

HOW THE LEURA GARDEN CLUB REACHED FORTY

On 21 January 1955, a meeting was held in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall (now the CWA), Megalong Street Leura. It was attended by a group of local people interested in gardening. They met to discuss a plan put forward by Mr W. Gillham, Curator, Admiralty House, Sydney, to form a "garden education club" through which they could exchange information amongst themselves and gain knowledge from outside about what to grow in this climate. A few weeks later, Mr Gillham again visited the mountains to show films and slides and to talk further about setting up a local garden club.

On 20 April, a meeting was held at the Katoomba home of Mr Scobie and a club to be known as the "Blue Mountains Home Garden Education Club" was actually formed. Mr Ralph Bennett became the first President; there were approximately a dozen founding members and the annual subscription was set at 10s 6d.

Information about the first years of the club has been hard to find because the minute book and early records were destroyed in the fires of 2 December 1957. It has been necessary to ask lots of questions and rely on the memories of early members. Several of these still live in the mountains and take an interest in the Garden Club. The longest serving member is Mrs Thelma Mawson, who joined in 1956, and has been actively involved ever since as she served a nine-year term as President and is a Life Patron of the Club. I am most grateful for her help and also that of Mrs Daisy Jarrett, Mrs Phyllis Mitchell, Mrs Una Orchard, Mrs Jean Sowden and Mr and Mrs Rudi Weiss. During the early years of the club, a garden bulletin was published approximately monthly. A few copies of these have recently come to light and they have helped fill in details of the very early times.

During the rest of 1955 the club met in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall and among the early members were Mr Sam Scobie, Mr Chas. Tresize, Mrs Childs of York Street Katoomba, Mr and Mrs Thompson of Lawson, Miss Grace Mitchell, Miss M.E. Mills and Miss Attwater of Wentworth Falls and Mr Jack Hartcher. They met in the evenings, exchanged information, plants etc., and finished with supper provided by the members. (Mrs Weiss' cakes seemed to feature strongly). It was a small friendly group.

As well, during 1955, there were two demonstrations by Mr Paul Sorensen at the nursery – on the 8 May "how to work soil" and on 29 May "Composting and its value to plant life". In June, Miss Crossman and Mr Sorensen gave a slide lecture on gardens and Mr Sorensen showed a film on general planting. In July, Mr Sorensen demonstrated fruit tree pruning at the Wentworth Falls Grammar School. In August, there was a day of visits to several gardens to illustrate garden layout – including that of Mr G Powell of Katoomba and the Council gardens at Echo Point. A library night was held at Mr Sorensen's in September and a visit to inspect Mr Caton's orchids in Leura in October. The last activity was another slide showing by Mr Sorensen in October. At some point through the year he became the club's patron.

Meetings continued as before in 1956 and special activities included, in January, a visit to the Wentworth Falls garden of Miss Mills and Miss Attwater, in March, a repeat of Mr Sorensen's "Composting", in April, Mr Sorensen on pruning small trees at the nursery, and "Pruning" documentary film at the Bullaburra Public Hall and in May Mr Sorensen again demonstrated pruning at the nursery – this time of older trees. In May, there was an excursion to *Nevallan*, Kurrajong and in October a trip to Mt Wilson for the spring blossoms. No details are available for the remainder of the year. There is a note, however, that finances were tight and funds had to be supplemented with raffles and the sale of coleus plants.

In mid-1956, Mr Bennett because of pressure of business, felt compelled to resign as President, but remained as a member and Mr J. Hartcher, headmaster of Leura Public School, took his place. In this year too, the club was granted affiliation with the Royal Horticultural Society.

1957 too was an active year. Garden inspections and showing of films apparently occurred regularly. Mr Scobie gave two talks on the growing of vegetables and herbs and there was a demonstration of floral art. Miss Thistle Harris was invited as a guest speaker.

The formal records of the club begin in February 1958, with Mr Ralph Bennett chairing the meeting in the RSL Hall with 19 members present. There was £66.8.10 in the bank and the hall hire was 15/-. A letter of resignation was received from Mr Hartcher, but by May he was back in the chair. Mr Anderson offered a question and answer box and Mr Weiss gave a most informative talk on bulb planting. Some time during 1957, Mr J. Anderson (*Yester Grange*, Wentworth Falls, brother of Mrs Jean Sowden) became the editor of the garden bulletin and it changed to become a comprehensive garden advice publication. It is a great pity that only a few issues for 1958 seem to have survived and there are no later ones.

The Annual General Meeting was held on 17 June (see full list of office bearers attached). The minutes for the rest of 1958 suggest that the average attendance was about 20 people and that one of the chief concerns was to establish a cold climate arboretum in Lone Pine Avenue – in conjunction with the Pioneer Way Association. The garden club was to plant a scarlet oak. Three days later, on 20 June, Miss Thistle Harris (Mrs Stead) gave a talk on native plants for the home garden at the Wentworth Falls Public School of Arts – illustrated with colour slides.

