falls? Or do they wearily take off their boots, hang up their hats, lower the blinds and stay quietly indoors?

Well, Horticulturalist Adam Lancaster comes home to a large, steep block in the foothills of kunanyi. Most of us know Adam from his years of working in the food garden, formerly known as Pete’s Patch. At the moment he is involved with landscaping the areas adjacent to that, the new green house and the lawns and plantings around that, below the main administration office. Anna Lancaster also worked at the RTBG from the years 2010 to 2013 completing a Traineeship in Horticulture and so is a familiar face when I visit them. They work as a team at home, Anna with the design of the garden and Adam making it possible. (figure 1)



It is worth mentioning that they have packed their television away, under the bed, so they have the time and incentive to sit outside and enjoy their surroundings. Why be traumatised by watching the evening news when you can see the sun setting on the mountain instead? This helps to explain the various spots for sitting in the garden.

The front deck overlooks the valley, the back verandah gives shelter and a view up the hill. Further up the slope the view changes and we are closer to the bush next door and its inhabitants. There is room for a fire pit. Birds are everywhere. There is room for a fire pit. Birds are everywhere. One evening a family of barn owls flew overhead, seen only the once. Recently their trail cam showed a quoll for the first time. It came in through a hole in the fence and when it left, it was carrying something. The image is too fuzzy to identify what is in the quoll's mouth. (figures 2 and 3)

There are plans to extend this. The drainage lines are filled with small rocks to minimise washouts caused by heavy rain. (figure 4)



Wallabies graze here in the evenings. They move out of the bush and down the road and quietly fan into the house gardens. Plants have to survive the wallabies and the dry, rocky soil. Rushes grow in the moister drainage lines. *Sisyrinchium* Devon Skies is a softer clumping grass with blue flowers which adds patches of vibrant colour to an otherwise dry and rocky area. *Sisyrinchium striatum* is thriving and is covered with lemon yellow flowers. It is a spectacular mass planting. *Iris japonica* copes with the dry conditions and seems to survive the wallabies. Down by the roadside is a row of *Poa rodwayi*, vigorous tussock grasses waving in the wind. It spreads easily and needs to be controlled. *Myoporum* or creeping boobialla wanders in between the other plants adding green foliage to the area. (figure 5)

This is a steep slope. The soil is light, silty mudstone and needs extra compost for the plant beds, both for the nutrient value and to retain water. Digging is hard work, stones are everywhere. Frosts occur occasionally. The back garden does not have vehicular access so everything is hauled up in a wheel barrow. The neighbourhood shares many tall trees and has a bushy feel. Anna has been here for 23 years and so knows the block very well.

Terracing is one strategy to deal with the slope. The front yard is stabilised by a stone wall built by Adam when a supply of stones became available and when he had some time during the Covid closures.



A hedge of hop bushes, *Dodonea viscosa*, is a good windbreak and gives privacy from neighbours. The bushes are quite tall but the tops were being eaten by possums. Anna read somewhere that possums can be deterred by lights and so now the *Dodonea* is decorated with solar powered tiny fairy lights. In the two months since the lights were strung up, no possum has munched a leaf. It's an experiment so, before you race out to Bunnings with your credit card, ask Adam how it is working.

The shady area under the front deck is fenced off and has a rain forest feel which continues up the side of the house. That narrow strip between house and fence is always a difficult one to deal with. There is an irrigation line along the top of the deck and fence so the water sprays down onto man ferns *Dicksonia antarctica*, our very own Tasmanian waratah *Telopea truncata*, *Nothofagus cunninghamii*, the tractor seat plant *Ligularia reniformis* and some *Impatiens sodenii*, sometimes known as poor man's rhododendron. The rainforest continues up the narrow space. Some *Luculia pinceana*, our native laurel *Anopterus glandulosus* and elk horns and bromeliads are there, filling in empty spaces. It is green, lush and layered with spots of colour.



