

TheBeak

news from the Friends of Coolart



WE CELEBRATE FORTY YEARS

To commence our 40th year we have pushed the refresh button on our newsletter and in this edition we celebrate what has been achieved as we begin to chart a course for the future. We look forward to your feedback as we map out our plans and changes. In the coming weeks we will be sending out a survey to seek your opinion on the role of the Friends of Coolart. This information will assist the Committee in updating our Purpose, revising our membership categories and benefits and clarifying our roles and relationships with key stakeholders.

The Friends of Coolart Committee was elected at a general meeting of Friends on 13th February 1982.

Members of the first Committee were: Dick Scotton, Beryl Smith, Liz Tapp, D.Wright and Marion Taylor (Sec).

A letter was received from the Chairman of the Management Committee:

"It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to extend to the "Friends of Coolart" the congratulations of the Committee of Management and to express our appreciation that so many people feel so sympathetically about Coolart that it has been possible to constitute a Committee to extend the "Friends" interests. A great deal has been achieved in the few years since Coolart Reserve came into existence and I am sure that much more will be accomplished in the years to come, however very little could have come about without the enthusiastic support, both physical and financial, which we have received. I believe that a great deal of the quality which is obvious at Coolart today is brought about by the active involvement of the many people with a feeling of 'belonging'. I congratulate your Committee on the initiatives that they are taking and feel sure that the future of Coolart is even brighter."

February 1982

A GLIMPSE OF
WHAT'S INSIDE:

**Property News
2022 AGM
Committee Plans
Sid Cowling**



FRIENDS OF
COOLART

Coolart - where history meets nature



a little bit of envy for the McCrae lighthouse

PROPERTY NEWS

When will the homestead reopen?

In our last newsletter, we let you know that as a committee, we were unhappy with the state of the homestead and lack of information concerning its reopening. We wrote to the CEO and these are some of the responses:

The homestead was closed to undertake critical restoration works. The first stage of works was major roofing repairs, funded by a Heritage Victoria - Living Heritage Grant, and the full drying of the roof cavity and structural components upstairs. This enabled works to take place to repair cracking and defective plasterwork, funded by the Pick My Project grant that the Friends of Coolart successfully applied for.

In May 2021 the conservation architect specified further roof drainage repairs as some water was still entering the building. The additional works were undertaken mid 2021. These works were flood tested and were followed by significant rain events. There is still minor water incursion at the junction between the two roof levels and in the upstairs bathroom.

In March 2022, the architect will undertake assessment of the latest roof drainage works with the builder to determine the cause of the remaining water ingress and devise a solution.

Parks Victoria has determined that the Homestead is now waterproof enough to enable ground floor internal decorating to proceed without the risk of it being damaged by water

entering the building. However, it would be preferable to complete repair of the remaining leak issues and then repaint the interior as one project.

While there is no fixed date for the reopening of Coolart Homestead, Parks Victoria is working to ensure the Homestead is reopened as soon as possible.

What is the plan for refurbishing the Observatory following the 2019 storm damage?

Following the 2019 storm, the Coolart information centre and Park office building were stabilised and the damaged carpet removed from the Observatory. The Observatory is safe and functional without carpet but less aesthetically pleasing. The Observatory is used by groups from time-to-time but is not open to the general public. Parks Victoria will continue to seek opportunities to undertake works to restore the building for public access.

The Friends Committee is working with the local Parks team to re-carpet the Observatory. This will improve acoustics and make the facility more energy efficient (& prettier!) We are currently obtaining quotes and hope to see the Observatory fully carpeted within the next couple of months.

We will be meeting with Parks Vic in April to discuss our concerns and ideas further.

PROPERTY NEWS (CONT)

Environmentally Winning

One of the most significant achievements over the past 40 years is the environmental work that has been done. When the property was purchased by the state government, much of the land had been farmed for more than a century. Dedicated staff and volunteers have gradually eradicated noxious pests and weeds and planted a significant number of native trees across the property. As a result of this passion and tireless effort that continues today, many bird species continue to return to Coolart year after year, areas of the property are weed free and a thriving turtle colony

is now regularly counted.

Congratulations must go to the wardens Graham Pizzezy and Steve Yorke, and Parks Vic Rangers Brian Thomas and Casey Lee - all passionate environmentalists. It is a reminder to us that Coolart is not just a stately home, it is an important environmental wetlands that has been carefully and skillfully rehabilitated and conserved over many years and stands testament to Tom Luxton's original desire to make Coolart a Sanctuary for Native Game in 1937. I think he would be happy.



photo: Brian Thomas

homestead garden

Anyone who has visited Coolart in recent weeks would have noticed the state of the homestead garden following the December storm event that hit metropolitan Melbourne. Coolart, like many areas on the Peninsula, had branches down and trees severely damaged. Parks Vic took the decision for public safety reasons, to leave branches and debris where they fell until arborists could assess damage and the cleanup could start. Because the region suffered extensive damage, the wait for

contractors has been several weeks and during this time, the garden with taped off areas and debris lying around has looked very unloved. The good news is that finally tree works commenced in mid March and the garden is already starting to get back to it's glorious best. Some of the trees have suffered heavy pruning as a result of the inspections and one tree unfortunately has been identified for removal. Despite the excellent care by Parks Horticulturalist Eileen Rowe, time and nature has won out.

