

TheBeak

news from the Friends of Coolart



CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERING

This month Friends of Coolart were successfully awarded a Victorian Government grant through the Volunteer Growth Fund. The purpose of the Fund is to assist organisations support and recruit volunteers. We will be purchasing gardening tools and safety equipment for use across all the gardening volunteer groups including the Community Garden and environmental weeding group and investing in new signage for the shop, Community Garden and events.

This is an excellent opportunity therefore, to thank everyone who has given their time at Coolart over the past forty years and share two stories of volunteering in this edition of The Beak. I can truly say the property could not do without you - from raising money, keeping the shop, assisting with events, gardening, environmental works, bird surveying and committee work - invaluable and incalculable.

A GLIMPSE OF
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We are now recruiting volunteers to train as baristas for our espresso coffee cart. This will not only be a great revenue raiser for Coolart but will also contribute to a better visitor experience with a decent cup of coffee! We will arrange training and in return ask for thirty hours of barista volunteering over twelve months. This will be a great way for a young volunteer to acquire a skill that can lead to ongoing employment, or for a more mature volunteer looking to master the art of coffee making and enjoy some chit chat. If this sounds appealing please send us an email: info@coolart.org.au

If lattes and macchiato are not your thing but you are outstanding at social media or would just love to help out at the occasional event we would also love to hear from you. Volunteering is a great way to meet people and contribute to our community. Drop us a line: info@coolart.org.au



FRIENDS OF
COOLART

Coolart - where history meets nature

PROPERTY NEWS

Opinion

We reported in the Winter edition of The Beak that the homestead would be re-opened in October 2022. This was an agreed timeline with Parks Victoria pending an assessment of electrical works. Sadly, once again we find the timeline for re-opening has disappeared into the ether and trying to obtain any information from Parks Victoria has come to naught. Are we surprised? No. Are we frustrated and disappointed? Absolutely.

Our concern is for the long term vision for Coolart. Parks Victoria appear to have no plan other than an outdated document from 1998 and no strategies for developing a new plan or at least achieving some of the goals originally identified more than twenty years ago. As a committee, we strive to support the Parks Vic team on the ground but they too are limited in their ability to at minimum, maintain the property; the resources simply are not there. It is my opinion that Parks Victoria is good at environmental conservation and over the near fifty years of public ownership, Coolart has benefitted from the work done by many volunteers and passionate rangers. But when it comes to building assets, Parks is failing us. Not only has no money been spent on activating the buildings, insufficient funds have been spent on maintaining the existing infrastructure hence the ongoing deterioration that we have witnessed. And the response - close the buildings to the public which only hides the problem - out of sight, out of mind. The tragedy of this is that I believe Coolart estate is the great untold story of the evolution of Victoria. Few properties offer such a wealth of history and culture. Coolart has been owned by politicians, explorers, farming innovators and environmentalists, society families and forward thinking settlers. The site is a significant area for the Bunurong and the house represents the history of architecture and domestication since federation yet these stories remain untold. We need new champions because sadly it won't happen under the watch of Parks Vic.

Julie Ebbott
FOC President.

What do you think?

Coolart is a state government owned property - owned by the people for the people. Regardless of our opinion, we would like to hear from you because what you think will help to inform us as to how best to proceed to the greatest benefit of Coolart. Email your thoughts to: info@coolart.org.au

Around the site

The FOC Committee continues to financially back volunteer activities around the site and fund minor works. It has taken more time than we thought but finally have an agreement in place to re-carpet the observatory. We wait with bated breath and send out our thanks to Flooring Xtra in Hastings for their assistance.



These beautiful nesting boxes constructed by Michael Mann are in place and residents have made themselves at home. The Committee has extended funding for Michael to continue his great work.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Bill & Ethel, John & Carolyn - The Musketeers

By Brian Thomas

After 22 years volunteering for the bush weeding group Bill Dickinson has finally retired. His wife Ethel retired 2 years ago after 20 years contribution. Brian Thomas acknowledges their incredible contribution together with fellow 'musketeers' John & Carolyn Mills who between them have contributed more than 60 years of volunteering at Coolart.

It's impossible to write about Bill's contribution to Coolart without including fellow volunteers; his wife Ethel and friends John and Carolyn, all of whom volunteered at Coolart for many years and although Bill carried on the longest, I see them as the core of our bush crew volunteers. So although this is to honour Bill's contribution it really is in appreciation of all four of the musketeers' work.

To begin at the beginning. After retirement Bill and Ethel came to Coolart one day and spoke to Jenny about volunteer work. Jenny outlined what was available and they went away to think about it. Sometime later they returned to volunteer their services and were impressed when Jenny not only remembered them but also their names, but if you know Bill and Ethel you will also know why Jenny did.

