



## **Bonsai Society of Southern Tasmania A brief history**

In March 1984, Hobart florist proprietor Arnold Markham placed advertisements in the Hobart media inviting people interested in bonsai to meet with the view to forming a society. About fifty people turned up on the night of 17<sup>th</sup> April, and thus was born the Bonsai Society of Southern Tasmania. The inaugural office bearers included President Arnold Markham, Vice-President Noel Kemp and Secretary/Treasurer Tony Hewer. Three decades on, the Society continues to meet at the Clarence City Council's Bellerive Community Arts Centre on the third Tuesday of the month, from February until November. Christmas and New Year barbecues are held at a variety of venues.

The Society has invited Bonsai Masters from the mainland, and from Japan, to run workshops, which enable members to learn new and more advanced techniques. The inspiration gained from these events is obvious for some time afterwards, and the raised level of artistic merit of the members' trees becomes noticeable too. In April 1985, the first public demonstration was given by Ron Andersen and Nell Saffin (Bonsai Society of Victoria) to a full house in the Royal Society of Tasmania Room, at the Tasmanian Museum. Where have all these potential/real bonsai enthusiasts/growers sprung from, we wondered as the room filled to (nowadays) beyond OH&S standards?!

Ron Anderson returned many times during the 1980s, continuing to enthuse our members, and to raise the standards of our trees. He was very generous with his time and his expertise. At the first workshops, in April 1985, we learnt, for example, that even in full leaf, trident maples can be cut back hard, top and bottom, and come back with a vengeance the next spring. You would have had a hard time convincing our Secretary-Treasurer team of Audrey and Harry McCarthy that their "short back and sides" trident would recover so well. It did, and often since then when new members ask "is it too early to work on this tree?" older members can answer assuredly that no, it is quite okay.

Since those formative years of the Society, a routine of workshops, “digs”, nursery crawls, shows and, of late, an Exhibition, has become well established.

Our workshops are held on (alternating) Saturdays and Sundays, each month from about April to September, usually the weekend after the monthly general meeting. “Digs” for trees in the wild (with appropriate permits) are a regular feature on our calendar. I suppose to mainlanders the list of species might sound exotic, including Myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), various species of Teatree (*Leptospermum* spp.), Celery Top (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*), Sassafras (*Astherosperma moschatum*), Pencil Pine (*Athrotaxis cupressoides*) and so on. The success rate is not 100%, but we reconcile our losses with the fact that the trees we dig up were doomed anyway because of clearing of the area or roadside slashing. Sometimes our timing is not the best, as on one occasion it was not the forest which prevented us seeing the trees, but the thick blanket of snow! Figs and olives are our loss but mainlanders’ gain.

Often associated with a dig will be a nursery crawl where more experienced members can help newer members in choosing suitable material for an upcoming workshop, or, to work on “one day”.

The Bonsai Society of Southern Tasmania has for many years participated in the four annual Hobart Horticultural Society (HHS) Shows at the Town Hall. The bonsai display always attracts a lot of interest at these events, from locals and visitors who have come to see the roses or the gladioli, but who are pleased and interested to see our diverse range of bonsai as well. Over the years the Bonsai Society has had displays or given demonstrations at a variety of venues, including The Royal Agricultural Society Show, the University of the Third Age, Probus and special interest groups, including many Gardening Clubs in the greater Hobart area.

In spring of 2010 the Society had its first “stand alone” Exhibition, which was held over two days at The Barn in Rosny. The Barn was built in 1818, and refurbished into a wonderful concert-exhibition-workshop venue in the late 1980s by the Clarence City Council. The Exhibition was a great success, with the numbers attending exceeding all expectations. The show of spring flowers, new foliage and the variety of species, natives, including many endemics, and exotics elicited many a favourable

comment from the steady stream of visitors. The second, also successful Exhibition, was opened by the Premier in autumn, 2012. The next Exhibition will be in spring, 2013. This alternation of seasons gives the public a chance to see our trees with unfurling spring foliage and flowers, alternating with autumnal leaf colouration and fruits.

At all of these HHS Shows and at our Exhibition, we welcome interested visitors to join the Society to learn the techniques associated with this ancient art form and to meet a convivial group of like-minded people.

Since the early 1990s a number of our more enthusiastic members have attended various Bonsai Conventions and Workshops on the mainland and thus have been able to bring back new ideas and techniques. This has resulted in a wider range of expertise, and a more diverse range of trees in our collections. Unfortunately, over the past few years increasingly stringent biosecurity restrictions between Tasmania and the mainland have meant that our bringing back trees from mainland workshops is now virtually impossible, and so it is now only in our heads that experiences and results are carried back to Tasmania.

Interested people visiting Tasmania are invited to view our website for details of contact numbers and names, and details of our meetings. We also have a Facebook page.

<http://www.bonsai-southern-tasmania.org.au>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bonsai-Society-of-Southern-Tasmania/195574507299015>

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