Coolart - where history meets nature

2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

From the President

This year we celebrate the 40th anniversary of The Friends of Coolart. In 1982 Coolart was managed by a government appointed Committee of Management, the public was required to pay an entry fee and Graham Pizzey was live in warden. The Friends started as a group of volunteers who, in return for voluntary hours, gained free access to the reserve. They did everything from household tasks for the warden to environmental works on the property. The Friends also ran a plant shop and held functions to raise funds for the property. Works around the place were funded, constructed or freely volunteered through government funded programs including the construction of the Observatory, the re-direction of the driveway off Lord Somers Road, extensive tree planting and the construction of the second lagoon behind the homestead.

Fast forward to today and while the passion and enthusiasm is still evident amongst volunteers and Friends, the environment in which we operate is vastly different to 1982. Under Parks Victoria management, the Friends are no longer the main source of volunteering and any project big or small needs to pass through significant layers of bureaucracy. To remain active and true to the original purpose of the Friends, the role of the committee has also had to change. We have had some success in securing grants for renovation works on the homestead and re-introducing a series of events such as our annual community picnic. We also established a tax deductible fund to secure a financial future for Coolart. And then COVID hit, coinciding with the retirement of Brian Thomas. Our relationship with Parks Victoria changed and we lost our ability to achieve anything. The 3 main areas of volunteering, the bird surveys, the shop and to a lesser degree, the gardening continued in their own ways but the links with the committee have become less tangible with time.

So where to now?

I believe, in our 40th year that we need to write a new future for the Friends of Coolart. It is time to re-define our role here; we need to forge new

relationships with Parks Victoria; we need to strengthen our relationships with the volunteer groups of Coolart so we can better support them; and we need to put procedures in place to protect the future of the public involvement in this property. We have work to do. We have 40 years of achievement to live up to.

Julie Ebbott

2022 Friends of Coolart Committee

President - Julie Ebbott

Vice President - Marnee Wills

Secretary - Denise Kempster

Treasurer - Andrew Giles

Committee Members

Pat Pringle

Cris Topfner-Rigby



Hazel Maynard from Volunteering Victoria (right with Julie Ebbott) was our guest speaker this year. speaking about recruiting, supporting and maintaining volunteers in organisations. A highly valuable presentation enjoyed by more than just the Friends. If you would like a copy of Hazel's presentation, send an email to info@coolart.org.au

Finally, we thank outgoing committee members Sally Holdsworth (President), Maria Robbins (Secretary) and committee member Peter Cole for their commitment, contribution and dedication to Coolart, giving 4 years or more of their time. Thank you.

We also thank all volunteers across the site - your work is important and your contribution is highly valuable.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2022

Plans from the committee

Review & Revision of Friends of Coolart Statement of Rules

We are currently reviewing the Rules of Friends of Coolart Incorporated to update a number of items including: terms of office, membership categories and our stated objectives. We believe that the changes will simplify our Rules, provide greater continuity of information and leadership beyond one year terms and importantly, more clearly state a measurable purpose for the association. The Committee is using Consumer Affairs' Model Rules as a reference point and a sub-committee is exploring a variety of membership options that include member categories, benefits and fee structures.

In regards to terms of office, the Rules state that all positions are declared vacant annually. In line with common practice, we propose to lengthen terms to two to three years to stagger vacancy re-appointments and ensure that only half or a third of positions are declared vacant in any one year.

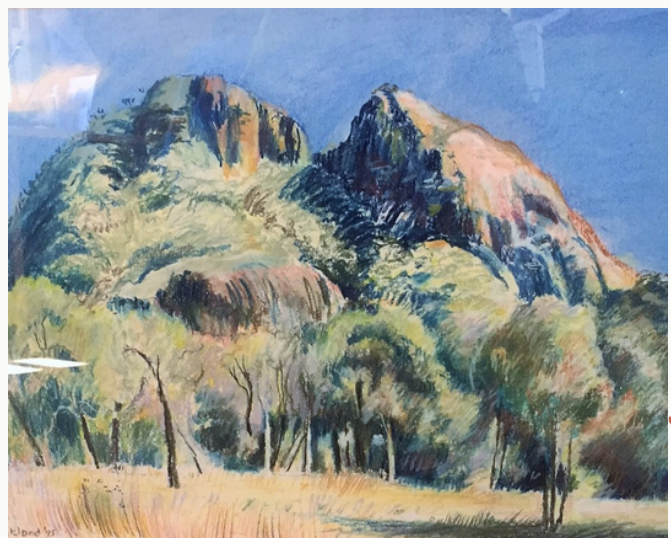
We will release a draft of the new Rules prior to holding a Special General Meeting later this year so that members can consider the proposed changes before voting.