The back verandah is trimmed with loops of heavy wire bent into flowing curves. The common hop plant is climbing up the wires and decorating it with new green leaves. It is growing in a container to lessen its vigorous growth because they want a light curtain of leaves, not the heavy look that something like a full strength hop or a grape vine would produce. There might even be a harvest of hops one year. (figure 6)

The back yard is dominated by the steep gradient. There is a stone wall built by Adam, also timber terracing, plant beds watered by irrigation lines, and a *Banksia serrata* loaded down with wires pulling it into an umbrella shape. Fruit and nut trees are growing well inside their wire netting. The vegetable garden is completely enclosed and weeded by five Guinea pigs, the day I visit. (figure 7)



Another strategy for dealing with the slope is to keep the surface covered with grass to stop the soil being washed away by heavy rain. It might look a bit untidy and weedy sometimes but it is a pragmatic solution for this site. They keep it under control, they only water with sprinklers when necessary, but most importantly, just enough to keep the surface grass alive.

In this challenging site Adam and Anna have created a garden which reflects their interests and allows them to live the way they want. It feeds them, there is room to move and work and experiment and to stop and sit and watch the birds.

# Flowers in the Moat

**Suzanne Brown**

During our summer sojourn in the UK in 2023, we visited many beautiful gardens, large and small, probably the one with the most unusual location was that in the moat at the Tower of London.

In summer 2022, to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, the moat transformed from a barren, flat lawn into a haven for bees, butterflies, other pollinators and seed eating birds. First the flat ground in the moat was contoured into different sized and shaped mounds of engineered, weed free soil with a path winding through them. In the late spring some 20 million seeds, chosen to give a wide palette of colours and a succession of flowering throughout the summer were sown, however, it was so wet during the following month, that much of the sowing was simply washed away. Not to be thwarted, a different method was tried, using a sort of carpet with the seeds within it was used, the idea being that this would keep them in place, even in heavy rain. As all gardeners know, the weather is fickle and despite what weather forecasters tell you, always surprises. So, after all that torrential rain, the UK then experienced the hottest summer on record.

That year we had organised a group of some 30 people to visit Superbloom, as it was called. The day booked, was forecast to be 40C (and it was), so we rescheduled to August. On that day, I was horrified to look down on the moat as we emerged from

Tower Hill tube, to see what appeared to be a moat full of dead plants and we had brought all these eager friends with us! As it turned out, the 'dead plants' were a sea of many varied and wonderful seed heads waving above beautiful later flowering wild-flowers snuggling underneath.

Following what was learned during summer 2022, work was carried out in the moat; micro climates in different areas of the moat affected what flourished where, the reflected and sustained warmth of the moat walls was a considerable factor. During March 2023 Shire horses, brought over from Henry VIII's palace at Hampton Court, ploughed the ground ahead of 2023 summer's bloom.

The horses' flare-like feathered hooves do not compact the soil as much as modern machines, allowing the seedlings from last year to survive. Many plants self-seeded, however not all, so the varieties in 2023 were different from those of 2022. Interesting that several species, which were not numerous in 2022, emerged this year; one such, *Gilia capitata*, unknown to me.

We visited in July 2023 with just one friend this time and the amazing sight, of so many colourful wild-flowers, was breath-taking. So many glorious colours and delightful flowers, it was a bit bewildering to know where to look first. Of course, the sunflowers, *Helianthus*, immediately grab attention, their bright orange, red and yellow faces turning to the sunshine



and the bright red common poppies, *papaver rhoeas*, some already gone to seed, but lots more nodding their delicate heads. I was delighted to see delicate Corncockle, *Agrostemma githago*. I've always considered these as natives to UK, growing in the cornfields in profusion for centuries, however, I have now read that it was introduced from Europe by Iron Age farmers 2400 years ago. This would make it a naturalised plant, a plant that has been introduced to a particular area and thrived there. Determining if a plant is native or not is not as easy as you might think... and indeed when should we refer to it as a 'native'?! Cornflower, *Centaurea cyanus*, 'Blue Boy' was chosen particularly to return the colour blue to the moat, which of course was filled with water until it was drained in the 1840s due to its awful stench.