The club's secretary, Miss Adelaide Pike, lived at *Bon Accueil*, the former French consulate's summer place at No 4 Churchill Street, Leura, and she was the hostess each year for the Christmas party.

In February 1959, it was proposed to have an "Autumn Festival of Flowers" on 18th April in the Methodist Church Hall, Grose Street, to be combined with a plant stall. A separate bank account was opened and any profits from the show were to be used for future shows. According to the minutes, even then flower shows were found to be a lot of work and there was discussion as to whether they should be continued. They must have decided it was all worthwhile, because by May they were planning a spring show for October 3, and two show committees were set up – all men in one, headed by Mr Thompson and the other all women under Miss Murray.

After the AGM in 1959, Mr R Weiss suggested that to save time at monthly meetings a committee be set up to deal with the routine business and this was agreed. On the committee were eight members – President, Secretary, Treasurer, 2 Vice-Presidents, Minute Secretary and two floor members.

In September 1959, the club moved its meeting place to the public school. The spring show was held at the school and made a profit of £47.15.0. The money was given to the P&C who used it to buy a projector. Perhaps the garden club used the projector too – slides seem to have been popular. Miss Pike again hosted the Christmas party. Everyone took a plate and there was a late afternoon/early evening barbecue.

In February 1960, Miss Pike reported that seven members of the Upper Blue Mountains Garden Club had attended the inaugural meeting of the Lower Blue Mountains Club. They planned to meet on the first Friday of each month in the Methodist Church Hall, Springwood. A letter of congratulations was sent.

In autumn 1960 a non-competitive show, open to non-members as well as members, was held. It was held at the school, with proceeds to go to the school, the heavy work being done by the men of the P&C. Unfortunately for the school, the minutes state that: "the show was an artistic but not financial success." There is mention here of a donation from Dr and Mrs North.

At the June AGM it was decided to remove the word "Education" from the club's name so that it became the Blue Mountains Home Garden Club. In future, the annual general meeting was to be held in February (not June) and the auditor, Mr Gray, drafted a revised constitution. There were to be three committees: a Programme Committee, consisting of the executive and five members; a Show Committee with the executive and six members and a Supper Committee. There was talk of finding means of attracting new members by a regular question time and of members being asked to bring garden produce and items of interest, e.g. unusual plants.

In August 1960 it was advised that the club was to affiliate with the Pioneer Way Association and so the club would have a representative on the Pioneer Way executive. Mrs Jeavons was elected.

The Spring Show had 120 entries in the horticultural section, 94 in the children's section and 72 for decorative art. They made a profit of £35.0.0 and £30 was given to the school.

In these early minutes there is not much mention of guest speakers. With an attendance of about 15-20 people they seemed to have relied on exchanging information among members and on slides. In October, however, Mr Deane from the Orchid House at Valley heights was a speaker and during the year Mr Paul Sorensen gave another grafting and pruning demonstration. Garden inspections were an important activity. Gardens included those of Dr North in Sublime Point Road Leura, Mrs Gilfillian at Wentworth Falls, the Misses Mills and Attwater of Allen Crescent Wentworth Falls and Clive Evatt's at Leura.

In 1961 the annual meeting was duly held in February and it was decided to set up a library of good reference books for the use of members. There was a library committee of three with Vice-President, Mr Gray, who was also show committee chairman, the first librarian. The committee drew up a list of recommended books to the cost of £30 and it planned to exhibit these at the autumn show. All books were to be covered and fines for late returns levied.

In March Mr Weiss spoke on bulb planting, particularly in containers and in April the National Heart Campaign asked the club to assist in providing attendants for gardens open for inspection on 29 and 30 April. In May the club ordered its first letterheads from Bennett's (£3 for 500), and Mr C. Smith from Bilpin showed slides of his liliiums.

In June 1961 there is a note that three new members were welcomed. Although no attendance figures are quoted it does seem that the club membership had been fairly static for some time. Evidence: the same names keep recurring.

Throughout the year efforts were made to have a number of speakers. In June the guest speaker was Mr Keogh from the Rose Society of NSW and in August Mr Booker from Springwood talked about cacti and succulents. There were four new members this month and more later in the year so possibly they were attracted by more activities. The horticultural section of the spring show was made more competitive but not the floral art. Mr Anderson invited members to his property *Yester Grange* at Wentworth Falls on 15 October and suggested that if other gardens were open for inspection the club would be able to arrange outings to see them.

The end of the year saw the club with a credit balance in the general account of £35.13.8 and £34.16.11 in the show account – after giving the school £25 from the spring show profit of £35.0.11. 1961 seems to have been a most successful year.

In 1962 the secretary's report to the annual general meeting says that the membership has increased – but not by what to what – and that the library has 28 titles.

