



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

Beaumont House

Sunday 17th September, 2023

History

Beaumont House was originally built for the first Anglican Bishop of Adelaide, Augustus Short, and his family who lived there from 1851 until they moved to Bishop's Court in 1857. He named it Claremont and chose the location because of the views and cooler climate. His early plan shows garden to the west, north and east of the house. He is recorded as planting fruit trees and olives (supplied by Davenport), and early sketches show shrubs and succulents under native trees bordering a driveway.

In 1857, Sir Samuel [as he became] and Lady Davenport moved into the house, renamed 'Beaumont House'. A keen horticulturalist, he was a friend of George Francis and Richard Schomburgk, the first two directors of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide, and also of Ferdinand von Mueller, who later became Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. He served on the Board of the Botanic Gardens from 1864-78. The Davenports were farmers and their property extended from high in the hills down to Beaumont Common. Trees planted by them exist in the garden today, including Aleppo, stone and pencil pines, almonds, figs and pears, and palms (cotton, Canary date and European fan), the Wigandia and olives. No records remain of what flowers they planted, but in their earlier garden at Macclesfield, honeysuckle, roses, broom, violets, mignonette, foxgloves, catchfly and geraniums grew.

Davenport was an ardent promoter of agriculture and new industries in South Australia. In 1864-72 he published several pamphlets, three of them dealing with the cultivation of olives and manufacture of olive oil, silk and tobacco in the colony. For his great interest in these subjects, he was elected President of the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society. Davenport planted olives and vines and built an olive mill and cellars. By the late 1880s he had 30 acres of vines producing 10,000 gallons of wine in a good year. He sowed and harvested jasmine and lavender with the aim of establishing a perfume industry and experimented with mulberry trees for silkworms for an emerging silk industry. Davenport's nephew GF Cleland continued to produce oil until 1962 when the factory closed.

Lady Davenport died in 1902. Sir Samuel died in 1906, and left his 54 acre estate to his nephew, Howard Davenport. It passed successively to the Vincents (who added the three front rooms, brick arches and verandahs), the Bennetts and the Brocks. Mrs Vincent had a well sunk in 1910, and she is recorded as having a vegetable and fruit tree garden, and presumably a flower garden. Mrs Bennett (subsequently Brock) had horses, built aviaries, and kept parrots and peacocks. When the Brocks took over, there were 1400 olive trees, (27 different varieties). Mr Brock established an olive tree nursery supplying trees to farmers all over Australia. The Brocks sold several parcels of land after the war.

Lilian Brock gave the property to the National Trust of South Australia (The Trust) in 1967, which took charge after her death in 1970. In 1972 a committee was appointed to oversee the restoration of the house and grounds. Work on the garden began with the help of the 18-36 Group, the younger members of The Trust, following plans prepared by Tony Whitehill and Rodney Beames. In 1975 the existing drive was laid with brick guttering. By 1980 they had planted many shrubs and established the lawns. The debris cleared included an old post and wire fence which in places was covered by red climbing roses. To augment the mains water supply, a bore was installed in 1981-82 with a pump. This system supplied sufficient water for the survival of the new lawns. The property is now only 3.21 acres.

Between 2005-2009 the Burnside Branch of the Trust took care of the garden. In April 2009 Beaumont House became the state headquarters of The Trust. Early in 2010 The Trust employed a gardener (for two days a week, then one day a week until 2017) and appointed a Garden Committee, with Marilyn Kuchel as the horticultural advisor. Terms of Reference of the Committee required it to retain the heritage value of the garden, and to be guided by the 2007 Conservation Management Plan. As a member of the Garden History Society and with experience with the Sustainable Landscapes project at the Botanic Gardens, Marilyn was keen to see the gardens become more sustainable and to reflect the horticultural ventures of Samuel Davenport. A grant from The Copland Foundation in 2015 funded the installation of four interpretive signs and labels on all the significant trees. The garden is maintained by gardener Patrick Love (four hours a week) and 15 dedicated volunteers every Wednesday morning. The house is again under the care of the Burnside Branch, now that the Office of the Trust has moved to the Tynte street Baptist Church.

