

# ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTS

## HELEN HADOBAS - BICENTENNIAL PARK



Prior to 2014 Helen was a member of Friends of Black Mountain and helped locally with Oaks Estate Progress Association. She joined Queanbeyan Landcare on their recommendation for the insurance offered to members of Queanbeyan Landcare.

She has a lifelong interest in natural history and horticulture. Helen worked at CSIRO and the Australian National Botanic Gardens and for 25 years worked as a technician in the ANBG herbarium, which was merged with the CSIRO Plant Industry herbarium in 1994 to form the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research.

Helen approached Queanbeyan Landcare at a working bee on Buttles Creek off Wanniasa Street, in early 2014, to support her in weeding the woody weeds out of Bicentennial Park. Roger Clement, chair of Queanbeyan Landcare in 2014, then wrote a letter to Council in about March 2014 informing them that Queanbeyan Landcare intended to form a new Friends of Bicentennial Park group that Helen Hadobas would coordinate to carry out woody weed control through weed removal,

cutting and dabbing. The letter sought Council's agreement to this activity.

There was a walk organised by Queanbeyan Museum and Queanbeyan Historical Society in the park led by Tom Baker and Bill Willis on Sunday 13 April, 2014, for Heritage Week, which Helen was unable to attend. Following contact after this event Tom gave Helen a list of three people who had attended the walk who said they were interested in joining a Friends of Bicentennial Park group. As she was reluctant to form a group it took Helen many months to contact the people listed. However at the first meeting on 28 September 2014 she and 3 others worked out a plan. The plan was to allow and support natural regeneration as the park was in reasonable health with lots of open grassland. However it had a significant weed problem and had been used as a dump by local residents.

Helen had a reasonable knowledge of the plants in the park but this improved significantly as Helen and Paul Hadobas collected samples, checked references, created Herbarium Sheets and took photographs. The specimens and photographs have been added to the collections of the CPBR. Paul also has a strong knowledge of the animals in the area and a strong natural history interest. There was a list of plant species at the 2014 walk but Helen and Paul have checked it and added to that list.

The park care group has changed over the years but there are usually 10 or more people Helen can call on to assist with activities at Bicentennial Park. One new person saw Helen and Paul working and came and helped. One person with a specific interest in orchids was in the inaugural group but dropped out soon after as she was over-committed with other responsibilities. There is another person

in the group who is very keen on orchids who Council referred to Helen, following that person's complaint that an orchid population had been damaged by council path-building work. There is a young couple very interested in the animal and bird life who live adjacent to the park. Several of the group walk through or live close to the park and use it often. Helen has an album of photos created for the Queanbeyan River Festival in October 2015 and subsequently revised. It shows briefly the history of the group's activities until September 2019 and a collection of plant and animal photos. Photos are not dated but are labelled. They can be dated if that is wanted.

The plantings around the Hill were chosen by Tom Baker and Bill Willis for a planting on National Tree Day on 28 July 2015. In May 2020 Helen sought the advice of Cool Country Natives about what species to plant, as the drought had damaged some of the original plantings. With their help she chose the plants, Council paid for the plants, tree guards and stakes, and mulch, and repaired the watering system. A small group of 10 (Covid restrictions impacted this planting) did the planting on National Tree Day, 2 August 2020. The hill area has been developed as a native garden, although NZ bluegrass is still there from the original Council plantings. These large plantings on the hill were done by the Bicentennial Park group with the help of many from the Queanbeyan Landcare community.

The Bicentennial Park group has concentrated mainly on weed and rubbish removal, and letting natural regeneration take place. The main weeds are African Lovegrass, St John's Wort, Pyracantha, Cotoneaster, Privet, roses and plums. Helen's teams have not done any active planting in the park, other than on the hill, except for a small area following some erosion control work carried out by contractors to Council. Paul and Helen collected and divided local Lomandra and Dianella and propagated native grasses from seed for this planting.

Infrastructure money was spent on the park in 2016-17 by Council, with advice from the group. This was used for seats, painting of play equipment, fencing and gates to attempt to keep motor-bike riders and other unauthorised vehicles out of the park, and erosion control/landscaping.

In the future Helen would like to see Council continue mowing in a way to avoid exacerbating the African Lovegrass and St John's wort problems. Council should also continue to control these two weeds by spraying at appropriate times, and ensuring that staff can identify these weeds. Woody weeds need to be continually removed and exotic trees that are in the park would ideally be removed and the paths maintained. Possibly also a BBQ and toilets. Shaun McDonald at Queanbeyan Palerang Regional council is part of the Bushland team and supportive of Helen's requests for mulch, mowing, rubbish removal and weed management.

Signage and pamphlets were in existence prior to Helen but she imagines they could be updated and improved through the use of for example QR codes which would enable visitors to access flora and fauna lists and a bit of Bicentennial Park history.