In April the members were pleased to hear that the National Trust had acquired Everglades and in May it was agreed that the club affiliate with the NSW Garden Club. (*Editor's note: This was the original Club name from 1950-1968, in 1968 the name was changed to the Garden Clubs of Australia*)

The June meeting was a panel discussion. The panel consisted of Miss Pike, Mr Weiss, Mr Gray and Mr Anderson. The latter suggested a plant exchange. By this time, the club had acquired so many books that arrangements were made to leave them at the school, rather than the librarian carry them back and forth to each meeting!

The August 1962 meeting was cancelled because of snow. Late in the year, Dr North and Dr Claffey opened their gardens for members' inspections. In November, Stan Peck (from Penrith) was the speaker on striking cuttings.

In 1963, the minutes for the February AGM list 21 actual names, with two new members, and there were two more new members in March. Finances seem to have been a concern this year, as members were constantly being urged to prepare plants for the spring flower plant stall to boost the take and a supper charge on 1/- was introduced. The committee was asked to get busy! Many subscriptions remain unpaid; many library books were overdue – so what else is new? In June two more new members joined, the speaker was a gentleman from Yates and the first Trading Table was set up with Mrs Phyllis Mitchell in charge.

In July there were 13 apologies, which either indicates a much larger membership – or that people just didn't want to come out at night in winter. Finances had deteriorated with £8.8.9 and £10.14.7 in the two accounts. There was a Show Committee of 14 people, but no indication of what each did. Mr Anderson composed and sang *The Song of the Pioneer Bay*, accompanied by Mr Hartcher on the piano.

1964's autumn show made a loss and bad weather was blamed. Mr and Mrs Gray took 3rd prize in the small garden section of the Herald competition. In April, the Speaker was Mr Paul Sorensen, showing slides of construction and renovating work in gardens. In May Mrs Thompson spoke on fuchsias, her field of expertise, and in June Mr C. J. Gray of the Lower Blue Mountains Garden Club, talked about his prize-winning garden in Springwood. In July only six members turned up – the weather was very bad. They discussed abandoning July and August meetings.

At the Annual General Meeting in 1965 it was decided to change the meetings to the first Tuesday in the month. In March a representative of the Katoomba and District Wildlife Preservation Society spoke about the Conservation Hut at the Valley of the Waters – and stressed the dangers of the destruction of forests.

Flower shows were becoming more common – two were held in Katoomba in March. An autumn flower show was discussed at the March meeting, but incredibly it was agreed that because of the prolonged dry weather, no final decision would be taken until the 6 April meeting. Later in the year meetings were brought forward to 7.30 pm and suppers reduced to tea and biscuits; the charge was dropped. There was discussion, time and time again, on how to improve meetings. The year ended with a Christmas party for 26 members and friends at Miss Pike's in Churchill Street.

President Hartcher must have been ill and retired towards the end of 1965 because he was welcomed back, convalescent, to chair the 1966 Annual General Meeting. This was held in the new CWA Hall but the newly elected President, Mr G. Harley was to approach the new headmaster about having future meetings at the school. Meetings were changed back to the third Tuesday in the month and a club questionnaire circulated. Members were asked if they wanted garden inspections, talks and demonstrations on gardening and floral art –

native plants and conservation, exchange table for cuttings, seeds etc. There is no record of what was decided.

Some problems seem to have arisen about the meeting place. In March the meeting was again at the school but not in April when they were back in the CWA Hall where they remained, while the President worried about raising money for the rent - \$2 (or £1). Five cents would have to be charged for supper.

In May Alderman Margery Anderson (Mr Anderson's wife) was guest speaker on "The Pioneer Way" – a project to establish parks and resting places between Emu Plains and Mount Victoria along the route travelled by the three explorers.

The club's financial embarrassment had been overcome by June, when the bank balances stood at \$61.42 and \$25.80 and it was decided to buy a tree for the CWA Hall's garden - suggested was an 8ft conifer for \$4. Mrs P Mitchell was running the opportunity table and it was agreed to take the money into club revenues. A suggestion to move to day meetings was put forward but defeated. There is a note that in July apologies were received from Mesdames Charlesworth, Mawson, Mitchell and Orchard. Mr Weiss spoke on landscaping. In September only 14 members were present because of heavy rain.

At the beginning of October 1966 a spring flower show was held in St. Alban's Hall – the rent for which was \$10.50. 500 show schedules were printed. The plant stall took \$5.35, refreshments \$9.30, raffle \$17.90 and the door \$41.24 – a strange amount. Later in the year Mrs Charlesworth's garden in Sublime Point Road was opened for inspection, as was that of Mr and Mrs Orchard, *The Braes*, Grose Street Leura.

In 1967 it was decided for the first time to hold a January meeting but to cancel that for July. Attendances varied greatly, from a high of 29 in March to only 11 in August, with the October meeting cancelled for lack of a quorum (10). The autumn show was non-competitive but made a profit of \$20.55, after paying St. Alban's \$17.50 rent for the two days. The subscription/membership of the Royal Horticultural Society was cancelled but no reason was given and Miss Pike held her usual Christmas party.

