



# FRIENDS OF Old Parliament House ROSE GARDENS

Issue 7 August 2014

## A Capital Design

*Di Dibley explores Milton Simms' vision*

When I asked Greg Simms what had happened to the drawings and working plans that his father Milton Simms had put together for the selection of roses for the reconstructed Old Parliament House (OPH) Rose Gardens, he gestured towards his office at the Bungendore Rural Centre, the business he used to run with his Dad: "Out the back, rolled up on one of the shelves!"

The conversation evolved. I volunteered to go through them, draw up an inventory and take them to the Museum of Democracy for archiving. Greg contacted his sisters and they were single-minded in their enthusiasm for the idea.

Working with the documents was challenging. They had been rolled up for many years and most unruly as they insisted on resuming a cylindrical shape. Some had been nibbled by silverfish!

As I worked through them, I was impressed with the extraordinary amount of effort involved in considering new additions to the gardens while rediscovering and reinstating the old.

Milton had firsthand knowledge of how the gardens had evolved from Robert Broinowski's original idea. In an undated address to the Friends of OPH Rose Gardens, Milton shared his experience of the gardens at the time of their creation: "During the 1930s, at the time the Garden was established, I was at a very impressionable age and living on a rose nursery where my daily companions included *Mrs Sam McGredy*, *President Hoover*, *Ophelia* and *Crimson Glory*. These great favourites, which were soon to include the greatest of them all, *Peace*, were planted in the new gardens in neat rows of equal spacing in beds dedicated to one or two varieties. This was the fashion of the time. It was a rather beautiful garden of roses but not, I believe, a rose garden in which the design intent set out a number of important goals."

Many years later when Milton was given the opportunity by the National Capital Authority to revitalise the gardens, he said it was an opportunity to change a "garden of roses to a Rose Garden".

With the Friends of OPH Rose Gardens, he identified the objectives for the revitalisation process. Up front the Friends acknowledged that planning should at all times be mindful of the important heritage values which attach to the Gardens and their relationship to the Houses of Parliament.

"In broad terms the objectives were: that there should be a statement of design intent for each garden; that the Gardens should represent all major classes and forms of the rose; that the Gardens should demonstrate the landscaping potential of the rose; that the Gardens should tell the story of the rose from the earliest time; that the Gardens should provide opportunity for education and research on many aspects of the rose; that the Gardens should provide a space for public and private events, such as weddings and concerts; that the Gardens should be a place of peace and beauty; a place for quiet contemplation."

*Continued on page two*



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The planning documents recorded in the Inventory cover every aspect of the revitalisation process and are presented in A4 and enlarged sizes. They include outer, inner and under planting schedules, magnified sections, and overlays. Some of the documents have pencil entries and crossings out, and are clearly working documents.

The selection of roses is astounding and on closer study reveals the rationale for each choice. For example the Macarthur Garden, so named in memory of Elizabeth and John Macarthur in whose name the family donated one hundred *Etoile de Hollande*, replicates the original gift with plantings of *Etoile* in the centre circle of the Garden.

In his address to the Friends, Milton refers to The Rex Hazelwood Garden (The Rex) having an east-west axis which provides the correct geographical orientation for the roses of those hemispheres. "The great classes of roses from the West are there – the *Gallicas*, the *Albas*, *Damasks*

and *Centifolias*," he wrote. "With rare exception they failed to produce an autumn flowering and sadly the colour range was limited. Oh for a yellow rose!" He provides a solution at the eastern end of The Rex. "Here you will find the great 'Stud Roses' and other species from China and elsewhere in Asia which arrived in England and France from the late eighteenth century onwards."

When Milton needed to find roses of height that were bred no later than the thirties, (the cut-off date for the Rex), but were in some way of special significance to Australia, the answer he said when it came, was obvious. "We decided to dedicate the centre gardens to the roses bred by Alister Clark."

These wonderful documents tell the amazing story of the creation of the Rose Garden and of the tireless and inspired work of its main protagonist, Milton Simms. You can find them gifted by the Simms Family to the National Estate and housed at the Museum of Democracy in Canberra.

## President's message

It was a great pleasure to attend the AGM a few weeks ago and reflect on a successful year for the friends of the Old Parliament House Rose Gardens.

Since our last newsletter we've held a delightful evening function in the Gardens for St Valentine's Day where we toasted hearts and roses with rose tinted wine and enjoyed a very well informed tour of the Gardens.

Victoria Jones had a fascinating perspective on how the roses have been chosen and how the history of the rose is represented in the Gardens. Thanks to both the Pork Barrel Cafe for their constantly generous support and to Anne Caine and Jim Lumbers of the Lerida vineyard.

The Friends have also been working hard behind the scenes to foster our relationship with the National Capital Authority (NCA) during a time of transition for the Gardens. The sponsorship programme is coming to an end, and while the NCA has not finalised how the new programme will represent the rose donors, we continue to be actively involved in that process.

The Friends also made a submission to the NCA on their draft heritage management plan for the Gardens earlier this year. After consultation with the committee and members, we identified a number of priorities.

These included signage; the watering policy and the importance of allocating enough resources for maintaining the rose as well as the trees; clearly identifying the rose gardens as part of the original intentions for the space; restoring and maintaining the lawns and in particular the original bowling green; and managing public access to the

Gardens in a way that maintains their fabric but promotes their existence.

As president I have met with past NCA head Gary Rake, acting head Andrew Smith and current CEO Malcolm Snow to discuss the substantial contribution the Friends and Volunteers make in practical terms towards maintaining the Gardens.

