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The Bonsai Society meets at the Bellerive Community Art Centre,
17 Cambridge Rd, Bellerive at 7:30 pm on the third Tuesday of the month
(February – November)

Website: www.bonsai-southern-tasmania.org.au

Newsletter No 250 May 2014

Our President (recovering, if somewhat slower than he'd like!) opened the April meeting with a welcome to 23 members, visitors Anthony Appleby and Bob Akers, and apologies from Sue (still sailing), Chris Spratt and David Budd.

Special guest, Andrew Ward, who was kept busy running weekend workshops, was our presenter for the evening so, with that in mind, business matters were kept to a minimum.

Your committee held meetings in February and April, during which arrangements for Andrew's visit were finalised, updated reports from the 2016 Convention sub-committee received, discussions regarding membership fee increases, ideas for fund-raising suggested, a request to the Horticultural Society that we have demonstrations, a raffle and sales table at the Daffodil, Camellia and Floral Art Show in September, and some shuffling of the monthly presentations which were in the amended calendar sent out with April's newsletter.

Report on Andrew's Workshops and Presentation:

From comments made during the weekend, participants were very happy with their achievements, and the time Andrew gave to each in turn. He certainly had a variety of subject matter to work with, and it was interesting to observe his approach to each specimen having first discussed its future with the owner. A table was set up with a white screen behind it, so that participants could avail themselves of before and after shots – very useful when compared with Andrew's sketches of how the finished tree should look. There were some concerned faces when the initial "cuts" were made, but by the time formative shaping could be seen, and the realisation that "all was not lost" had registered, there were smiles, and time to enjoy a cup of coffee!



Two trees which had a lot of work done on them at Andrew's workshops.

Home-made soup and crusty bread was available both days and the bench-tops wouldn't have looked complete without the usual selection of goodies – including Herbert's wonderful sponge cake! And a big **“thank you”** to our own Gill Roberts, who ensured everything, including the kitchen, workroom and tables was left clean and tidy on both days.



Left: The tree before removal of excess growth.



Right: a lot of the foliage has been removed.



Andrew's presentation on Tuesday evening kept us interested. The tree, a *Pyracantha* (from Chris Xepapas's collection) had a substantial amount of growth which was removed (including some of those deadly thorns), before the overall shape could be decided. The tree was taken out, some of its soil removed, then it was placed back in the pot for stability while Andrew commenced work on further enhancing an existing wound (shari) in its trunk, using an electric grinder.

The tree has also been heavily wired and, as can be seen in the photo directly below, has gentle curves in both trunk and branches, already beginning to take on the appearance of age in a lovely informal upright style.

There were a few ladies who expressed interest in the small hand-held Dremmel used to enhance the shari, and with Mothers' Day approaching their husbands/partners might be surprised what they ask for as a gift!



Raffle: Herbert won a pot, Tony B won an azalea, Robyn won the metal chopsticks.

Events:

May Meeting: Tuesday 20th at 7.30pm. This will be a review of trees from Andrew's workshops. How different do they look now? If possible, bring along before and after shots – a plain background helps to enhance the tree's shape.

May Workshop: Saturday, 24th May commencing at 1pm. held at the Bellerive Community Arts Centre. While some of our trees are probably still holding green foliage, others have succumbed to the autumnal nip in the air as their leaves change to varying shades of red, bronze, gold and yellow. Mosses too are greening up and I've been collecting some from one or two areas of supply, to replenish those I need to remove. While all mosses have their beauty, some are more appropriate for use in bonsai than others. Liverwort is also rearing its head and can quickly invade pots as it smothers everything else. Dabbing it with a cotton bud soaked in white vinegar and leaving the pot in a sunny position for a few hours usually kills it off.

Huon Valley Dig:

During the recent dig in the Huon Valley, some trees were collected in preparation for use during the 2016 Convention. While survival of one or two is questionable, the others seem to be recovering quite well. Of course, it's early days, and we know that trees removed from the wild can take time to settle into their new environment. There are still some members who, unable to be involved last time, would be interested to participate while our permit remains valid. If you are interested, please let me know, so that a signed copy of the permit can be provided. I don't want anyone acting illegally or disrupting our relationship with Forestry staff who have been very helpful. The permit is valid until 30th June.

Election of Committee for 2014-2015 –Noel has advised he won't be standing for President and, as all positions are declared vacant anyway, it's time to think about who you would like to nominate for next year. Membership fees will increase to \$35/member and \$45/couple from 1st July 2014.