At the Annual General Meeting in 1968 the Treasurer complained about the bad year just finished. Twenty-five subscriptions had been received but these were not enough to pay the club's way. Membership was the lowest since 1960 and 3 times in the previous year there had been insufficient members to hold a meeting. To save money it was decided to stop advertising meetings, to have more activities, such as garden inspections, barbecues, and bus trips, and question and answer sessions were again suggested. There was also a suggestion of changing meetings either to the daytime or back to a Friday night. Throughout the year there was discussions on poor attendances – again no quorum in August.

The Spring Flower Show had to be cancelled for lack of members. Mrs Mawson and Miss Pike suggested that the club needed a patron, who was interested in the club, but not necessarily a public figure. In September Mrs Mawson, seconded by Mrs Charlesworth, moved a notice of motion that the club meet in the daytime. A committee consisting of Mr Harley, Miss Pike and Mrs Mitchell was formed to consider the implications of this change. The motion was put to the November meeting, when there were 12 members present. The motion was carried 10 for and 2 against. The new arrangement (proposed by Miss Pike and seconded by Mrs Orchard) was to start in January with morning tea at 10.00am and the meeting at 10.30am.

In late 1968 there was correspondence about a proposed Rhododendron Festival at Blackheath and from the Blue Mountains District Anzac Memorial Hospital about the possibility of opening gardens in Leura. The club's year ended with a Christmas afternoon tea at Miss Pike's – now at 14 Blaxland Road Leura.

At the first day meeting in January 1969 there were 11 members, four apologies and seven visitors, all of whom joined. Mrs Hangar, President of the CWA confirmed the availability of the hall for a rent of \$1 (half the 1966 charge). 16 members and six visitors, all joining, came in February and it was decided to advertise meetings again to try to attract new members. The club lost two active members through the changed meeting times (Mr and Mrs Weiss?).

Speakers through the year included Mr Miller from Blackheath on compost, Dr North on using organic fertilisers and loosening rather than digging the soil and Mr Weiss answered questions. Gardens opened for members' inspections were those of the Orchards, Mr Harley and Miss Pike. Alderman Margery Anderson again opened the spring show, in which there were 137 entries. The profit was \$30.72, so the club was encouraged to press on with plans for an autumn show.

From the records 1970 was a fairly uneventful year with attendance at meetings between 20 to 25 people and no autumn show eventuated. It is, however, hard to get a clear picture as the club was without a secretary for most of the year. For some months there were two set of minutes and for others none. In January there was no meeting because there was an excursion to M C. Smith's liliium nursery at Bilpin. Mrs Mitchell's plant exchange book was well used and there is mention of a Mr Slade as guest speaker – Colin? In August Mr Paul Sorensen spoke about establishing a rhododendron garden on 43 acres in Ridgewell Road Blackheath. There is some correspondence from the Garden Clubs of Australia about why the membership of the Leura Home Garden Club had been allowed to lapse. Members seemed to show interest mostly in local affairs and organisations.

By the end of 1970 there had been a good spring show and the club once again had a secretary.

Mr and Mrs Kaub, the first speakers in 1971 talked about conservation and deplored the proposal to bulldoze part of the Boyd Plateau to replant with softwood for a proposed woodchip mill at Oberon. There were fears that wastes would pollute the Fish River.

Two shows were held this year – they were too big for the CWA Hall so St Alban's was used. Both were apparently very successful. There is a note that professional florists were banned from exhibiting at shows. Perhaps to encourage members to exhibit flower arrangements, the September speaker was a Mrs Matthews who talked on the subject and gave a demonstration.

In October Mr R. D. Overton, Secretary of the Blue Mountains Group of the Society for Growing Australian Plants, spoke about the Glenbrook Native Plant Reserve. At this time the club was most concerned about trying to beautify the approaches to Leura, particularly as a caravan park on the corner of The Mall and the Highway was about to be built. Suggestions about boundary trees and a rockery on the corner were put forward. In spite of overtures to the Council nothing was done and the caravan park was begun in August. Members were delighted when *The Braes*, Mr and Mrs Orchard's 5 acre garden in Grose Street, won 2nd prize in the Sydney Morning Herald's spring garden competition.

Finally in 1971 the club acquired two patrons, Dr North and Mr Sorensen.

Early in 1972 Mr G. Harley resigned as President and Mr Hall was nominated. He appears to have accepted nomination and then reconsidered his decision as from March to April the position of President was left open. In April, Mrs Mawson accepted nomination – after having previously refused it – was duly elected and so began a term of almost 10 years in office.

In April 1972 the "monthly competition" was started and became a regular club activity. It was limited to financial members and to one entry per member and judged by a committee of three. By November the competition had two sections, one for one stem and the other for

three stems. Points were to be totalled every six months. In May, on the suggestion of Mr Hall, lucky door prizes donated by members were introduced.