Bill's sheer physicality was always so impressive, despite me being many years younger, I felt that I was often hard pressed to keep up with him on working bees. I remember being made aware of how fast Bill worked when I put the team to work trimming back the overgrown New Zealand flax in the garden. After explaining the task I left them to it while I attended to another job, (expecting the progress to be relatively slow as it was quite a tough job to dig the extra growth out by the roots), but I hadn't figured on Bill. I came back after a very short interval to find a huge pile of flax on the lawn and a tiny remnant in the bed – and it wasn't even smoko time!

Their core work centred around revegetation; a lot of tree planting which for most people is the fun part of revegetation but they were uncomplaining when I threw them into bush weeding as well and the results we achieved (with the help of other volunteers) through regular weekly working bees over a period of many years were astounding. To make a difference to weed infestations takes a dedicated application of time and energy on a regular basis and we were able to achieve this.



Over the years they never baulked at any of the challenges I threw at them and the tasks were many and varied; they would also volunteer their services if they heard us planning other activities like music concerts or art exhibitions and without even waiting to be asked they would say "We can help with that" and would make themselves available and make our job so much easier as a result.

One of their greatest and most endearing of attributes was how they made newcomers welcome to the group. No matter what the age or background they would always welcome new volunteers and make them feel at ease and comfortable and spread their love of life and volunteering at Coolart. This was reflected at morning tea when home-made cakes and biscuits were produced and much happy chatter and laughter ensued. We were so lucky to have them as volunteers during our tenure at Coolart and so pleased that we can still count them as the very best of friends in our personal life too.

Brian Thomas

Coolart - where history meets nature

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Chris Colquhoun

By Loie Sharp

Chris Colquhoun is an artist, a gardener and an environmentalist. She is a mother, an auntie and a grandmother. Chris is a long-time member of Friends of Coolart. Now in her nineties, she continues to lead a rich, generous and busy life.

Chris became involved as a volunteer at Coolart close to forty years ago supplying plants for sale in the then newly established FOC Plant Shop. The shop, established by volunteer Jo Eabry was a fund-raising endeavour offering a wide range of products for sale to raise money for Coolart. Many years later, the FOC shop continues to raise funds for Coolart and Chris continues to grow stock for sale.

Passionate about native flora and fauna, Chris has an enormous depth of knowledge and affinity with the local environment. Along with propagating native plants from seed for The Tree Project and for Mornington Peninsula Koala Care (MPKC) she grows an abundance of fruit and vegetables, that keeps friends well supplied.

I asked Chris about her experiences and memories of volunteering at Coolart:

"The charm of Coolart is almost tangible as you drive, cycle or walk the driveway - perhaps spotting a koala or a huddle of Tawny Frogmouths - en route to the visitor centre. Always a welcome there, then on under those majestic trees and through the garden to the grand old house. And it was in a room there that Jo Eabry started the Plant Shop and that I joined her band of helpers. We sold donated books and magazines, and books on commission from Farrells of Mornington, and plants, and soon needed more space so moved to a larger room and the veranda; another move, to the laundry, and eventually to the present site, with two rooms and the spacious, bricked veranda where we could display the plants and where keeping them watered was no longer a challenge - there was a hose! Indoors we had more space for books, fresh and dried flowers, that wonderful category "bric a brac", Bill's excellent handmade walking sticks, honey and home-made jams and cordials, until a change in health regulations closed down that line of trading.

Sometimes the Shop was buzzing with visitors, and we would have a goodly sum at the end of the day to take to the office to help fund improvements for Coolart. And when the weather turned dreadfully inclement, there would only be the Swamp hens for company and the takings - nil!

The joys and privileges of volunteering are many and varied: a climb up a shaky staircase and rickety ladder to the tower, with its stunning views over gardens and paddocks; helping Jenny and Brian hang the entries to the then annual Art Show; the visits by the Chernobyl children and their Melbourne hosts, for a fun day at Coolart - games, clowns, the beach, a barbecue and lots and lots of food. I wonder what memories those kids, adults now, have of their holiday long ago and far from home?

Coolart is a joyous place and association with it is an honour I'll always treasure."



Long time shop volunteers Maria Chemis (L) shares a cuppa with Chris Colquhoun (R)

Coolart - where history meets nature

Friends of Coolart is a volunteer organisation that works to preserve and enhance the environmental, cultural and educational values of Coolart Wetlands and Homestead for the public benefit..

The work carried out by the Friends of Coolart complements 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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