NCA volunteer co-ordinator Sallyanne Boyle also attended a committee meeting where the dual roles of the Friends and Volunteers were discussed. The committee and the NCA have agreed to work on ways to streamline the two organisations, particularly given that we have many members in common.

On August 24, the Friends are gathering for a fireside chat with our co-patron Richard Broinowski. Richard is a distinguished former diplomat and the grandson of Robert Broinowski, who was instrumental in creating the original garden space.

Richard joins us at 2pm on August 24 at the Ivy Cafe, Old Canberra House Acton. Tickets are \$10 for members and \$20 for non members, and includes a generous afternoon tea.

**Genevieve Jacobs**  
President

# Margaret Bennetts' Gift

By Fred Knowler

Early in March this year the Friends received the following email from Margaret Bennetts' daughter, Jane:

'My late mother's garden in Deakin has several varieties of mature roses that will be removed prior to the sale of the property later this year. Family members have taken cuttings already. Would the Friends be interested in relocating the bushes- either to the OPH Rose Gardens if appropriate or elsewhere to interested parties?'

Margaret developed her rose garden during the '90s and it was appreciated by her family and friends who also delighted in receiving hand picked blooms from it. However it was a comment by a real estate agent assessing the property early this year—"Those plants should go. This area would be ideal for outdoor entertainment"—that prompted daughter Jane to contact the Friends. It was a shocking observation, however her late mother's legacy was not to be ignored, let alone destroyed!

Margaret (nee Feakes) gained her Bsc, Dip Ed, from the University of WA during the late 1940s. She came from a horticultural background and inspired her family to develop their interests in gardening and horticultural work.

Her grandfather, Daniel Feakes, worked at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and on moving to Perth was appointed Superintendent of Government Gardens in the 1890s and Supervisor of King's Park until 1904. Margaret's husband John was a senior member of the press gallery during the

1950s and '60s and is in several photos on display in that section of OPH.

The roses in Deakin were inspected and approved by the Friends and Dennis Dempsey of CityWide. They are mature bushes, about 20 years old, disease free and in excellent condition. They are mainly hybrid Teas, such as '*Just Joey*, *Mr Lincoln* and *Gold Medal*'; with floribundas - mainly '*Friesias*' and David Austin's '*Graham Thomas*'. Climbers are represented by '*Iceberg*' and '*Cecile Brunner*' varieties. In all they totalled 27 plants.

The removal to CityWide's depot in Commonwealth Gardens took place on June 11 when the plants were dormant but it was not an easy task for the seven helpers involved. The narrow, stepped pathways precluded the use of a backhoe, so each bush had to be identified and labelled, pruned and then carefully dug out so as to retain the complete root system intact. They were then packed in plastic bags and transported to the depot. The garden was then restored for the upcoming auction of the property. We also took a number of cuttings of the roses with the aim of propagating them for use as future plant stock.

Once the quarantine period has been completed it is intended to use these roses as replacements in the OPHRG later this year where they will be maintained and be able to be enjoyed by all visitors.



From left: Anne Knowler, Fred Knowler, Morton, Nadene Edwards, Dennis Dempsey and Katryn Bennetts following the successful rose transplant. Photo, Elizabeth Geissler.

© George Morton

## Volunteers wanted

The National Capital Authority is currently seeking 15 new horticulture Volunteers to care for the Rose Gardens. There will be a further intake in November.

We require one morning a week, of three hours, or fortnightly as agreed with the Volunteer Coordinator and Garden Team Coordinator. We are especially keen to have Thursday morning Volunteers, to assist with the management and special care of the Rex Hazelwood garden.

The NCA supplies initial and ongoing training and personal development. We supply equipment, uniforms and vaccinations (vaccinations need to include tetanus).

The Volunteers are a friendly and engaging group who perform a vitally important service in caring for the Gardens, and you will make an important contribution as well as enjoying their horticultural companionship.

For more information visit [www.volunteeringact.org.au](http://www.volunteeringact.org.au) and type 'rose gardens' into the search engine.





## Greeting cards

A range of beautifully photographed cards made by gifted photographer Margaret Weir.

Includes close detail and landscape shots of the Gardens. They are available either as individual cards at \$4 each or at \$15 for five plus \$3 for postage and packaging.

## Membership

If you would like to become a member of the Friends, please complete this form and post to:

Friends of the Old Parliament House Rose Gardens  
PO Box 213  
CURTIN ACT 2605

### Membership category (please tick)

Single (\$35)

Family (\$40)

Concession (\$30)\*

*\*Pension card holders or full time students*

### Concession Card number

---

### Contact details

Name

Address

---

Post code

Telephone

### Payment (Please tick)

Cheque  Direct deposit

For payment by direct deposit:

**BSB:** 082 902

**Account number:** 16770 7016

**Account name:** Friends of Old Parliament House Rose Gardens

## Place your order\*

I wish to order (Please tick)

There's Something About a Rose  \$15

Sunshine and Roses CD  \$15

Greetings cards  \$4 each or \$15 for five

Number of copies

**Total amount**

### Contact details

Name

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Address

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Post code

Telephone

Email

### Payment (Please tick)

Cheque  Direct deposit

For payment by direct deposit:

**BSB:** 082 902

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### Post this form to:

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All proceeds go to support the work of the Friends.

\*Please see website for details [www.fophrg.com](http://www.fophrg.com)