

## **Gardening through Friendship for 70 Years**

The Leura Garden Club began on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1955 when Mr. W Gillham, the Curator of Admiralty House in Sydney met with a group of locals interested in gardening to discuss the formation of a garden education club. They met at the Soldiers Memorial Hall (now Country Women's Association). The following April a meeting was held at the home of Mr Scobie which formally established the Blue Mountains Home Garden Education Club. Mr Ralph Bennett was elected as the first President. Early records are scarce as they were destroyed in the 1957 fires, but Margaret Erwood wrote a history of the first 40 years which can be found on our website [www.leuragardenclub.org.au](http://www.leuragardenclub.org.au) under About Us.

Over the years meetings were held on Friday evenings at the Leura Public School, the Soldiers Memorial Hall, St Davids, and St Albans. In the early days members brought a plate, and supper was a feature of club meetings. Miss Adelaide Pike often hosted the Christmas party at her home Accuel, on Churchill Street Leura, the former French consulate's summer place. It was not until 1967 that meetings were changed to daytime and today's format was adopted. In 1959 the committee structure was set up to deal with business with the Secretary reporting back to the full meeting. The activities included talks by members and guests, trips to gardens, and the annual festival of flowers. Garden rambles were called garden inspections, and lots of hard work went into preparing before a garden club visit.

In June 1960, the word education was removed from the name, and in 1973, Leura replaced 'Blue Mountains' in recognition of other garden clubs established in the mountains. In 2022 the word home was removed from the name. So, the club is now known as The Leura Garden Club.

The library was established in 1961 with many past members and their families bequeathing funds to buy books. In the beginning, members were charged fines for overdue books.

In 1962 the club first affiliated with Gardening Clubs of Australia. This lapsed for a time but was re-established in 1972.

In 1973 Mrs Thelma Mawson became President and held the post until 1982 during this time the club flourished. It's interesting to note that for the first 20 years membership was around 20 people but then exploded to 159 in 1981. When Allan Seale spoke in 1975, over 100 people attended St Albans which was bursting at the seams. Up to 80 people often attended meetings during this period. In 1979 advertising was stopped as there were too many members for the size of the hall. When Mrs Mawson retired, she donated a silver tray to the club which was used as a prize for the club championships during the Spring show.

In 1971 the club acquired two patrons: Dr North and Mr Sorenson. Both played a significant role in the development of the club. Since their deaths, they have never been replaced.

In 1975 a competition to design a club badge was held and Mrs Doris Dillon won with her design of two daffodils with green edging.

In mid-1980 the club was advised they were successful with their bid to host the Garden Club of Australia (GCA) convention at the Hydro Majestic in Medlow Bath in September 1981. The whole venue was booked out for the convention and the club collected all the funds for the bookings and registration of guests. Flowers were put in every room and members were on the information desk for 4 long days. It all went off without a hitch. In

2011 the GCA convention again came to the mountains. Many members volunteered to assist with various events and trips, not to mention our club providing morning tea for 226 people in Noel Roscoe's Garden as part of the tour of Leura Gardens. Trish Fewer volunteered her cottage garden and also organised two of her neighbours to do the same. Speaking on behalf of the GCA Convention Committee, Leura did us proud – sumptuous morning tea, stunning gardens, and volunteers so warm and friendly that the Convention was judged a huge success by all who attended.

In 1986 the club was incorporated, and Mrs Joan Wearne received the Australia Margaret Davis Award from Gardening Clubs of Australia.

In 1992 an attempt was made to fine people who did not wear their name badges at meetings, but this was abandoned after fierce member resistance!

Over the following 30 years, the club meetings continued to host interesting speakers which generally attracted 40-60 members each month, lots of tours during the year, flower shows, competitions, and social events. Noel Roscoe started his educational series on "This Month in your Garden" which he only stopped in 2023 when he left the area. The Leura Railway Garden was cared for by Liz Cunningham and helpers. Membership settled at around 100 in 2010. Since COVID membership has fallen however meetings still engender lively discussion and a friendly atmosphere. After each meeting members host a garden ramble, and we go to lunch at a nearby café.

The list of people who have worked tirelessly to keep this club functioning is large. It has always been a club where members help each other to get the job done in a friendly and caring manner. Those who took on the

President's role and served on the committee over the years are responsible for its continued success. The best way to recognise their efforts is to thank them and to take a few moments to read the history recorded on our website. It's truly a community effort that improves the community we live in by connecting us through our common love of gardens.

The club has always played a role in the community. In 1970 the club was concerned with beautifying the entrance to Leura, mainly to hide the proposed caravan park. In that same year, the club supported the establishment of the Rhododendron Garden in Blackheath. The club also managed the gardens at the Memorial Gate and then in 1989 established Leura Railway Garden and continues to maintain it today. Members also assist with the Leura Festival which raises money for the Katoomba Hospital and members have managed the Rotary garden at Katoomba Hospital grounds until recently. In 1993 \$1250 was donated to the Katoomba/Leura Bush Fighting Brigade. The club supported the dry food collected for the Salvation Army Xmas appeal. Then sweets were collected for Xmas for Ritz Nursing Home patients, to be given out during carol singing. More recently with the support of the Blue Mountains City Council, a bird bath and some bird-attracting plants were donated to Leura Public School and plants for a restoration project on Everglades Road in Leura.

The club received an environmental award from Blue Mountains City Council in September 1991 and in May 1992, received an award from the Minister for Transport Bruce Baird for the club's work on the railway garden. This plaque was given to the Fairmont to display to the public. The Fairmount resort donated \$500 for use at the railway garden which allowed

a fence to be built to protect the plants from vandals who were stealing them.

In 2022 all our records were archived and passed over to the Blue Mountains Historical Society for safekeeping.

### **A quick glimpse at some influential speakers**

In 1965 a speaker from the Katoomba and District Wildlife Preservation Society spoke about conservation and the dangers of destruction of our forests. Today that same group is warning us about environmental weeds that threaten our bush.

Alderman Margaery Anderson talked about the Pioneer Way, a project to establish parks and resting places between Emu Plains and Mount Victoria. There is a rest spot in her memory on Scott Avenue in Leura.

In 1971 Mr and Mrs Kaub spoke about conservation and deplored the proposal to bulldoze part of the Boyd Plateau to replant with softwood for the proposed woodchip mill at Oberon fearing the waste would pollute the Fish River.

Mary Moody made presentations in March 1989 and again in March 1991 she spoke about the restoration of Kingsford Smith Park. In 2002 she talked about her book Au Revoir. She will speak again at our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary today.

In closing, we should be proud of the work this club does to maintain a sense of community within Leura. While membership is lower than in the past we still attract new members and let's hope it keeps going for another 70 years.