In June 1972 the club re-joined the Garden Clubs of Australia. In September it provided helpers for Leura Garden Week and in the same month the Blackheath Rhododendron Society held a tree planting ceremony for the opening of their grounds. The club became a member of the Rhododendron Society for an annual subscription of \$4.

In spite of all this activity spring show entries were down and there was again talk about the viability of shows in general. One suggestion was that having floral art speakers would boost the floral art section and add interest to shows.

The year 1973 started with a notice of motion to change the name from the Blue Mountains Home Garden Club to the Leura Home Garden Club at the AGM in February. This was passed as it was thought necessary because of other garden clubs in the mountains. There is no indication of why they retained "Home" in the name.

A member, Miss Shiel, offered to represent the club at GCA meetings and the club voted to pay the economy train fare. Miss Adelaide Pike, one of the foundation members, was made a life member.

In March Mr Ron Rowan from the Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society spoke on dahlias. This seems to have been his first of many talks. In subsequent years he features frequently – usually several times a year. In 1974 his name appears on the committee – he must have moved to the mountains.

In mid-1973 the club decided to keep the garden at the Memorial Gate in order and working bees for a Thursday morning were held twice a month. Once again members helped on the gates of the Leura Garden Festival, which raised \$6,000.

In November Mr Stan Peck was guest speaker. To assure a good attendance paid advertisements, inviting visitors, appeared in the *Blue Mountains Gazette* for two weeks running. Records show that 38 members came along, six visitors and four new members. Average attendance at meetings in 1973 was 30.

The 1974 AGM elected a big committee with many new offices. For example for the first time the club had a social secretary. Mr Harley was made a life member and the subscription was set at \$1. In August 1974 it was increased to \$2.

An autumn show was held, St Alban's rent rose from \$10 to \$15 for the 2 days, and it was decided to continue there. By October, however, it was agreed to abandon the autumn show and replace it with small specialist shows – Dahlias in March, Chrysanthemums in May and Camellias and Daffodils in August.

During the year a club badge competition was held. Members voted on the designs and the winner was Mrs Doris Dillon. Her design of two daffodils with a green edging is still the club's badge. A memorial service was held at the reserve for Mrs Margery Anderson. There was further discussion about the problems of obtaining good speakers and a suggestion was made to replace some meetings with excursions. There is no record of what was decided.

By October work on the Memorial Gates garden had to be discontinued because of lack of help and the Council was informed.

In March 1975 Mr Alan Searle was guest speaker so St Alban's Hall was booked for the monthly meeting, which was just as well because over 100 people turned up. In July what was planned as permanent move was made to St Alban's as the CWA Hall was now too small. Rent was to be \$5 per month with a charge of 50 cents for gas.

In August the President, Mrs Mawson, was made a life member and an informal lunch was held to celebrate. This year the Royal Horticultural Society was asked to send judges for the flower shows. In October Ron Rowan became Chief Steward and a committee meeting was held to amend show rules and categories. In December the Christmas Party was also the club's 21st birthday (for January 1976).

Six stewards were appointed at the 1976 AGM – Chief Steward, Ron Rowan and H. Callcutt, S. Robinson, R. Scott, A. Hudson and V. Butcher. In June Mr R. Weiss gave a talk on remodelling gardens for easy care and the club made a donation of \$50 to the Rhododendron Society – apparently not for the first time.

In September Miss Adelaide Pike, founding and life member, died. Her sister, Veronica gave \$50 in her memory to be used at the club's discretion. It was later decided to buy books.

For the spring show complimentary tickets were sent out to the club patrons, the mayor, the rector etc. This year the club gave the blackout curtains for the hall. The material was donated by one member and made up by two others. It was also decided to pay St Alban's \$10 per month plus \$1 for heating. This too was the year when Christmas sweets for the Ritz patients were started.

By 1977 attendance at meetings was up to 80 or more. Committee meetings were held in St Alban's boardroom, at no charge. The question and answer book, which must have lapsed, was re-introduced. Dr North became the club's life patron and was presented with a badge to this effect in July. On the same day Miss Greening became a life member and was presented with her badge, as also was Mr Mawson, a life member since 1975.

Floral art classes were suggested in 1978 and Mrs Matthews often held these after meetings closed about 12 noon. Life memberships were conferred on Mrs P. Mitchell and Mr Hudson. Two speakers who attracted large audiences were Esther Dean and Stan Peck.

For some reason it had been decided to hold the AGM in January and this was done in 1979. Twenty-one people attended the first committee meeting in February and eight bus trips were planned for the year. Places visited included Swane's, Koala Park, Bathurst and Orange, *El Caballo Blanco* and Gledswood for wine tasting.