Lots of old favourites were there: bright yellow Pot Marigold, *Calendula officinalis*, delicate pink *Cosmos bipinnatus*, sparkling white Oxeye Daisy, *Leucanthemum vulgare*, sprawling Mallow, *Malva*, with its lilac-coloured dark veined petals, the cheerful nodding yellow Common Toadflax, *Linaria vulgaris* and white Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*, with its open petals covered with butterflies and bees. Many not so well know plants as well, (not known to me that is): pink and white everlasting daisies, *Rhodanthe cholorocephala*, Annual Baby's Breath, *Gypsophila elegans*, Crimson Flax, *Linum grandiflorum* and Bird's-Eyes, *Gilia tricolor*.

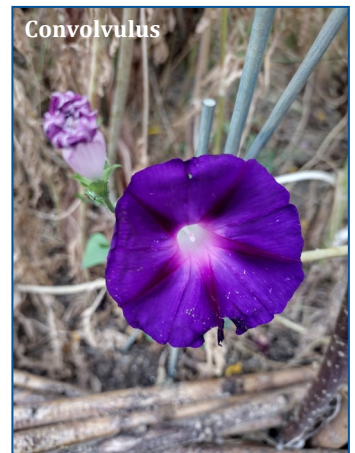
Many different plants have been selected to provide ideal conditions for a variety of pollinators, flat open flower heads, those with deep narrow pointed lobes, requiring insects with long tongues to visit them.

The co-evolving of flowers and pollinators has certainly been taken into consideration with the planting, to ensure the widest possible range of flowers attracts the widest possible range of pollinators.

Wandering through this wonderful sea of colours, literally buzzing with life, so many butterflies, hover flies and bees, this truly is becoming and will continue to be a wonderfully bio-diverse habitat within the City of London. I think Historic Royal



Californian Poppy



Convolvulus

Palaces who instigated the project, landscape architects Grant Associates and Nigel Dunnett, horticulturalist and Professor of Planting Design and Urban Horticulture at University of Sheffield, are to be congratulated and applauded for coming up with such an ambitious and worthwhile project and seeing it through to its glorious conclusion. If you're ever in London between June and September go to see it for yourself, you won't be disappointed!



Cornflowers, poppies, yarrow, and masses of seed heads, mostly poppies.



Landscape with Tower Bridge

# Historic European Botanic Gardens\_discoveries

**Lee Cole**

As we know travel broadens the mind and opens up opportunities for new discoveries and adventures.

In mid-September 2023 Susan and I headed for Europe: France, Italy and Germany mostly by train. We spent a week in Paris, revisiting favourite spots as well as exploring new and undiscovered places. Then we moved on to Burgundy for a few days in Dijon, where the mustard isn't made but certainly marketed at every opportunity, as a centre of gastronomy: food, wine, small goods, beer, cider were all on show while we explored the old city and soaked up the atmosphere and culture. Twisting and turning through passages alleys and narrow streets, past shops, cafes, houses and businesses, the warm weather forced us to look for shade, so off to discover the local botanic garden. le Jardin de L'Arquebuse, founded in 1771, proved a delightful respite. Parterre garden beds, gravel paths, a central fountain and shady trees were the attraction, display plantings showcased plant diversity across a wide range of edibles and ornamentals all labelled and sign posted in French and English. A small arboretum shared the site: some of the trees were nearly 200 years old and were showing the ravages of time. Attempts to compensate for changing climate with rough grassy areas and fallen branches which are enriching the soil and encouraging animal life, added to a real diversity in the understory. We did not see any red squirrels. Along the paths and against a boundary wall were sculptural works, somewhat forlorn and neglected but all adding to the age and atmosphere of the site. The rumble of the adjacent railway line and main road did little to distract us. There was a small museum within the gardens which displayed geological and flora and fauna specimens with

some very pale, sad, old antipodean marsupials! Outside in the courtyard a large 200-year-old plane tree, which is protected from foot traffic and lack of moisture, stood magnificent despite the issues. Climate change is everywhere!

