



THE FRIENDS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE ROSE GARDENS

Autumn Newsletter | Issue No. 24 | April 2026

President's Message

Dear Members and Friends,

What a wonderful way to end 2025! Our Carols in the Garden was held on Friday, 5th December at the House of Representatives Rose Garden — a self-catered and thoroughly enjoyable occasion. The gardens looked spectacular in full summer bloom, and it was such a joy to share them with so many of our wonderful members and friends.

Earlier in the year, our luncheon and picnic in the Gardens was held on Sunday, 26th October 2025 and was beautifully catered for by byCath Catering, who delivered a delicious spread enjoyed by all who attended.

I am so proud of our committee who worked tirelessly to make these events such a great success. A warm thank you to everyone who attended and to all our dedicated volunteers who keep these beautiful gardens in such magnificent condition year-round.

A very special highlight of the year was the conferring of Life Memberships on three of our most valued and long-serving members — Dr Malcolm Beazley AM, Ann Knowler and Fred Knowler. This recognition is richly deserved, and we congratulate Malcolm, Ann and Fred most warmly.

In this edition, we also carry the sad news of the passing of our beloved past president, Ellnor Grassby, and share some wonderful rose stories — including the launch of the "Endless Love" rose and a fascinating glimpse into the wartime history of our own gardens. I hope you enjoy reading.

Jackie Warburton

President, FOPHRG



FOPHRG Committee at the Carols in the Garden, 5th December 2025



Canberra Harmony Choir sang at the Carols



Guests enjoying the afternoon gathering



Members relaxing under the pergola

Carols in the Garden — December Highlights

The 5th of December saw a wonderful gathering at the iconic House of Representatives Rose Garden at Old Parliament House — the perfect summer setting, with roses in glorious full bloom and the garden pergola draped in lush wisteria.

Guests were welcomed as they mingled in the beautiful surroundings. The warm December day brought a relaxed and joyful energy, with laughter flowing freely along the pergola walkways.

A highlight of the evening was a special address by Ross diBartolo, who spoke engagingly about his winery and generously provided a wine tasting for guests — a wonderful addition to the festivities that was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

It was a joy to see both long-standing members and newer faces enjoying the gardens and the fellowship that makes The Friends of Old Parliament House Rose Gardens such a very special community.



Members enjoying the event



Addresses and presentations



The beautiful garden setting

Formalities & Looking Ahead

President Jackie Warburton addressed guests with great warmth, reflecting on an eventful year and sharing the exciting plans ahead for 2026 and beyond. She highlighted the significance of the Old Parliament House centenary in 2027 — a major milestone that will see special events and garden celebrations commemorating 100 years of this remarkable piece of Australian history.

The committee was acknowledged for their tireless contributions throughout the year. Special thanks were extended to our Friday volunteers who tend the Rex Hazlewood Rose Garden and the Broinowski Garden week after week, keeping them in immaculate condition.

Members were reminded that the NCA's ambitious rejuvenation of the National Rose Gardens is progressing, with plans to reinstate the original 1950s garden layout and introduce some 7,500 new roses — an exciting development for all rose lovers in Canberra.



The President addresses assembled members

In Memoriam — Ellnor Grassby

14 January 1937 – 16 February 2026

It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the passing of Ellnor Grassby, beloved Past President of FOPHRG (2016–2019) and a cherished friend to our community. We received the following message from her daughter:

"I am writing to let you know that my mother, Ellnor Grassby, passed away yesterday morning. I would appreciate you passing on this news to members and friends." — Dhurva Gabriella Davis

Ellnor was a truly remarkable woman — a pioneering ACT politician who was elected to the inaugural ACT Legislative Assembly in 1989 and served as the first Minister for Housing and Urban Services. She was remembered at her funeral at St Christopher's Cathedral as "fierce, funny and loyal." Her coffin was draped with the Australian flag.

Wife of former Whitlam government immigration minister Al Grassby for 43 years, Ellnor was deeply committed to community. She served on numerous bodies including the Chief Minister's Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs and — most dear to us — the Friends of Old Parliament House Rose Gardens, where she served as our President with such dedication, warmth and energy.

Her daughter described her as "a born organiser and fundraiser who never took no for an answer" — and those of us who knew Ellnor will recognise that perfectly. She will be deeply missed. Our heartfelt condolences go to her daughter Gabriella and all who loved her.