Open Gardens South Australia Inc: is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

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The Plants

The bore water is of poor quality so we have planted many tough, old-fashioned plants which can survive on minimal irrigation such as quinces, almonds, pomegranates, abelias, buddleias, lavenders, pelargoniums, rosemary, salvias and succulents and which were commonly found in other 19th century Adelaide gardens. Biodiversity officers from Burnside Council have supplied many indigenous species which would have been growing on the property before and during Bishop Short's time.

Much progress has been made in the past 13 years, despite continuing problems with the pump and watering system. A group of around 16 volunteer gardeners, who help out most Wednesday mornings have assisted with an enormous amount of weeding and mulching. Many old trees have received surgical attention from an arborist. The pond has been temporarily repaired with a safety grid and a new fountain. On the eastern boundary, crêpe myrtles have been planted, and a variety of tough shrubs to screen the road. To the west, native callitris have been planted to hide a house and fence. In the large bed north of the house, crab apples, daturas, murrayas, solanums and hibiscus have been added. A vegetable and herb garden has been established, behind which there are three young almonds and a quince tree. In the north west corner a stone pine, three grey box gums and other local natives donated by Burnside Council have been planted. The aviary was restored by the Rotary Club of Adelaide in 2010 and the birds cared for by a member of the Burnside Branch.

An area of old rock walls, dating from the 70s, has been restored near the 'cottage,' and the surrounding garden has been planted with heritage roses, catmint, tulbaghia, bulbs, iris, hellebores, salvias and other fragrant plants that might have been used by the Davenports in their pursuit of establishing a perfume industry.

Between 2014-21 we planted more heritage roses, hibiscus, oleanders, candle pines, a white mulberry, a pomegranate, an apple tree, a mandarin, a fig, native pittosporums, hardy camellias, a Montpellier maple and more salvias and succulents. A new dry 'Mediterranean' bed near the marquee pad was planted in 2017.

The Olive Grove

In 2016 with expert advice we began to prune some olives whose branches had become elongated, brittle and prone to breaking in storms. Our aim was to reduce and rejuvenate all the trees over five years to improve their health and productivity. In May 2017 we harvested 360kgs of olives and with the help Michael Johnston, president of the Olive Association of SA we produced 40 litres of oil, the first in 60 years! Horticultural students from Urrbrae TAFE have been assisting with pruning in the grove and throughout the ornamental gardens since 2016 - a huge help. We had a second harvest in 2019 which was pressed free of charge by the wonderful Domenic at Diana Olives in Willunga. This year we harvested 350kgs of olives and the oil crushed again by Domenic is now for sale. We were saddened to learn of the death of Michael Johnston, shortly after the 2023 harvest. He will be greatly missed.

The Challenges

The greatest difficulty is in finding evidence of the plants which grew here in the early days. The few photos available show views of the house and adjacent beds but we have no photos taken looking towards the north or west. There are no plans and only sketchy references to plants. We use as reference Elizabeth Simpson's "Beaumont House: the land and its people" (pub 1993) Robert FG Swinbourne's "Gardens Lost" (2006, SA Branch of The Australian Garden History Society) and "Gardens in South Australia 1840-1940, Guidelines for Design and Conservation" (1998 Dept of Environment and Heritage) which list plants grown in other early Adelaide gardens.

Future Plans

We are hoping to install a more efficient irrigation system. We are planting a fernery behind the aviary with tough, shade loving plants. We will prune some trees to improve the views of the city and plant more screening shrubs. We would like to build more post and rail fences out of recycled posts and some wisteria arbours when funds permit.

How you can help

Beaumont House is available for hire for weddings etc. The Trust was established in 1955. It receives no government funding. It relies on membership fees, sponsorship, donations and entrance fees for its survival. People interested in joining The Trust, donating plants or volunteering to help in this garden (or Stangate House garden in Aldgate which will be open every Sunday in September) should telephone 8202 9200 or email: admin@nationaltrustsa.org.au

The gardens that open for us are chosen to reflect a great diversity of styles and may even challenge the conventional view of what constitutes a garden. While aspects of a garden may not be to your taste, we urge you to celebrate this diversity. Please remember you are visiting a private home and show respect and sensitivity for the owners who have so generously shared their garden with you. Thank you.