We headed for Italy to meet our daughter in the university town of Padua, via Lake Como which lived up to our expectations. The obligatory ferry trip on the lake with tourists from everywhere, was delightful. Cruising as far as Bellagio we crisscrossed the lake following the shore and seeing just how the other half lives. Stunning lakeside mansions with beautifully manicured gardens and plantings right on the shore with boatsheds and moorings; villages clinging to rocky promontories and the shoreline. Small gardens, plenty of pots with balsam and geraniums enlivened streets and windowsills all around Bellagio. We explored stone walls, cobbled streets and cafes in quaint settings with plenty of gelato. Once the centre of silk production, Como's Silk Museum on the edge of the old part of town was most interesting.

**Dijon Botanical Gardens**





Como ferry trip



A wonderful visit of discovery as well as respite from the heat of an Italian autumn afternoon. Needing a restorative beverage, we sought refuge under an umbrella for an Aperol before enjoying a meal in one of the many piazzas which dot this beautiful city built on layers of culture, history and learning.

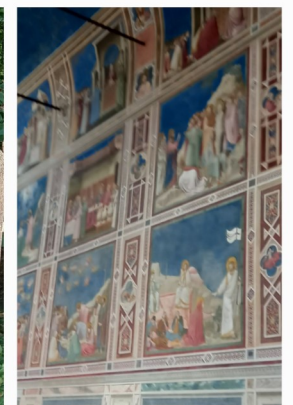
The final leg of our travels took us into Germany to Marburg, another university town outside Frankfurt. There we discovered two gardens. The older garden, Alter Botanischer Garten was once again established as a teaching garden attached to the University. It spreads over 3.6 hectares and is now a public garden and arboretum in the city. A newer 20-hectare site established in 1961-77 for the Nueur Botanischer Garten to celebrate the 450th

anniversary of the university, is maintained by the University of Marburg.

Then on to Padua. Once again, the warm weather drove us to look for shade, so we headed for the Botanical Garden. Orto Botanico di Padua was created in 1545 and is the oldest academic garden still in its original location. It was originally established as a place of education and teaching, and it showcases plants in a series of circular fenced beds labelled botanically as well as in braille. A central walled garden was laid out in a circular central plot symbolizing the world. Large plantings of trees and shrubs surround the walled garden with gravel paths and statuary, ponds and suitable labelling. Goethe's palm is contained in its own glass house along with 19th century teaching glass houses - caldarium and tepidarium areas, carnivorous plants and orchids. These are complimented by a very informative museum detailing the use and development of the herbarium and various plant collectors from history and the University. Displayed samples from 15th century collectors are also to be found. The prefect's lecture room of tiered wooden panelled seats screened informative snapshots of Goethe's time in Padua.

anniversary of the university, is maintained by the University of Marburg.

In all these spaces there was room for passive recreation and contemplation, many varied learning opportunities, surprises and discoveries, interpretation and history. All easily accessible, well signed and welcome respite from travel.



# Volunteers' Morning Tea

On 14 Dec 2023 the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens hosted a thank-you morning tea for all volunteers. Many of the staff attended and a lovely spread of food was supplied. Esther, as Volunteer Coordinator said a few words of thanks as did the Gardens' Director, Yann. It was a very relaxed and friendly gathering of volunteers, many of whom are also Friends. Margot White gave out some unnamed tomato plants she had raised from seed so we could report back to her with images of the type of plant and fruit that developed. One of the plants I have is producing small black tomatoes.

