

President's annual report for the period July 2018 – October 2019

N.B. My report this year covers fourteen months because a special general meeting in March 2019 approved the AGM be held in November to allow further time for the review of our annual accounts.

A key event was the long-awaited opening on 12 November 2018 of the Katherine Mansfield Garden with its wonderful replica 1911 Model T Ford. The car was built by members of the Waikato Veteran and Vintage Car Club with huge support from individuals and businesses. I'd like to acknowledge and thank them all once again. At long last another successful Mansfield Garden party could be held in the actual KM garden during the Summer Arts Festival. We also sold cheeseboards at the Festival and supported the brilliant one-woman play *A Case for Katherine Mansfield*.

Family fun time was part of the Scarecrow Festival ably organised once again by Cate Shepherd and her team and then there was all the fun at the Matariki Kite Day which followed on from a memorable Te Kahanga o Tau Hou (Matariki Dawn Service and Breakfast) which took place in Te Parapara Garden and Exhibition Court attended by many distinguished guests. Both the Kite day and the breakfast were the result of weeks of preparation led by vice-president Marleina Ruka, thank you Marleina.

On Anzac Day we once again tolled the bell in the Russian Tower to remember those who have given their lives in the conflict of war. Earlier in April the bell had been tolled following the death of Janet Franks who was instrumental in having the tower constructed at the Gardens in 2002. We also farewelled 'Mac' MacDonald, a loyal, long-serving volunteer at the Information Centre and a founding member of RUFFS, the forerunner of our present day propagating group.

An essential part of our fundraising programme is the profits made from our monthly plant sales. The Propagating group relocated to an area behind the pavilion with entry into the piazza. A revitalized group is working hard to improve our propagating practices under the guidance of Michael Heiler, Judy Holdsworth and others to ensure quality plants are always available including some of the more unusual plants from the Gardens. Many thanks to all who loyally support this group throughout the year. Special thanks to former committee member and tour guide Lizzie Dickson who each month provides morning and afternoon teas for those on the sales table and who makes the famous brinjal chutney and other preserves for sale at events.

Another good fundraiser is the port, sherry and cider sales thanks to a mutually beneficial relationship with Vilagrad winery and to our indomitable Gay Main. Thank you Gay for collaborating with the winery and delivering orders around the city. Thank you also for producing our annual journal. We also appreciate Ceana Priest's generosity in giving the Friends a percentage from the sale of her great Outdoor Kids guide books.

The *In the Beginnings* team of Jane Stewart, Rena Williams and Marilyn Yeoman has created an invaluable historical resource for the future by sorting through a vast archive of written records, newspaper accounts and photographs which have now been deposited with the Hamilton City Library in preparation for a Hamilton City Council digital archive project. Several oral history interviews have been recorded and transcribed. Thank you all very much.

The Friends enabled the setting up of the Gardens History Research Foundation which marked its inauguration during the year as a charitable trust by launching a website and awarding its first small scholarship funded by the Friends. Visit <https://gardenhistoryresearchfoundation.com/> for further information or talk to our representative on the Trust – Marilyn Yeoman.

A variety of speakers, including Keith Woodley of Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre, Simon Rickard, Japanese gardens expert and Sally Sleigh's account of her recent, gorgeous garden tour at a Soup and Buns lunch along with several garden visits have been entertaining and inspirational at Social Group and Garden Club events. Thank you to Susan Coubrough and Judy Holdsworth for your organisation.

We look forward to Dame Malvina Major hosting the Friends' preview of the Picturesque Garden on 30 October, the public opening on 4 November, the Surrealist Garden opening in February and our signature Scarecrow Festival on 3 November.

Our members were urged to have their say regarding the Draft Management Plan so I was mindful of the views of those who responded when I presented verbal submissions at council hearings pressing for the Plan to be accepted. It enables better access through the Gardens, for safe, secure parking, and to ensure enough green space for events along with room for more riverside gardens - which will complete Dr Peter Sergel's vision for a unique, world-class garden telling the story, history and context of gardens – truly a museum of gardens.

In February Cr Bunting asked for further public consultation which was provided. Of the submissions received, 72% were in favour so I was dismayed and disappointed when councillors, fearing a loss of support if they showed a clear preference for the plan prior to local elections, opted to defer the plan again and again until at the last meeting the majority voted for the new incoming council to consider the matter next year.

Sadly much reactionary misinformation has been circulated via social media around the need to change the layout of the Gardens namely to create parking space where the Rhododendron Lawn is now and to use the existing Carpark one or Turtle Lake carpark, for more riverside gardens. I hope that the explanations offered in the October newsletter have helped to correct any mis-information.

However Stage One of the long term plan for the Gardens is well under way in the enclosed sector. On your behalf the committee has ambitiously but confidently committed to raise



\$420,000 over the next 3-4 years for features in the three of the four new gardens, the Medieval, Pasifika and Ancient Egyptian Gardens. We know that we can depend on our membership for support.

In the May newsletter I suggested members could help keep the momentum going by setting up a regular donation to the Friends as we do have charitable status making all donations eligible for a 33.3% tax rebate. Encouraging friends and family to join the Friends is also a great help as is supporting the Gardens' shop as the Friends benefit from a percentage of the profits.

As president I wish on your behalf to thank all our supporters within the Gardens 'family' – Director Peter Sergel and his staff, Gus Flower and the gardeners and the Hamilton Gardens café operators, Craig, Jenny and Zeta Fraser and their staff. Thank you to all our great volunteers who staff the Visitors Information Centre, act as tour guides and help at events and to Rena Williams who organises the rosters. My sincere personal thanks and appreciation to all members of the committee for their interest and many hours of hard work during the year, particularly those I haven't mentioned so far - co-opted members Philip Hart, Roslyn Whalley and Denis Gibbs who have already found their niche, Philip and Denis with the Propagating group and Roslyn as understudy to secretary Colin Sheppard. Janet Sceats our representative on the Summer Arts Festival Board and membership officer Sally Sleigh, treasurer Bruce Sinkinson for keeping the books balanced and Jane Stewart for our very informative newsletters. To all Friends and the wider community who individually and collectively give generously in many ways to support the Friends' activities, I thank you. I have appreciated the support I've received in my three years as president; it has truly been a privilege and I have learned so much about garden history – my new passion and about how our city and Gardens operate. Warmest good wishes to incoming president Marleina Ruka and the committee as they continue to advocate for these wonderful Gardens.

Virginia Graham

President, Friends of Hamilton Gardens