It will be a crucial time, as we hold our Autumn Exhibition in May, and twelve very busy months later, the Convention will be almost upon us! A lot of planning must be done to ensure **both** occasions are successful and the committee will certainly need support from as many members as possible. **Think about what you can do to assist your Society.** It may be letter-box drops, information to your local nursery, library, shops etc. Perhaps donating an item for a raffle prize; you may have plants or other bonsai related items to sell. Ideas for promotion of either event. Just to mention a few.

June meeting: Tuesday, 17th June – A discussion on bonsai potting mixes and, as we are about to commence re-potting our trees, this couldn't be more appropriate! Please bring along a sample of **your** mix for a forum on this topic. Of course, there are almost as many potting mixes as there are bonsai enthusiasts, with opinions differing on what's best. I'm sure there are those who are, or have been, experimenting to find the right mix for their specific trees. Its function is to hold sufficient nutrients, water and air to provide a regular supply of these three vital components to the roots of your trees. Too much water can result in roots decaying, while a free draining mix allows the root system to breathe.

Bonsai Convention International, Gold Coast, Qld. August 21st – 24th, 2014. Details at the following websites: www.goldcoast2014.bonsai-bci.com or www.aabcltd.org

Daffodil, Camellia and Floral Art Show 12th-13th September to be held at City Hall. We will be holding bonsai demonstrations and running a raffle, and there is the possibility of a sales table. More information in our next newsletter.

Website: Don't forget to check out our website.

Library Collection:

The Society's selection of books and journals is available to members, who can borrow for a month at a time, at no charge. It's regarded as a further source of gaining information and improving our bonsai skills.

New members in particular might find copies of "*Bonsai Today*" especially helpful on re-potting, shaping and pruning, see numbers 50 – 52, 57 -60, 63, 65 and 66. The first 49 copies also include some useful information, with bonsai enthusiasts such as Peter Adams looking at optional designs for particular trees.

If you have something interesting you would like to share with other members, or a request for information, let's hear from you. And if you'd like to tell us about yourself and how you became interested in bonsai, it gives everyone an opportunity of getting to know you better.

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Bonsai Notes for May
Supplement to "Bonsai News" April 1984. Reg. Publication VBH 6368

The hot weather has now gone and trees need to be placed in full sun. It is a good time to rotate tree positions, to check drain holes and also check whether wire on branches is damaging them. At the first sign of wire cutting into the bark, remove it, if necessary using wire cutters which allow you to cut the wire without damaging the bark of the tree.

Reduce watering. It should not be necessary to water daily, so do it only as the trees need it; but beware of windy days, which seem to dry pots very quickly even in cool weather.

Trees and shrubs to be grown for autumn colour should be chosen before the leaves fall. It is a good time to visit nurseries and select suitable material. Trees worth considering include Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*), Trident Maple (*Acer buergerianum*), Chinese Pistachio (*Pistacia chinensis*), Liquidambar, Crepe Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia*), Smoke Bush (*Cotinus*), Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*) and Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*) etc. *Liquidambar styraciflua* is the variety most commonly seen and it colours well. There are other varieties sold e.g. *Liquidambar formosana* and *Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Festeri', they are very hardy, they colour well and keep their leaves until new ones come in Spring.

The Smoke Bush – either the green one which colours well in autumn (yellow) or the purple one which turns bright red in autumn – are both worth growing

Pin oaks & Scarlet oaks are difficult to shape but they do have very attractive colour in autumn.

Crepe myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) is often very disappointing when grown for flowers, as it is difficult to get it to flower and when the flowers do come, they are on long straggly branches completely out of proportion with the tree. However, it can be grown into a rather nicely shaped tree which has very good autumn colour and a lovely smooth trunk.

Evergreen trees should have been potted by now to give them a chance to establish their root growth before winter.

Deciduous trees should not be re-potted before their leaves fall. The best time to do this is when the buds begin to swell, indicating they are about to come into active growth.

Early flowering deciduous trees may be re-potted, but do not prune them until after they flower, or a year's flowers may be cut off!

Thick moss should be removed from dishes because in winter it holds water and keeps the soil very wet and cold. If the moss is of good quality (and clean) it can be dried and used again later.

Fertilize evergreen trees and deciduous ones too if they still have their leaves. At this time of year the aim is to nourish the trees and not promote a lot of top growth. Choose a fertilizer which has a low nitrogen content. Most trees have the ability to store food in their main roots ready for spring growth needs.