*Fran Alexis*

**What a Spread!**



**Anna and Esther**



**Deb and Fran**



**Jane and Leonie**



**Margot**



**Wendy and Vito**



**Trixie**



# Significant Trees in the RTBG

## Number 24: *Quercus suber* or Cork Oak.

This significant tree hardly needs an introduction as most local visitors to the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens (RTBG) know exactly where to find it. I freely admit it is a favourite of mine and have admired its shapely growth for many years. When guiding tourists around the Gardens it is an important stopping point as it not only illustrates the diversity of specimen trees in the Gardens but also the conservation role of Botanical Gardens in general. The Cork Oak, situated below the Visitors Centre, is a very fine example of its type, reputed to be one of the finest examples of this species in Australia. Since June 1995 it has been on the National Tree Register and is so classified because the condition of this tree is excellent. It is also on the Significant Tree register of the Hobart City Council. As an important plant in the Gardens, it has social and historical significance as part of the significant collections at the RTBG.



The name *Quercus suber* or Cork Oak comes directly from the Latin with *Quercus* meaning 'Oak', either the tree itself or the coronet made of oak leaves used in ancient Rome to signify military prowess, while *suber* means 'cork' or 'cork oak tree'. The common name Cork Oak signifies that this type of Oak tree produces cork, which is the thick phellem (cork) layer of bark tissue composed of suberin, a hydrophobic substance. All tree bark has this substance to a degree, which protects the inner tissue of plants, but in the Cork Oak, it is especially abundant.

In the plant Family *Fagaceae*, the genus *quercus* contains many different species of Oak, the most easily recognised of the European Oaks being *Quercus robur*, the Common or English Oak, (also known as the pedunculate oak because its acorns are held on a small stalk or peduncle). With their distinctive massive shape, they stand out as a feature of any park, garden or street. Their largely horizontal spreading branches are held at awkward angles. The Cork Oak shares many of the characteristics of the Common Oak, especially in the way the branches grow.



Oaks grow in many regions of the world, from Asia through to North America and Mexico. In the collection of Oaks in the northern section of the RTBG we have examples of many different species as well as the usual *Q. robur* or English Oak.

There are over 450 species of the genus *quercus* but the one I want to draw your attention to here is *Quercus suber* or Cork Oak. This evergreen tree differs from most other species of oak in that it grows an extremely thick layer of corky bark.

Native to countries around Central and Western Mediterranean, the cork oak tree is harvested for its cork mainly in Portugal and Spain where it is an economically important plant. Trees must be at least 30 years old before cork is harvested and can only be harvested again after 9-11 years.

About 10 years ago, Richard Forcey, one of our volunteer guides at the RTBG, wrote an excellent article about our Cork Oak. The article has a wealth of information about the growing and harvesting of the cork oak trees in Portugal and here is the link if you missed it the first time.

<https://gardens.rtbg.tas.gov.au/category/stories/>

Our Cork Oak has never been harvested for cork of course, and is thought to be over 160 years old.

The first mention of cork oaks at the Gardens can be found in the *Hobart Town Courier* for Saturday 2 May 1829, about 10 years after the Gardens were established on the Domain, where it was reported that one Captain Johnson of the *Swiftsure* had the foresight to collect acorns from the cork oak tree while his ship was detained in Lisbon, Portugal. The report went on to say that some of the acorns that were set in earth for the voyage had already sprung when they arrived and that they 'are now planted and growing in the Garden'. The Botanical Gardens was the place to establish if the tree was suited to the climate in the colony and also to ascertain if cork might be, in time, a profitable article of colonial produce.

Cork Oaks have been trialled for suitability from the beginning of the colony, not only in Tasmania but also on the mainland. A small plantation was planted in the State Forest at Mt Macedon in Victoria in 1887 with cork harvested from them by the cork-processing firm Vogts in 1930. However, the plantation was destroyed by fire in 1983.

