



# FRIENDS OF Old Parliament House ROSE GARDENS

Issue 11 – Winter 2016

## President's letter

The Friends of the Old Parliament House Rose Garden are delighted to announce the election of a new president. Former politician and keen rose lover Ellnor Grassby has taken over the reins from Genevieve Jacobs, who steps down after three years' service. Ellnor brings with her considerable experience in business, government and public service organisation, and long years of dedication to the national capital and its natural beauty. We asked her to tell us a little about her life and background:

"I was born in Griffith NSW, where my mother and father ran a large business - my father was first employed by the federal government as the paymaster on the building of the M.I.A. His business career began in Yanco, later moving to Griffith as this became the bigger town in the M.I.A.

I was educated at Santa Sabina Strathfield, NSW, and travelled widely after I left school, working in Europe, Canada and the U.S.A. Returning home, I began a manufacturing business in Griffith which was very successful for eight years before I met and married Albert Grassby. Our daughter Gabriella Giovanna was born in December 1962.



Past and present Friends committee members Genevieve Jacobs, Malcolm Beazley, Anne Knowler, Fred Knowler, Jacqueline Luby, Andrew McLeod, Wendy McLeod, Nadene Edwards and Lorraine Gentle

Al became the NSW member for Murrumbidgee in 1964 and I became his unpaid secretary, traveling with him on many car trips to Sydney. In 1969 Al was elected to the Federal Parliament as the Member for Riverina and we purchased a house in Aranda although the driving between Griffith and Canberra continued! In 1972 after Al's mother, who lived with us, died, we moved to Canberra. A girl friend and I later purchased two hotels, one in the suburbs and later in the city of Sydney. I spent some time living in Elizabeth Bay in connection with the business, before returning to Canberra.

Following self government, I stood for office and was elected to the Legislative Assembly, where I became the Minister for Housing and Urban Services in the Follet government. After retirement, I've continued with an active life in the community, taking on many different jobs, helping as many who asked, and working on many committees.

I love living in Canberra and would not wish to live anywhere else. However, if we could only put a big cover over Canberra in the coldest days, we would be living in paradise!"

The Friends warmly welcome our new president and thank her for her generosity in taking on the role.



# Campaign to save OPH's standard roses

Recently the Friends became aware of plans to remove the front row of standard roses immediately in front of the Old Parliament House building. We sought urgent clarification, and have learned that the proposal comes from the Museum Of Australian Democracy. It evidently follows a heritage report suggesting that the building should be returned to its original 1920's appearance and stripped of some later plantings. The considered view of the Friends is that the roses form part of the rich tapestry of lived history of this significant building.

On enquiry we were told that the consultants knew very little about the plants. With the resources of a wide range of friends and connections we have been able to establish a fuller picture of how and why the roses were chosen for this prominent position. There are six beds of standard roses in front of the building, arranged in two parallel rows. Robin Johnson was the supervisor of the Senate gardens and worked with previous head gardener Simon van den Heuvel at the time. He told us the roses were planted at the direct request of the President of the Senate, the Honourable Harold Young, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir Billy Snedden in 1982.

Standard roses were chosen for several specific purposes: their height provided a colourful backdrop for official photographs, and the long stemmed specimens also provided cut flowers for members. Robin recalls deliveries to the Hon. Joan Childs, who very much enjoyed the blooms. They were also frequently used as a backdrop for television interviews carried out by the ABC and Channel Nine. Historian John Gray, who was commissioned by the National Capital Authority to write *Roses, Tennis and Democracy* has sourced the reference for this planting in the Business of the Senate and its Committees 1982 paper. This places the roses within the context of the parliamentary history of the buildings and the story of the people who worked there as elected representatives, media and staff.

Citywide gardener Dennis Dempsey believes the appearance of a number of the bushes, the thickness of their stems and base growth, indicates that some may have been moved there from elsewhere in the Gardens. He believes that the remaining roses are now in excellent health and show no signs of serious disease. Given their age and establishment, however, he thinks it is unlikely that they would survive being transplanted although there is no reason why they should not continue to thrive in their current positions.

Robin Johnson also recalls that a number of roses were replanted from elsewhere in the Gardens. He himself has a specimen of *R. Peter Frankenfeld* which he saved from discarded older specimens. He believes these standards may be among the only remaining original rose bushes planted in the Gardens prior to the departure for new Parliament House. Emeritus senator Colin Hollis, who is president of the NSW Rose Society and was one of the original horticultural volunteers at the Old Parliament House Rose Gardens has also confirmed the history of the plantings to the best of his recollection and urges their retention on the grounds of a link with the history of the building within living memory.

In order to ensure the continuation of the planting however, Citywide had sought permission from MOAD to propagate the roses and replace a handful of dead specimens. These cuttings have been professionally grown on and are now ready for planting. At this point MOAD has not granted permission for the planting to take place.

The Friends' past president, Genevieve Jacobs, and new president Ellnor Grassby met with MOAD director Daryl Karp to express our deep concerns about plans for the roses' removal without wide consultation and an attempt to understand their significance. We believe that the living, layered history of Old Parliament House ought to take precedence over plans to restore the site to its original state, and that the building and grounds ought to represent the entire story of the place rather than a selective interpretation based on the earliest history. Daryl Karp gave us an assurance that the roses would not be removed within the current season and the Friends have undertaken to discover as much as possible about the roses in the intervening period.