Trees which flower and fruit are usually potted yearly as they need to be grown in good, well fertilized soil. Pines and conifers do not need to be re-potted so often. The health of the

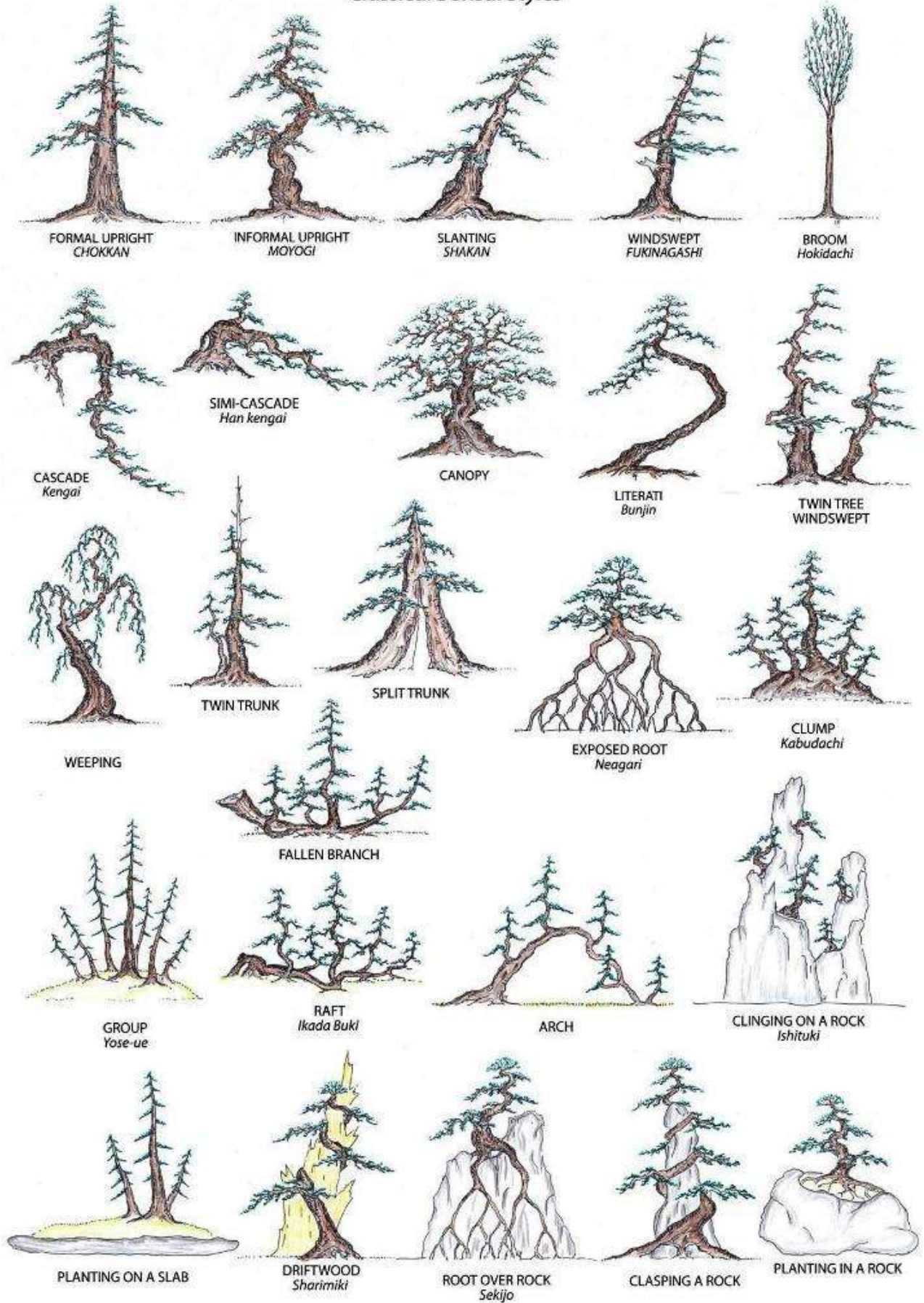
tree and its roots are the best indicators of the need for re-potting. Look for indications such as:

- The surface soil begins to rise level with, or above, the rim of the dish; when trees such as pines rise up they lift the wire mesh above the drain holes and slaters and other pests burrow into the root-ball.
- When the tree is lifted from its pot there are a lot of old brown dead roots and long roots winding around the root-ball.
- Growth slows down, leaf colour is not so good and the tree is less vigorous.
- The tree dries out quickly, may be hard to water, or may remain too wet because of poor drainage.

If the tree has only a very fine sparse network of roots, it may not need to be re-potted.

Hopefully, these monthly tips and advice are helping to enhance your bonsai experience. The following page shows the classical bonsai styles, most of which you are probably familiar with except, perhaps, the Japanese name for each. And while I've heard several people refer to a particular style in Japanese, I don't think we're going to be "tested" anytime soon!