The largest plantation of cork oaks in Australia was established at Mt Stromlo Forest near Canberra in 1917 and 1920. Cork was harvested from these trees in 1948 and again in 1981. Now nearly 100 years old the trees are healthy and form part of the National Arboretum. Harvesting cork is a specialised task and in 2001, two Portuguese men were brought in to

show how it was done. In 2005 three Portuguese-Australian men were commissioned by the ACT Forests to strip cork over a two-week period and the harvest was sold to plant nurseries for growing orchids.



Seeds were the surest way of sending plant material from England as the long journey by sailing ship often resulted in the death of slips and cuttings of living plants. I don't presume to suggest that the Cork Oak in the Gardens is one of these first plantings for many reasons, not least the fact that gardens change all the time. In the 20 years that I have been associated with the RTBG I have seen many changes to the plantings, for one reason or another – plants out-grow their space, are damaged by weather and old age, they fail to thrive, some become a nuisance through their growth habits, some become a danger to the public and sometimes, the judgement of what is suitable for a botanical garden, condemns a plant for removal.

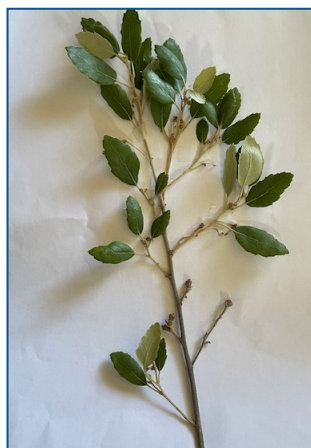
These days the names and positions of major plants at the RTBG are stored on an electronic data-base but in earlier times lists and catalogues of plants were often considered ephemeral and have not been preserved. It is only by chance that a hand written

guide to the Garden written (about 1914) by the then Superintendent, John Wardman, was discovered and transcribed by Jenny Parrott. She and I devised a walk in 2014 to see if we could follow his guide concentrating on the trees he listed, hoping that some of them may possibly have survived for over 100 years. It was a challenge as the layout of the Garden paths and infrastructure have changed but we found enough to be fairly sure that some of the trees were the same. Wardman listed the cork oak as a part of a 'fine group of Oaks' but today our Cork Oak is the only oak in that position (*see below*).



Later in his guide, when describing some of the trees in the northern part of the Gardens, Wardman mentions a garden bed 'recently planted with a collection of oaks' and situated them near the elms; quite probably these are now the very big trees to be found along the path from the Tasmanian section toward the Eucalypt Lawn and Greater Hobart Section of the Gardens.

*Quercus suber* or cork oak is a broadleaf evergreen tree, with leaves that are leathery, waxy and sparsely toothed. These simple oval to elliptic leaves are dark green above, with greyish and hairy undersides.



Flowers of the cork oak are gold to yellow and fairly insignificant. In Spring, you can see the male flowers are long catkins while the female flowers are small, short and held in clusters in the leaf axils. These, when pollinated grow in one season into small acorns, oval to oblong with a shaggy cap that covers half the nut. At the moment the acorns are tiny and only some of them will develop to become mature.



Our Cork Oak is also testament to the role a Botanical Garden has in conservation. Almost 30 years ago at the RTBG there was an outbreak of Armillaria, or root disease fungus, the foremost killer of trees and shrubs in plantations, natural forests, orchards, amenity plantings and botanic gardens throughout the world. It was discovered that many of the prized specimens of trees were found to be in danger of dying due to this fungus. Armillaria can live for hundreds of years, and obtain their nutrients from dead wood on the forest floor, and have the important function of breaking this down to create humus and soil. Several species, however, use the roots of living trees as a food source and this root-rot usually causes the death of the plant. Armillaria can be seen as a particular disease of Botanical Gardens as the increased density of plants, better irrigation and nutrition improves the living condition of this pathogen.