A spectacular wisteria display on the garden front at Camden Park

## Fireside chat

The current custodians of one of the most historic family gardens in Australia, John and Edwina Macarthur Stanham of Camden Park, have kindly agreed to be guest speakers at the Friends' annual fireside chat on August 21. John is a descendant of the original John Macarthur, who began building Camden Park in 1832. The house was designed by architect John Verge in the Palladian Revival style and set in an extensive landscape including the family church of St John at Camden, whose spire was sited as an "eye catcher" for the estate.

The early colonial gardens are the largest and most intact of their kind. Many trees date from the 19th century, including a bauhinia planted by Ludwig Leichhardt and the oldest camellia in the country (*C. japonica var. anemoniflora*). The first Australian camellia cultivar, the 'Aspasia macarthur' was also grown here by Sir William Macarthur.

Our fireside chat is a rare chance to hear about this significant Australian garden and the challenges of maintaining it. We are holding a high tea at the Mercure Hotel on Limestone Avenue on August 21 between 2 and 4pm, at a cost of \$40 per person (payable in advance) for an extensive repast and lecture. Please RSVP to [friendsophrosegardens@gmail.com](mailto:friendsophrosegardens@gmail.com) or tel/SMS Jacky: 0408 696 109. We are happy to accept a direct deposit to BSB: 082 902 A/C No: 16770 7016 (please note your name on deposit), or pay via cheque to: Friends of OPHRG, PO Box 213, Curtin, ACT 2605.



*Mr Lincoln* is a familiar but much loved rose with a strong damask scent.

## Stories about roses

*Citywide's Nadene Edwards is also a Friends committee member and a devoted carer for the Gardens. She continues her series on some of the striking and historically interesting roses in the Old Parliament House Gardens.*

*Mister Lincoln (Mr Lincoln) is a wonderful hardy rose that needs no introduction. An old favourite, it is still as popular today as it was when first released in 1964 and is named after America's 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. Mr Lincoln is a Hybrid Tea cross between Chrysler Imperial (Hybrid Tea, Lammerts, 1952) and Charles Mallerin (Hybrid Tea, Meilland, before 1947). The breeders are Herb Swim and Ollie Weeks who contributed to many other perfumed roses released over many years.*

There are a number of specimens in the Old Parliament House and National Rose Gardens, but none more spectacular than the old standards at the front of OPH. The flowers were cut and given to the politicians to admire and enjoy in their offices during time of Parliament.

*Mr Lincoln* is a magnificent velvet red rose with a sweet damask perfume that can be enjoyed from up to three metres away. It is a vigorous rose that flowers on new wood in late Spring to late Autumn and even into early winter. Ideal conditions are full sun with afternoon shade, free draining soil and a pH range of 5 to 8. Bred to be tough and disease resistant it does occasionally get a little black spot. When pruning, remove the older canes and reduce by two thirds. Fertilise with organic material like turkey manure at the end of winter and into early spring and follow with Sudden Impact with each season.

## St Valentine's Day champagne in the gardens



Citywide's Dennis Dempsey plays rose detective in the Gardens



Guests enjoy champagne in the pavilion



Tom Kesina's music added a European air to our drinks



Gardens historian John Grey with the winning raffle prize

# Membership renewal

A reminder that membership renewals are due in March. Four categories are available: join as a single member for \$35 per annum; as a family for \$40; and at a concession rate for \$30, available to pension card holders or full time students. Active Rose Gardens volunteers are eligible for a special rate.

Friends membership brings you inclusion in our events, lectures and workshops, and helps us to raise awareness of the Gardens, to advocate for their care and wellbeing and to enhance our own knowledge of rose cultivation.

To renew, or to become a member the Friends, please visit the membership section of our website at [www.fophrg.org.au](http://www.fophrg.org.au). Alternatively, 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)\*

Active NCA  
Garden Volunteer (\$15)

*\*Pension card holders or full time students*

## Concession Card Number

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## Contact details

Name 

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Address 

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Post code 

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Telephone 

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Email 

---

## 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

# With thanks to our Sponsors

Many thanks to our supporters, who contribute a great deal to our work in promoting and supporting the Gardens.



**The Pork Barrel Cafe** is unfailingly helpful to the Friends and Volunteers and we highly recommend tea, cake and refreshments among the blooming roses. Friends receive a 20% discount.



**The Heritage Nursery at Yarralumla** offers a 10% discount to the Friends and have been most generous in their support of our rose events.



We are also delighted to welcome aboard the **Mercure Hotel**, who kindly provide assistance to the Friends through their use of its facilities for our events.



## Greeting Cards

We have 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.

We also have available "There's Something About a Rose," a book of Australian poems and artwork that celebrate the rose compiled by Malcolm Beazley and Judith Pugh, and "Sunshine and Roses". This CD of 24 favourite old tunes also plays upon the rose theme. Both are priced at \$15. Please email the Friends for further details.

For details please email [friendsophrosegardens@gmail.com](mailto:friendsophrosegardens@gmail.com)