In February 1979 advertising was discontinued so that memberships would not grow. The committee was against actually restricting membership. During the year a sub-committee met and amended the constitution – how? March was a question and answer day. In April the GCA Zone Director was the speaker and the meeting was followed by inspections of the gardens of Mr and Mrs Sowden and Mr and Mrs Judd. Members brought along their own lunch. Ron Rowan spoke at both the May and August meetings.

President Thelma Mawson attended the GCA convention in Lismore. In October, at the club's suggestion, the payment to St Alban's was increased to \$20 per month. A 25th birthday party was planned for 22 January 1980 at the Leura Gardens Motor Inn - \$7.50 per head. Guest speaker was the GCA President, Mrs A. Williams Clarke. Ten foundation members attended and Mr and Mrs Geoff Sowden entertained guests at a garden afternoon tea afterwards. Publicity Officer, Miss Ivy Ward, in her piece in the *Blue Mountains Gazette*, said that no foundation members still remained in the club but that the President, Mrs Mawson was the longest serving member and just the fourth President – having been preceded by Mr R. Bennett, Mr J. Hartcher and Mr G. Harley.

In 1980 the annual subscription was increased to \$3. There was a non-competitive mini-show in March, after which the committee met to draw up a new spring show schedule, with five classes and a children's section. The rector agreed to the club erecting a marquee in the grounds for the spring plant stall.

In May Mrs Ailsa Dorward died and her family, in gratitude for the friendship extended to her, gave \$100, the interest from which was to go as a prize to the new member deemed to have made the most worthwhile contribution to the club. This continued until 1992 when falling interest rates reduced the value of the prize and the family agreed that it should be discontinued and the \$100 used to buy two very worthwhile books for the club library.

Some members started to object that the club was organising too many bus trips and asked for more speakers. The result was that the committee decided that bus trips would be held on the second Tuesday of alternate months and speakers on the other months. The third Tuesday was to be for meetings only. Once again a proposal to restrict membership was put forward but rejected.

In mid-1980 the Leura Home Garden Club was told its application to host the September 1981 convention had been successful. The Hydro-Majestic at Medlow Bath was chosen as the venue and arrangements got under way.

A collection was taken up for a presentation to Mr and Mrs Hudson. \$110 was raised. Why?

To put arrangement on a businesslike footing the club agreed that travelling expenses should be paid to guest speakers and the sums agreed upon were \$20 for those travelling from the metropolitan area and \$10 for mountain people. Immediately following the spring show a schedule for the autumn show (again competitive) was drawn up and entries raised to 10 cents each to a maximum of \$1. The club's assistant secretary became show secretary and this was recorded in an amended constitution in November.

A garden festival church service was held on 12 October 1980 and immediately following this a Canadian Spruce donated by the club was planted in the church grounds.

In 1981 membership stood at 159 but only 53 subscriptions had been paid by February. In future no membership fees were to be taken until the AGM had endorsed the subscription. Meetings were becoming lengthy and there was a suggestion to abolish the 9-30 – 9.50am morning tea but with no success. Both general meetings and committee meetings frequently continued until 12.30 or 12.45pm so in April it was decided that in future all business would be carried out at the committee meetings and that the secretary would summarise the proceedings and report them to the monthly meetings. Mr G. Liddell criticised the new format, calling it a get together not a meeting but he was outvoted.

The duties of the show secretary and the chief steward were set out and inserted into the minute book – also later those of the social secretary, librarian and publicity officer. A post box at Leura Post Office was acquired.

For some reason, in spite of making meeting shorter and more interesting, from 1980/81 attendances began to decline. There is no record of how long this trend continued or at what number attendance levelled out.

The big garden club event of 1981 was the National Convention of the Garden Clubs of Australia held from 21-25 September at the Hydro Majestic. Months of detailed preparation went into this. There is a hefty file in the club's records covering all the meticulous arrangements made for the convention. Secretary Mr George Wearne spent months covering every detail with the President, Mrs Mawson. The Hydro Majestic was closed to other guests. Four nights' accommodation with all meals cost \$150 per person. The LHGC was responsible for taking all bookings and for the registration of delegates when they arrived. Flowers were in every room and the convention took over the whole hotel. A getting-to-know you was arranged for the Monday evening, with local garden club members mixing with the delegates. An information desk operated for the whole of the 4 days of the conference and it was manned at all times by 2 members. Coach trips were arranged and the precise

organisation of fleets of taxis to take delegates to other venues reads like a military manoeuvre. Everything went off without a hitch. Members helped with a film night and there were guest speakers. Mr Wearne and Mrs Holliday were Leura's delegate and alternate delegate. Leura was warmly thanked for all its hard work. Mr Geoff Sowden was elected federal treasurer – at the convention or later? There are photos in the club scrapbook. The November meeting of the LHGC congratulated Mr and Mrs Wearne and Mr Gordon Crawford on the conference organisation.

Members worked really hard at this time. A week or so after the conference the spring show was held. Special Pyrex and pottery show vases were purchased. At the spring show Mr F. Leonard was made a life member.