At the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) in Canberra, Armillaria was discovered in 1984. Their strategy to combat the disease involved the vigilant search for, removal and destruction of the fruiting bodies of the fungus, clear felling of areas of infection, trenching, the use of herbicides and the

introduction of beneficial fungus. An infestation of Armillaria was also found at the RTBG when, in 1994, several of the big trees in the Gardens seemed to be dying and fears were held for the survival of the Cork Oak. I believe that there was public support to help meet the cost to save the Cork Oak but I have been unable to find any reference to that. Calling on expertise from the CSIRO, Forestry Tasmania and the University of Tasmania, the RTBG followed the lead of the ANBG to deal with the outbreak.

Drastic measures were required; a complete rebuilding of the area where the Cork Oak grows (*below*).

Soil from around the tree out to the drip line was removed and infected roots pruned back. A trench, about 3m deep, was dug at the outside edge of the cleared area where a stiff plastic sheet of root barrier was inserted before herbicide was added and the trench back-filled with clean soil. This trench created a block between the tree and the rest of the Garden to prevent reinfestation. With the whole area under the tree covered with a thick layer of mulch and improved drainage the tree was saved and has thrived so it is now the wonderful specimen that we all know and love.

**Fran Alexis**



Sources:

Cork Oak Trials  
(victoriasforestryheritage.org.au)  
*Quercus suber* (Cork Oak, Cork Tree, Oaks)  
/ North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant  
Toolbox (ncsu.edu)  
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[https://trusttrees.org.au/tree/TAS/  
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1996 p 21  
[www.anbg.gov.au/gardens/about/  
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Strategy-2003-2013](http://www.anbg.gov.au/gardens/about/management/policy-docs/Armillaria-Strategy-2003-2013)

## Friends' News

### December General Meeting

In December 2023, at our general meeting, we were pleased to have Lee Cole tell us all about his passion for Basket Weaving, a skill he is perpetuating as his ancestors living in Cambridgeshire in England were basket weavers. Lee brought along many samples of his work, one of which dated back to his great grandparent's day to show the wide variety of material used. He described the basic principles of basket weaving. He sells his basket-ware at craft fairs and when members of the Basketmakers of Tasmania get together.

**Fran Alexis**



# 2023 Photo Competition Winners

The Photo Competition was a success and the quality of images was high. Each photo showed an aspect of the structure of the Gardens so each entrant made the effort to visit the Gardens.

Images judged to be winners and those highly commended are displayed in the Foyer between the Shop and the Restaurant and a selection of the other entries is mounted as a display in the Cottage for a Peoples' Choice prize later.



Thanks to Nicole and Lee for organising these displays. Congratulations to all winners and thanks to all entrants.

Keep taking photos of things you like in the Gardens as there will be another competition later this year.

