

Bolobek Garden Notes - October 2024

Bolobek is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register as being of 'aesthetic, architectural, historic and horticultural importance' to the State of Victoria. Bolobek has pastoral origins as well as being a 'retreat' in the early part of the 20th century, as were many of the grand and great houses and gardens in and around the area. In its heyday Bolobek boasted a nine-hole golf course, a croquet lawn, a tennis court and a swimming pool. Only the croquet lawn survives. Bolobek is still a working farm producing wonderful grass-fed angus beef and prime lamb.

The reasons for the Heritage listing are diverse but relate primarily to the garden which was designed and planted around 1915 by Mildred and Oswald Syme who owned Bolobek until 1969. It was then purchased by the Law-Smith family who were here until 1992. Much of the original Syme garden design remains (as do many of the plantings).

Joan Law-Smith an accomplished plantswoman, botanical artist and author was regarded as one of Australia's leading gardeners. Her husband Robert was a director of many of Australia's major companies. During their twenty-three-year tenure the Law-Smiths undertook a major renovation of the garden, simplifying the plantings, using plant forms with an emphasis on foliage and white flowers, particularly around the house. They pulled down the original three-story Edwardian house and many of the remaining outbuildings, filled in the cellars, and rerouted the driveway. The new house they built was designed to reflect the symmetry of the garden and to maximise the views of the garden from the house - which it does beautifully.

Between 1992 and 2000 Bolobek had two owners who were not particularly interested in the garden or the farm. In 2000 it was bought by the Edgerton family who started the process of addressing the neglect and then in 2006, Hugh and I purchased it.

Bolobek today is a very different garden and property to the one we took on in the middle of the millennial drought. Over nearly two decades we have dealt with drought and floods, a significant variety of pests and the wind, the awful and destructive north wind. We have renovated, replanted, replaced, restored

and reshaped; at all times attempting to remain true to the origins and design of the garden and the property.

Since the Garden Fair last year, we have planted the big new border to the north of the house and the Crab Apple Walk beds. These plantings are still very new and remain a work in progress. The Fern or Stream Garden is beginning to settle into itself and the ferns under the big Oak have been replaced with Variegated Ivy as they were really struggling. The Cyprus Trees in the north-east corner of the bottom of the garden continue to fall over and they will be removed next Autumn as they are a serious safety issue.

What you see here today is the result of hard work, time, a great team and a desire to leave what we have in much better shape than it was when we arrived in 2006.

Thanks must go to the Fair Organising Committee Kevin Edwards, Lisa Hall and Hannah Robertson, our wonderful stallholders many of whom have been coming every year since 2014, our major sponsor Macedon Nursery and Garden Supplies and of course the Gisborne SES Unit who do such an amazing job of running the car park and who we could not do without!

We are thrilled to have as our Keynote Speaker this year the articulate, entertaining and talented, chef, author and farmer Annie Smithers, who will be speaking at 11.30 on Saturday and 11am on Sunday. Other terrific speakers on Saturday are Carolyn Blackman and Stephen Ryan and on Sunday Keith Edwards, and Chris England.

There will be garden tours at 2.30 on both Saturday and Sunday afternoon.

The Fair has become a big fundraiser for Macedon Ranges community-based organisations – ideally those with an environmental or horticultural focus or project. We are enormously proud of being able to donate close to \$40,000 to the community last year. We would hope to do the same again this year!

Thank you for coming to see us and please enjoy the Garden and the Fair.

A word of caution. There are water hazards and there are many rough and uneven surfaces. We have signposted these but please watch your step!