The committee decided that the show account should be transferred to the Leura Bank of NSW for convenience, while the general account was left with the Commonwealth Bank in Katoomba. Both banks supported the spring 1981 and other shows. As by this time club finances were very healthy, \$150 was given to the Rhododendron Society and \$50 to the Great Pyramid appeal at the Botanic Gardens.

In 1982 Mrs Mawson retired after nearly ten years as club President. She was formally thanked and presented with a book. She was succeeded as President by Mr Gordon Crawford, who held that position from 1982-1984.

The committee decided, when planning the autumn show, that show helpers should be entitled to free tea and coffee throughout the day. By this time Mrs Billie Brown was tea convenor, having started in 1981. Complimentary show tickets were given to all life members, local speakers and to any firm that donated prizes.

1982 was declared by the United Nations to be the Year of the Tree. Mr A. Byrne represented the LHGC on the Blue Mountains Year of the Tree Committee. World Environment Day on 5 June saw the beginning of a tree-planting programme. A donation of \$50 was sent to the Glenbrook Native Plant Reserve.

In 1983 coach trips were reduced to three a year. Members had been complaining about the expense.

Mr Paul Sorensen, our club patron, died in September 1983.

In October it was resolved that the management committee of the LHGC should consist of the Executive (President, Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer) plus two Vice-Presidents, Chief Steward, Show Secretary, Social Secretary and two other members – ten in all.

In 1984, at the AGM, it was decided to have two sub-committees – show and floral art. Also the club's trestle tables were bought from St David's. It was once again agreed to have two shows a year – spring and autumn – and that at the monthly meeting before each show Chief Steward Ron Rowan would talk about and demonstrate show presentation – this is to be in place of a guest speaker. (*Editor's note: St. David's hall is the former St. David's Presbyterian Church 187-197 Leura Mall. It is now sold and used for commercial premises.*)

Later that year arrangements were made for a 30th birthday party at Wentworth Falls Country Club in January 1985. The life patron, life members and other foundation and past members were to be invited. Photos in scrap book.

At the same time the club became part of the Garden Clubs of Australia insurance scheme.

In 1985 the annual subscription was raised to \$5. Mr Bert Byrne became the club President (remained for 1986 also). In April the club put doors and locks on the section under the hall to

store show equipment. More trestles and table tops were bought from the Garden Clubs of Australia.

In October 1985 Don Burke was guest speaker. In November it was resolved to allocate \$100 each year for charitable purposes. By this time bank accounts and interest bearing deposits totalled \$1,900.00.

At the 1986 Annual General Meeting Mrs Joan Wearne presented Mrs Thelma Mawson with her Life Patron's badge. In the previous year Mrs Mawson's designation as assistant social secretary had been dropped as she agreed that as Life Patron she was ineligible to hold any club office.

A special executive meeting had to be held in January 1986 because the club was experiencing difficulties over its meeting place. The boardroom could no longer be used for committee meetings. Apparently problems were resolved because monthly meetings continued throughout the year at St. Alban's.

In January Colin Slade had been the speaker talking about taking over an established garden. In June mayor, Peter Quirk spoke about the Environment Management Plan.

At the February 1986 meeting Mrs Mawson had also announced that she intended to donate a silver tray to the club to be used as the club championship trophy at the spring show. It was awarded at the 1986 spring show and at each subsequent spring show.

That year Alan Wood became the first recipient of the Doris Dillon award. This involved only small changes to the rules e.g. it made nominations necessary.

The club was duly incorporated on 8th August 1986.

Also that year Mrs Joan Wearne received the Garden Clubs of Australia Margaret Davis Award. At the September meeting Dr John Hadley, who had known Margaret Davis when she lived in Leura, talked about her assistance with the Garden Clubs of Australia and presented Joan Wearne with an azalea.

Publicity seems to have been a worry. Publicity Officer, Mrs Joan O'Brien complained of her problems in getting local papers to print the pieces she submitted.

1987 started badly for the club when the Rector stated that the hall would no longer be available on the third Tuesday of the month. The AGM in February (when Mrs Phyllis Breakspear was elected President) and the March meeting were held in St David's Hall. As no agreement had been reached with St. Alban's, it was decided to move the club's possessions after the March show. Finally, the caravan park offered the use of its recreation room. The problems here were that there was nowhere to store the club's library and crockery and also that no meetings could be held in school holidays when the recreation room was in constant use. The offer, however, was accepted. No charge was made at first but a donation was given. Later the rent was fixed at \$25 per month plus heating. Members took home various pieces of club equipment. The spring show was held at the Wentworth Falls School of Arts and the Christmas party at the Katoomba RSL/Bowling Club. The spring show attracted 343 entries by 21 members and seven non-members and 600 schedules were printed.

At the Perth Conference of the Garden Clubs of Australia, Mr Geoff Sowden was made a life member of the Garden Clubs of Australia and secretary Gordon Smith became Zone Director.

