

A Brief History of the Leura Home Garden Club

(Text of an address to the Club by Treasurer Terry Goulden)

The club started out in 1955 as an informal group of people interested in gardening. They wanted to form a garden education club based on a plan put forward by Mr. W Gilham, Curator of Admiralty House in Sydney. They set out to exchange information amongst themselves and to draw in knowledge from outside, especially relating to which plants could be grown in this climate. Meetings were held in private homes.

The foundation of the club can be variously set between January and April 1955 when it is believed that the Blue Mountains Home Garden Education Club was actually formed and a President elected. Unfortunately the early records went up in smoke during the 1957 fires so our information was based on the memories of long standing members when the history was first written forty years later in 1995 by Mrs. Margaret Erwood a long standing Secretary of the Club.

The first formal meetings of the club were held in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall and from the outset these involved guest speakers with Paul Sorensen being the most noted. Later the meetings were moved to Leura Public School and in 1959 the first flower show was held the auspices of the Royal Horticultural Society of which we were an affiliate.

In 1960 the word education was removed from the club's name which was actually meaningless as our club has leaned heavily to education throughout our existence. So much so that when the club stopped holding twice yearly flower shows (in the 1980s) education once again became its main focus with a emphasis on guest speakers, Month in the Garden talks, our extensive library (set up in 1961), the back page article of our newsletter and our publication "A Year in the Garden" all of which worked together to help generations of club members to adapt their gardens to suit the Blue Mountains climate.

In 1962 we affiliated with the foreunner of Garden Clubs of Australia and it is also the year that Everglades was acquired by the National Trust and many of our members have worked voluntarily with that historic garden. In 1963 we started our popular trading table.

During the 70s and 80s membership waxed and waned but strengthened when the decision was finally taken to move from an evening meeting to a daytime meeting and a permanent home was found in the St. Alban's Church Hall on the third Tuesday. Meetings were once again heavy with guest speakers and social activities such as bus trips to interesting gardens became a feature.

This era probably saw the biggest change in the focus of our club with the twice yearly flower show competitions waning and finally being abandoned and lately even the small monthly competition were phased out. The club focussed more on education, information exchange between members and social activities - a focus we keep to this day. Competiveness gave way to mutual information exchange and help and I personally think that our club is all the better for it.

Our club has continued its community spirited volunteer activities such as the Leura Railway Garden; The Blue Mountains Hospital Garden; The Leura Garden Festival and in the last few years, Garden Force.

So if we can sum up our club we would have to say: we educate ourselves on gardening; we exchange information freely amongst ourselves; we enjoy ourselves socially and while we may not be a flash trendy club we have worked solidly for our membership and our community for the whole of our 60 years.