Queen of Sweden — in bloom at Old Parliament House

Rose of the Season: Queen of Sweden

Photographed in our own gardens during the Carols in the Garden, the Queen of Sweden was looking truly magnificent. This beautiful David Austin English Rose (AUSTiger) was introduced in 2004 and named to commemorate the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Sweden and Great Britain.

The blooms open from exquisite tight little buds into wide, shallow, upward-facing cups carrying soft apricot-pink petals that mature to a delicate pure pink over time. With over 100 petals per bloom and a lovely moderate myrrh fragrance, it is one of the most refined and elegant roses in the David Austin collection.

A medium to large shrub growing to around 1.25–1.75 metres in height, the Queen of Sweden is renowned for its particularly upright, bushy habit and exceptionally healthy foliage. It is an excellent repeat bloomer, flowering in generous flushes throughout the season from late spring through to early winter.

David Austin Roses can be found growing beautifully in the Broinowski Rose Garden at Old Parliament House. And a timely reminder — autumn is one of the most beautiful times to visit the gardens, with the roses putting on a truly magnificent display right now. Do come and enjoy them! The Queen of Sweden is available from nurseries that stock David Austin throughout Australia.

"Endless Love" — A Special Anniversary Rose

We are delighted to share news of a beautiful rose created to celebrate a very special milestone — the 60th Anniversary of the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA).

The ABA was founded on 13 February 1964, when six women gathered in Melbourne to establish a group to support mothers who wish to breastfeed. Over sixty years, it has grown into one of Australia's most important community health organisations, providing breastfeeding counselling, information and support to families nationwide. Its National Breastfeeding Helpline has received over one million calls.

To mark this remarkable anniversary, the ABA commissioned the creation of the "Endless Love" rose — a fitting name that captures both the spirit of the organisation and the enduring bond between mother and child. The rose has attracted great interest from garden lovers across Australia.

The FOPHRG has been contacted by the ABA, who are delighted that our members and network will help spread the word about this special rose. If you are interested in obtaining one, enquire at your local nursery or garden centre, or ask for it to be ordered in. As demand grows, availability is expected to increase.

What a perfect rose to plant in honour of sixty years of community, care and love.



"Endless Love" — ABA 60th Anniversary Rose

Available from local nurseries nationwide.

breastfeeding.asn.au



Staff of Parliament House inspect the newly dug air raid trenches in the grounds of Old Parliament House, 1942. Image: Australian War Memorial

History in Our Gardens: WWII Air Raid Trenches

As we enjoy the peace and beauty of the Old Parliament House Rose Gardens, it is worth pausing to reflect on a remarkable chapter in the history of this very ground.

From 1942, the threat of Japanese air attack on Australia's capital seemed very real. Canberra, as the seat of government, was considered a prime target. In response, air raid precautions were rapidly established across the city — sirens were installed, blackout drills held, and slit trenches were dug near all major buildings.

The grounds of Old Parliament House were no exception. Photographs held by the Australian War Memorial (AWM Collection C257226 and 136211) show workmen digging zigzag slit trenches in the very gardens we tend today, and staff of Parliament House inspecting the freshly dug shelters in the foreground of the building.

These trench systems were dug in preparation for air raid drills and evacuations — ready for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to take shelter should enemy aircraft appear over the capital. Heavy bombers and fighters carried out manoeuvres over Canberra to add to the realism of the drills.

It is a powerful reminder that the gardens which bring us such joy today were, not so long ago, shaped quite literally by the anxieties and preparations of wartime. The full collection of photographs is accessible via the Australian War Memorial website at awm.gov.au.

Membership

Membership renewals are due 30 June 2026.
We greatly value each and every member —
your support makes everything we do possible.

- Single: \$20 per annum
- Family: \$30 per annum
- Concession: \$15 per annum
- Volunteer: \$15 per annum

www.fophrg.org.au

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Coming Up in 2026

We have a wonderful calendar of events
planned for the new year. Watch your inbox
and the website for details on:

- Free Coffee and Cake — TBA
- Spring Garden Walks — November 2026
- Christmas Carols — December 2026

**Centenary Celebrations 2027 — planning
underway!**

The rose gardens of Old Parliament House are open to all. We warmly invite you to visit, walk among the blooms, and share in the beauty of this very special place. Thank you for your continued support and friendship.