The club added to its plant and equipment by buying a Gestetner for \$150 from the Cricketers' Club in Sydney.

In January 1988 a meeting was held at St Alban's as it was school holidays. At the February AGM Mr James Goulder became President. The annual fee was \$4 and some members felt it was too high but it remained unchanged.

By this time a new rector of St Alban's was expected so no decision could be made with the church and arrangements went ahead for the spring show which was to be combined with a heritage rose show. There was a record number of entries, over 400. In October the church increased the hall rent to \$50 a full day for the shows.

In December it was resolved that Life Patrons be exempt from fees and charges at any function.

In February 1989 the Station Master at Leura was approached about beautification of the station gardens with some help from the LHGC.

In March the President suggested buying a typewriter for the secretary. This month Mary Moodie was guest speaker and the committee set show entries at 20 cents each with a maximum of \$1.50. In June the rent for St. Alban's monthly meetings increased from \$30 to \$35 and Mrs Jean Sowden was nominated for the federal committee of the Garden Clubs of Australia.

In July work started on that section of the station garden between the railway line and the Alexandra Hotel and it has been going on ever since.

At the end of 1989 renovation work started on St. Alban's Hall so that the meetings moved for the start of 1990 over to the much smaller St. David's Hall.

At the AGM in February 1990 the subscription was raised to \$5 and the committee meetings were changed from the Friday morning to Friday afternoon preceding monthly meetings. In June the monthly meeting format was changed. In future meetings were to start at 9.45am for the formal part of the meeting, to break at 10.30 am for morning tea and to resume at 11.00 am for guest speakers, and to finish at 12 noon. This was popular and has continued ever since.

After the spring show it was decided not to use the CWA hall as an adjunct in future shows. Vegetables and herbs would be dropped because of lack of interest. Show prizes for adults were to become prize money. Proceeds of the show plant stall would be donated to the horticultural stall at the hospital fete. The Christmas party was held at the Leura Golf Club.

1991 saw hall rent for St Alban's rise to \$50 a half day and to \$150 for the two days of a show. The future of autumn shows was in serious doubt.

In March Mary Moodie was again guest speaker, this time on the subject of the restoration of Kingsford Smith Park.

Work on the station garden proceeded even although the plants were stolen. The Leura Village Association invited the LHGC to a meeting to discuss the beautification of the station for its centenary. The Fairmont Resort donated \$500 for use in the station garden. A protective fence was built around the garden to deter vandals.

In June 1991 foundation member Mrs Keola Conolly died. She was an award-winning gardener.

In September the club received an environmental award from the Blue Mountains Council, principally for its work on the station garden.

Towards the end of 1991 a fire broke out under St. Alban's Church and the building was partly destroyed and only the outside walls remained standing. It was believed to be the work of vandals. The hall was undamaged and so became a temporary church. The club offered to help rebuild the garden but fortunately the insurance covered the garden as well so this offer did not have to be taken up.

In 1992 it was agreed to hold a mini Dahlia show/exhibition instead of the autumn show. In future there would be just one show, in spring.

An attempt to get members to wear name tags at meetings by fining those who forgot was tried but was abandoned after fierce member resistance.

In May the SRA made an award to the LHGC for its work on the station garden. Representatives of the club met Transport Minister, Bruce Baird at the Valley Inn Restaurant where the awards were presented. In December the plaque was given to the Fairmont Resort to display.

Chief Steward Ron Rowan started a quarterly information sheet for members. The material these contained has been collated and is attached.

The need to keep the library up to date was emphasised and the sum of \$250 a year was allocated for the purchase of new books. In September the family of the late Ailsa Dorward agreed to the bequest being used for the purchase of books to be duly inscribed.

The spring show was a great success, financially too. It made a profit of \$715.55

1993 was a year which passed without major upheaval. A workshop on striking cuttings was held after the AGM and a mini-Dahlia show was held again in March. St. Alban's was re-dedicated in June 1993.

In January 1994 there was a severe bushfire in the Blue Mountains. It was agreed, therefore, that the club should give \$1,000.00 to the Katoomba/Leura Bushfire Brigade for the purchase of equipment. The fire captain and his deputy accepted the cheque at the AGM. Subsequently another \$200 was sent, made up of \$150 donated by members and rounded up by the club.

At the end of the year the club's finances were down because of these donations, an allocation of \$250 for the library and \$230 subsidy for the Christmas party.

Early in 1994 Mrs Mawson pointed out that the club would turn 40 in 1995. It was formed in January 1955 and she was the longest serving member, having joined in 1956. She felt that there should be a 40th birthday party.

After consideration through the year it was finally agreed to combine the birthday party with the 1994 Christmas party. This was held on 20th December at the Wentworth Falls Country Club and attended by over 100 members and former members.

Researched and written by Margaret Erwood in 1995 and later edited by Terry Goulden in 2014 to place on the club's webpage. Thanks also to Caroline Stanton for a final edit.