Coolart Herb Garden

In 1984 the Committee of Management secured a grant for \$160,000 to build a bird hide / auditorium overlooking the wetlands plus create a formal brick paved herb garden in the old vegetable garden area. Recently Parks Vic Horticulturalist Eileen Rowe identified the herb garden as an area in need of attention. This coincided with a push from local Somers residents to establish a Community vegetable garden. The Friends committee has facilitated a discussion between the Somers garden group and Parks Vic to find a solution that would be mutually beneficial. First discussions have proven fruitful. There are still details to be worked through however with the existing infrastructure in place, there is enough for the group to get started. The Friends Committee has offered to support the group with funding assistance where it can and guidance in navigating Parks Victoria requirements. If successful, we believe this project will bring more activity and people to Coolart and the vegetable garden will once again look like the productive food garden it once was.

Artwork donated by Pat & John Webb

In 2021, FOC members Pat and John Webb donated an original art work by Peter Strickland to the Friends of Coolart. Unfortunately it took some time to collect the painting from the rangers office so I take this opportunity to publicly thank John and Pat for their generous donation and apologise for the delay in confirming receipt. Peter Strickland lived in Luxton Drive and illustrated the History of Coolart book that John wrote. Pat and John have left the fate of the painting with us so it is likely that we will auction the piece sometime this year.



Coolart - where history meets nature

LETTERS

From the Foundation Chairman Committee of Management

When we last saw Sid Cowling we asked if he could write down some of his memories for us. In his recent letter, he made good his promise ...

I was on the VORG Committee for many years with Gordon Cameron, and he succeeded me as Chairman of the Coolart Committee.

Coolart had long been a notable wildlife conservation site on the Peninsula. For many years under Tom Luxton's ownership the lagoon had been protected from grazing and was a noted ibis breeding colony. The importance of Coolart's lagoon was recognised by the then Fisheries and Game Branch of the Chief Secretary's Office and the property had been proclaimed as a Sanctuary under the Victorian Game Act for some decades before its purchase by the state government. The birds had been recorded by VORG and Alan Reid, a school teacher at the Somers School Camp who kept meticulous records of the birds of the district, and who authored many bird field guides for the Bird Observers Club.

The Coolart Committee of Management was actually established in 1978 as a Statutory Committee of Management under the then Land Act, hence the initial set of Regulations under that Act. It finally received some funding through a grant from Richard Hamer via the then Ministry for Conservation. When the state government bought Coolart they did not provide any funds for its operations. From the start Coolart received excellent support and cooperation from the local shire and community as well as from the various departments which had a representative on the Committee. The local State Public Works staff thought Coolart was a great public asset and undertook many maintenance tasks at no cost. For instance it soon became obvious that the roof over the upstairs servants quarters leaked and the PWD quickly identified that the guttering over that part of the house, which took the main drainage off the Mansell roof, was insufficient for the roof area

(presumably since the house was built it still had the original drainage system and apparently there had always been problems with water seeping into the servants quarters).. Accordingly the PWD quickly installed a better set of roof drains which directed water from the main roof away from the guttering over the servants area.

The grand table in the Committee Room opposite the kitchen was the table from the Fisheries and Wildlife Department's Library when the department moved its library to a new building with new furniture.

As you are probably aware there was also a need for a high standard bird hide on the lagoon and I was able to get the plans for the one at Minsmere from the Royal Society for protection of Birds in the UK in 1978, and we were able to build it. Of course it has been extended and improved since then, and the appointment of Graham Pizzey as our Warden enhanced Coolart's reputation as a primary conservation site.

In the early days Coolart had its own footbridge over the creek to the beach of Westernport, which gave it another feature and birding opportunities.

We also used our connection with HMAS Cerberus to have the RAN Concert Band from Cerberus play at some of the Open Days and other special occasions. I was told by a senior officer that military bands do not play at Garden parties, they "Render Airs" at Garden Parties. Initially we held an open day on a monthly basis before Coolart was able to open on a more regular basis with the tremendous support of the Friends of Coolart. Some called Coolart "Everybody's Country Estate" because they could come and enjoy the garden and mansion, and sit and listen to music, or walk down to the beach.

Sorry that my intention to just apologise for the AGM has turned into a longer ramble through my memories. Nevertheless I wish Coolart all the best - keep Parks on the move and like Gordon Cameron, don't take no for an answer.

Sid Cowling

Coolart - where history meets nature

Friends of Coolart is a volunteer organisation that was formed to assist Parks Victoria in the preservation and enhancement of the environmental, cultural and educational values of Coolart Wetlands and Homestead. The work carried out by the Friends of Coolart compliments Parks Victoria's management of the reserve and adds value to both the essential qualities of the property and the visitor experience.

For more information or enquiries:
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