Classical Bonsai Styles



Myrtle Group

Ambrose Canning, May 2014

On recent BSST Club digs in the Southern Forests we have collected Myrtles and they are proving to be a very suitable species for bonsai. This article is about a group planting I have had for many years and which is still developing. It includes my spring 2012 repotting of the group into a new pot and a change in angles, its growth and development since then, and my future plans. I will nominate this group for inclusion in the 2016 convention exhibition and so I am focusing its development over the next two years for this, but ultimately it will depend on whether it is up to standard in autumn 2016, or not.

Myrtle or given its botanical name *Nothofagus cunninghamii*, or Myrtle Beech, is tree native to [Tasmania](#) and Victoria. It is an [evergreen](#) hardwood that grows mainly in cool temperate rainforest and mixed forest. Tasmania contains 95% of Australia's cool temperate rainforest, and as we know it is very different from the rainforest found in warmer areas of Australia. Myrtles typically grow to 30 to 40m tall and have large trunks with scaly, dark brown bark, although at high altitudes in montane rainforest it can be seen as a smaller multi-trunked shrubby form.

The photo below shows the typical small leaves of the Myrtle Beech, ideally suited to bonsai.



Myrtles have traditionally been classified as a member of the Fagaceae family which includes other well-known northern hemisphere trees such as Oak (*Quercus*) and Beech (*Fagus*). Worldwide the Fagaceae family includes 1000 species in 8 genera, Australia has just 3 species from 1 genus, and Tasmania has 2 species from the 1 genus *Nothofagus*. *Nothofagus* is an amalgamation of Greek words that mean “false beech” or alternately “southern beech”.

These southern beech occur in Australia, New Zealand, New Caledonia, New Guinea and South America. Fossils of their leaves have been found in Antarctica and all these locations are linked to the ancient Gondwana continent. Recently a new family has been created, *Nothofagaceae*, to include these southern beech in place of *Fagaceae*.

The species *cunninghamii* is named after Allen Cunningham (1791-1839) an English botanist and explorer who collected plants in Tasmania. Other closely related species include *N. gunnii* which is Tasmania's endemic deciduous beech, and *N. moorei* on mainland Australia in New South Wales and Queensland.

My original three trees were collected very early in my bonsai interest while on a work trip to Tasmania's West Coast. On a day off I drove from near Zeehan along the former NE Dundas Railway formation towards the Montezuma Falls. It was 1985 and I remember it was very wet and I was stopped by a flooded creek I could not drive through. The three Myrtles came from the centre of the vehicle track and had estimated ages of about 3 and 6 years. They were all small although the oldest and tallest was tall enough to have had its top broken off by the underside of a vehicle.

I planted them as a group in 1989. Later one tree died and was replaced by a tree collected in 1993 from side of the road near the Tyndall Ranges, West Coast, with then an estimated age of about 3 years.

The current ages of the three trees are now about 35, 32 and 24 years old. They have been in training as group of three for 25 years.



The above left hand photo is the group in May 2010, potted in an unglazed oval pot. The poorer quality scanned photo on the right above is the group in October 2010 at our first exhibition at the Rosny Barn, the wire has been removed and it has been foliage trimmed.



By spring 2012 very little had changed, as can be seen from the photo above left. I had decided that the pot was too deep for best effect with the group and was not wide enough and so I already had a replacement unglazed oval pot selected.

The above right photo shows the roots after removal from the pot and moss removal. It is a healthy and well developed root mass. During the root pruning the three trees are not separated but are maintained together and root pruned as one.

The Myrtles shoot vigorously in spring and the shoots continue to grow through summer. I fertilise my Myrtles with full strength normal fertilisers. Sometimes organic, sometimes inorganic types. I apply liquid fertiliser every weekend throughout late spring, summer and early autumn. The new growth in Spring is a conspicuous bronze or red colour which progressively changes to dark green during the summer.

Myrtles respond well to pruning and will shoot back from old wood. In the past I used to regularly finger pinch the new shoots during spring and summer to maintain the tree shape, but I have realised that this stops development. By letting the foliage shoot unchecked each spring and summer the amount of foliage increases, so giving more choice when it comes time to prune, and the trunks thicken. As the trunks thicken they begin to produce rough cracked bark. It also means the trees are very healthy as the mass of foliage has given them plenty of energy via plenty of photosynthesis. The only drawback is that during summer the trees look very wild and hairy with masses of long new shoots up to 20cm long.

