

# La Trobe's Cottage Garden News

## Autumn Update – March 2015

Summer in Melbourne is always a hard time in the garden because of the scorching temperatures. But we were lucky this year, we did not have any 'scorchers' and summer was rather mild. We lost only one plant our Waratah camellia *Camellia japonica* 'Anemoniflora'. Luckily, we still have another one and it is thriving. With lots of help from our volunteers over the last few months our garden is looking good.



Blue Russel Lupin

The Friends of La Trobe's Cottage have been busy. Talented landscape artist Jo Reitze donated a painting of the cottage and garden to the C J La Trobe Society. It was unveiled by Gardening Australia's presenter Jane Edmanson on La Trobe's Birthday Celebration in late March. It will be on display in the Reception area soon. But meanwhile if you like to support the Cottage you can buy postcards of the painting.



Unveiling of Jo Reitze's painting



Jane Edmanson (C) with Jo Reitze (R) and Sandi Pullman

We also asked Jo and Jane if they would plant together a beautiful new *Camellia japonica* 'Welbankii' (white flowers) which we purchased from the Growing Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. It is listed as early as 1843 in the Colonial Plants Database (Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection, Sydney Living Museums, Historic Houses Trust of NSW) as *Camellia Japonica welbankii* [*Camellia japonica* cv. *Welbankiana*], in the catalogue of plants cultivated at Camden Park. This was the property of John Macarthur who is recognised as being a pioneer of the Australian wool industry and also very interested in horticulture.

### What's Happening in the Garden?

In order to add some autumn colour we had decided to try growing dahlias in our crescent moon bed. The soil was prepared with lots of organic material and to our delight they have done really well. They face north and have not so far attracted any of the mildews to which dahlias are so susceptible. Another great success was our Russel Lupins, which we had not grown in the garden before. They did brilliantly and have self-seeded which is always appreciated by gardeners. Sadly, however, we had only three apples this year – two *Malus* 'Ribston



The apples ripening

Pippin' and one *M. Pomme de Neige* variety - but that is an improvement on last year when we had none.

### La Trobe's Elm

The good news about the root cuttings of the original elm that La Trobe planted in the Botanic Gardens to celebrate the Port Phillip District's separation from New South Wales is that the City of Melbourne have agreed to include it in the planting scheme of the Shrine Reserve landscape improvement plan. They decided to send off the cuttings to Metro Trees who will graft them onto *Ulmus glabra* rootstock. This will help them get a good start in life. It will probably take about two years for them to grow to a height that will be suitable to plant near the Cottage.

### To watch out for this coming Spring

We know that La Trobe loved jonquils as his friend Georgiana McCrae wrote in 1844 'The boys walked ... to Jolimont with jonquil-bulbs for Mr La Trobe'. So this year we have splurged in purchasing lots of lovely bulbs to create a grand spring display. With the help of Christine at Hancock and Co. of Menzies Creek we were able to choose some very special double flowered early daffodils:

- *Narcissus* Golden Phoenix (1777) and
- *Narcissus* Van Sion (pre 1620).

We have also purchased a hundred *Anemone* 'De Caen' to create an absolute splash of colour to announce spring is coming and they will be planted along the path that leads into the garden to welcome you.

### Bird Bath

It was decided that a permanent water source in the garden for the birds and the bees would be a good idea. The reasoning behind this idea is that once the bees know there is permanent water, they will regularly visit our garden and when the trees are flowering stop for the pollen, consequently pollinating the apples resulting in a bumper crop.

Researching the history of bird baths was challenging because there is not a lot of information about their evolution; it seems they are a modern invention and developed in the middle 19th century as a result of the industrial revolution and a middle class who had money to spend on garden ornaments. Before the 1840s, there were no such things; they were either depressions in the ground or in rocks, puddles or hollows of old trees. The firm of James Pulham and Son of Broxbourne, Hertfordshire were the first to make bird baths in the 1840s, but Melbourne at that time was fairly basic and frivolous items like bird baths would not have been available here. If La Trobe did have a bird bath it probably would have been something like an old cooking pot or maybe a log that was lying around. Besides, the original site of the cottage was on a rise, just up from the flood plains of the Yarra River, so there was probably quite a lot of water lying around and he would not have needed one. But we do as the cottage is not in its original position and the flood plains of the Yarra are no longer there.

Luckily a relative of one of our volunteers lives in the Otways – a lovely connection with La Trobe who rode down there in 1845-46 – and he was happy to make a bird bath log for us. He found a suitable yellow box stump in his wood pile and chiselled a depression about 5cm deep, just enough to hold water. It has been water proofed with glue (rather than bees wax), is positioned in the shade and gets filled by the garden sprinklers at night. The birds love it! So far we have



The yellow box bird bath

had honey eaters and butcher birds drinking from it, but as yet no bees.

If you would like to know more about early Victorian bird baths visit the Claude Hitchings site <http://pulham.org.uk> and you will be able to see *The Garden Ornament Catalogue* of James Pulham and Son.



Bird bath with a noisy butcher bird



Russel Lupin