

**AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE TRUSTEES EXPRESSED THEIR
THANKS TO THE MANY VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE
WORKED TIRELESSLY AT STRATHFIELDSAYE OVER
THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS AT AN
APPRECIATION DINNER HELD ON THE PROPERTY ON
FRIDAY NIGHT, 14 JUNE 2019**

**Peter E Daly AM
Chairman, Australian Landscape Trust**

Over the last couple of months, Strathfieldsaye has been extremely fortunate to have had the added services of a team from the Drought Employment Program of the West Gippsland CMA funded by the Victorian Government. The team greatly assisted the SEL volunteers who have given up their free time to work with us in revitalising the property. Not only this, but to ensure SEL will shortly be able to fulfil its ongoing obligations as a research farm, providing valuable information and services to the community.

The Drought Employment team emanates from the State Government's program to assist those in Central and Eastern Gippsland who have been hard hit due to the drought conditions. The team comprises farmers and a number of other occupations and business people who are well conversant with the work that has to be done at Strathfieldsaye.

Furthermore, they basically do their own thing which might seem strange, but there is no need for any supervision - they know exactly what to do to improve the property and a lot of work has been carried out in re-establishing the garden fence, pathways, beds and gates as the attached photographs will show.

Still the important issue here is to remember there is no cost to Strathfieldsaye and moreover these people have adopted Strathfieldsaye and fallen in love with its history – their community's history. One team member discovered her great grandmother's wedding was held in the Strathfieldsaye garden in 1870, a year after the property was purchased by the Dishers.

Not to be forgotten are those volunteers who have been continually involved for over a year in the administration assisting Pam Parker in her voluntary work to maintain the property and to ensure there is sufficient monies to carry us through to hopefully better times. It is difficult to capture in any detail the work of these dedicated volunteers; nothing seems to be beyond their capabilities and nothing on the edge of disaster escapes their attention. They have even been able to ensure that the tractor is back in use as well as repairing some of the old machinery which had been long discarded. As well, they have done extensive fencing work and repairs of infrastructure.

Also believe it or not, they have tackled expenses, solving issues that allow a reduction of operating costs. They have cleaned, mowed, repaired, tidied, recycled, graded, pumped, painted, electrified, raised funds, involved their children and their friends in tasks at the property and introduced the Army Cadets field base to Strathfieldsaye. They made Strathfieldsaye come alive.

So on Friday night 14 June 2019, we held a “bumper” party to thank all of those involved in the rehabilitation work of Strathfieldsaye. Through their own initiative, they supported Pam ensuring that the party was a resounding success, providing the Trustees who were able to attend, with the opportunity to see the work undertaken and to speak to each and every one of them and to make sure they realised the importance of what the Drought team have been doing for the last couple of months, what the long-term volunteers have done to keep the property going and the contributions from those organising and attending the two Working Bees. These are immense benefits to us.

It would be wrong not to mention the party itself. Everyone contributed towards the party and the food provided by those that attended was nothing else but outstanding. The array of sweet dishes was amazing. Everyone truly enjoyed the many homemade treats, eaten by those of us who are probably at this time endeavouring to lose weight! To top it off, we had a bonfire. The bonfire arose out of all the old material including dead trees that were cleared from the garden and other areas around the homestead and some bits left over after doing the roof and some internal work to the buildings.

The monies we received from The Feilman Foundation grant, was used to repair the roofs of the buildings in the Homestead Precinct. The reason we decided to tackle the roofs is that once you have secured the roofs of the buildings, then you can work at your own pace to improve the other parts of the buildings which will require many hours of labour and of course further cost. However there is a strong sense amongst all those present that this will be the next stage and it will be a challenge to raise further monies to complete the task.

Probably those of us who have visited the property, we will remember years ago, the magnificent gardens which of course no longer exist because of the lack of maintenance and the other matters that needed to take priority. The gardening members of the drought team and those attending the Working Bees undertook garden transformations that were just outstanding and from some of the photographs on the Strathfieldsaye Facebook page you will see that they have rediscovered the pathways and important structural parts of the garden and restored the brick pathways on the north side of the homestead.

Whilst there are no flowers in the garden, nevertheless, the garden itself is starting to take shape and I was given to understand the team who has participated in the drought program, will be back to assist us from time to time.

Everyone I spoke to are extremely proud of their efforts. In one regard, I couldn't believe that two of the long-term volunteers were able to raise monies from their employer (Esso) as a community service grant and this money is now kept in a “tin” out of which they are able to pay for petrol, diesel and the odd material required. The latter was an important issue, because while the long-term volunteers and the drought team were working on projects, management were able to supply them the necessary material so they could get on with the work and avoid delays.

Also in attendance were the roofers who have done a magnificent job in securing the roofs of all but one of the buildings in the Homestead Precinct, including the outlying Managers House and the Farm Hand House. They, like the drought team and the long-term volunteers, have fallen in love with the property and its history and in speaking to them, they have reduced their costs to undertake their work. While originally, we were not undertaking to repair the roof of the Wool Shed, we have seen some subsequent photographs and it looks as if the roof is falling apart and sheets of iron will be coming apart causing a danger to those visiting the property.

Once again, they have come to the fore and their generous offer plus the offer we received from the building people to replace the failed foundations of the of the Blue Room and West Wing of the Homestead, we might be able to undertake this work within the Feilman grant.

We are certainly indebted to all those involved in The Feilman Foundation grant-supported works as well as those who have helped us in so many other ways and I believe we have the nucleus of a new voluntary team. In my thank you, I told them I count them as friends and they should see Strathfieldsaye as a home away from home, where they can come with their families and share what we believe is an outstanding property, providing many opportunities to their families.

In closing, much credit has to go to Pam Parker for the outstanding work she does in a voluntary capacity and it comes through that there is nothing she cannot do. I am sure this is recognised by those who have surrounded her with helping hands as it can be awfully lonely if you are on your own on a property away from everything.

I can assure the everyone that the Trustees certainly appreciated the enormity of the work done over the short period and we look forward to other Trustees, that were unable to attend for one reason or another, visiting and sharing the vision of the work for the future of Strathfieldsaye. Finally may I direct you to the Strathfieldsaye Facebook page as there are many photographs of the work conducted as well as those enjoying the bonfire.