In autumn I use scissors to trim back the foliage to get back the tree shape and profile I want. My plan will be different prior to the exhibition, I will let it grow through summer 2014/15 and scissor prune in autumn 2015 to continue development. Then through spring and summer 2015/16 I will continually finger or scissor prune to maintain shape ready for the exhibition.



The photo above left is after root pruning. Photo above right after angle change.

I also thought the trunks were too upright, in particular the left hand tree. In a group trees will tend to lean away from each other to chase maximum light. The photo above right is after the two larger trunks have been moved apart and a small chock of wood is under the centre of the root ball to maintain the angle which extends down into the root spread.



In the above left photo I have prepared the new pot with tie down wires and with mesh over the drainage holes. Small loops of wire through the mesh and holes and splayed out under the pot hold the mesh in place.

In the above right photo the group is trial positioned in the pot. The “soil” is a mix of Turface (a water retentive clay based granular product that people love or hate), fine crushed dolerite (blue-metal), and coir peat (a coconut by product). The group is a little further to the right in the pot to maintain it off-centre.



The above left photo shows the repotting complete. The soil surface has been covered with a layer of dried and chopped moss. After watering and some time the dried moss will start growing again. The above right photo is a close up of some retained tall rain forest moss.

The photo below left is a close up of the base of the trunks. It shows the development of mature and older looking rough and cracked bark. In fact the small splits in the bark showing more tan coloured bark underneath show expansion caused by the unchecked growth during the previous growing season. Plenty of good growth causes the trunks to thicken.

The angles of the trunks looks extreme in this photo and really should be viewed in the overall composition of pot, trunks, branches and foliage to see them in context.

The below right photo shows the added “gutter-guard” plastic mesh cover against black birds to prevent them digging holes when looking for worms and other insects. Scrap pieces of mesh are held together by pieces of used aluminium bonsai wire.



The following photo below left shows the group this May 2014 before trimming of the spring and summer growth. The moss has grown too long and there are a few weeds that must be removed. The pot is dirty and due for a clean of its external surfaces. The foliage has grown freely and the group has a wild and hairy look, but it is very healthy and has plenty of growth to choose from when pruning. There was a limited amount of wire on it and which had been there for all the last growing season. In places it was just starting to dig in and it was time for it to be removed.

The below right photo is a close up of the main tree’s lower trunk. It continues the progress with developing rough and cracked bark which gives the illusion of a mature old tree. The cracking of the bark has been accelerated by trunk swelling due to letting the foliage grow freely all season. In a couple of spots are small pieces of lichen growing naturally on the trunk. Some people dislike this and would remove it, but myself, for a rain forest tree I think they are a badge of honour, and I will leave them alone



The photo below is after pruning and foliage trimming in early May 2014. The pot sides and rim have been cleaned with a kitchen scourer and warm water. A lot of foliage has been removed including some significant branches in or near the apex of all the trees. It has also reduced the height of all three trees. Like many trees there is a drive to be apically dominant, to produce lots of foliage at the top. This makes them visually top heavy and weakens lower branches. Currently the group is about 60cm tall above the pot.

Some wire has been used to bend and redirect some branches. The wiring will remain on until next autumn. I will monitor it during next spring and summer and if it starts to dig in I will remove selected pieces.

The left hand tree's lowest branch has been lowered a little. I used the method of a chisel hammered into the top of the branch to trunk junction and a small wedge of stone to hold the gap or crack open.

Although the foliage now appears very sparse I know that during the next and subsequent growing seasons it will fill out again. Branches will extend and ramify, and new branches will shoot from the upper trunk and from existing branches.

After looking at the final photo below I would like to bend the left hand tree's trunk a little to the right. This would bring the top of that tree to a more upright position, and counter or balance the lower trunk's lean to the left. I will try to do this using a special clamp which I hope to borrow and which is designed for just this job.



My plan for the coming 2014/15 spring and summer is for plenty of growth to get the foliage to continue filling out, but then to prune it back next autumn to maintain the overall oval profile of the group. I plan it to retain a fuller head of foliage than in the above photo.

This coming spring I will remove the group from its pot and check the roots and decide if it needs a root prune or not. If not then it is still possible for me to root prune in spring 2015 and still have one season's growth and establishment in the pot prior to the exhibition.

The group's progress over the next two years will determine whether it reaches the standard required for the 2016 AABC exhibition. It has given me incentive to plan the group's development and refinement and to put it into practice.

References:

- a)M Wapstra, A Wapstra, H Wapstra, "Tasmanian plant names unravelled", Fullers Bookshop Pty Ltd, 2010.
- b)C Howells editor, "Tasmania's natural flora", 2nd edition, Australian Plants Society Tasmania Inc, 2012.