*Fran Alexis*

## Section Winners

**Children under 12 (top)**

**Shadows: Ivy Andrews**

**Open (centre)**

**Wistful Chair: Diane Nicolson**

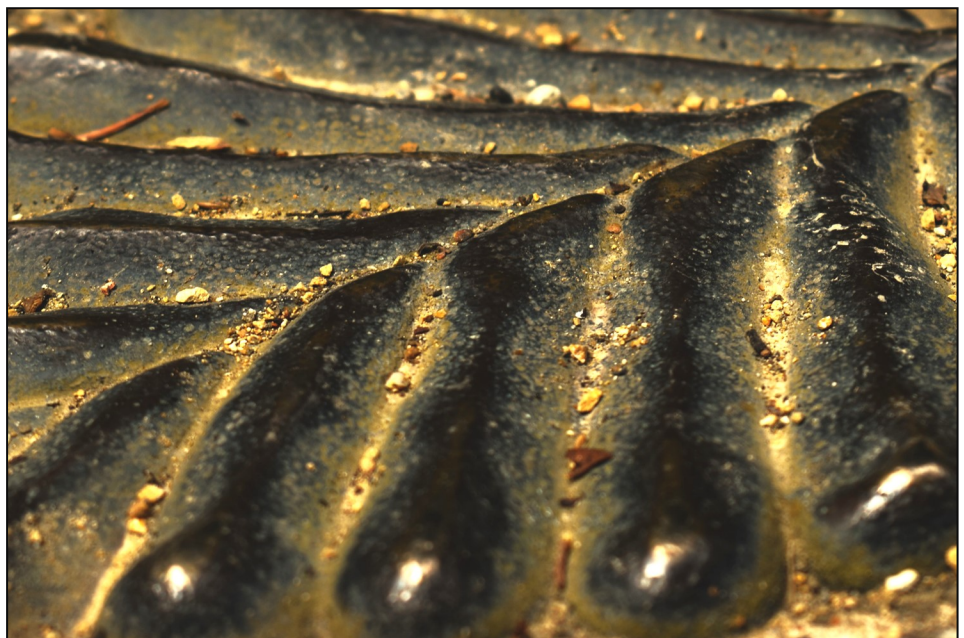
**Children 13 to 17 (bottom)**

**Lost Fagus: Minna Pribac**

**Friends' members (front cover)**

**Structures :**

**Leonie Mickleborough**



# Welcome to New Members

It is with pleasure that we welcome the following new members to the Friends of RTBG: Andrea Gerrard, Helen Lord and Collette Lansdell,

*Anne Crawford*

*Membership Officer*

## Benefits of Membership

In addition to knowing that you are kindly supporting and promoting the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens (RTBG), you will also receive our quarterly magazine, *Fagus*. We have four meetings each year with specialist speakers on gardens and plant-related topics, and opportunities to participate in outings and activities.

You can receive discounts on *Neutrog* garden products during our twice yearly offer; and free entry to the RTBG Tomato Sales (normally \$10).

Available **only to single/joint membership** and not affiliate members, discounts are also offered on selected purchases at participating plant nurseries, garden centres and retail outlets. It is essential that you show your RTBG membership card at the time of purchase.

Botanical shop – RTBG – *10% discount*

Chandler’s Nursery – 75 Queen St, Sandy Bay – *5% discount*

Greenhill Nursery – Leslie Vale – *10% discount*

Julie’s Nursery – 2273 Huon Highway, Grove – *5% discount*

Plants of Tasmania Nursery & Gardens – 65 Hall St, Ridgeway – *10% discount*

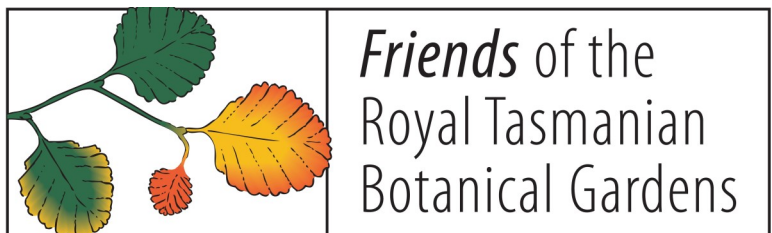
Stoneman’s Garden Centre – 94 Grove Rd, Glenorchy – *5% discount on full priced stock*

Wildseed Tasmania – 91 Weston Hill Rd, Sorell (0429 851 500) – *10% discount on tube stock only*

Woodbridge Nursery – 3 Llantwit Rd, Woodbridge (open Fri and Sat only 9.00–5.00pm) – *10% discount*

Neutrog Australia Pty Ltd—Order twice a year through Friends when notified

*Show your membership card  
and save!*



*If you know anyone who wishes to join Friends or you would like to give a gift subscription to someone, you can email [membership@rtbgfriends.com.au](mailto:membership@rtbgfriends.com.au) or ring Anne Crawford on 0418517968 and a membership form will be forwarded to you.*

### General Meeting Dates

**March 16, 2024**

**June 1, 2024**

**September 21, 2024 (AGM)**

**December 7, 2024**

At this stage all meetings will be held in the Banksia Room commencing at 10 am

**Our Next Issue: May 2024**