

Conservation pioneers in Beaumaris

Dr Valerie Tarrant has been active for many years in the protection of Beaumaris's original vegetation. Her PhD explored the history of the indigenous plants movement in Victoria.

THE STORY OF HOW a post World War II generation of newcomers to Beaumaris developed a conservation ethos and practice is an important part of Melbourne's history. It is of particular interest to VNPA members, who may have contributed to its making or walked in the area's bushlands, or may be looking for new places to explore.

Lying along the eastern shores of Port Phillip Bay, Beaumaris was sparsely settled until after

World War II. And while parts of the landscape have changed, and are changing, with the introduction of new styles of housing and gardens, tracts of the distinctive original bushland, and many tree-filled gardens, fortunately remain today.

The story of how this came about gives valuable insights into how a community organisation used its skills to conserve an area its members loved. Members also made efforts to ensure the long-term survival of valuable heath, woodland and foreshore vegetation. This is particularly relevant as tracts of bushland become increasingly precious with the continuing expansion of suburban Melbourne.

From the early 1950s an energetic group of citizens developed innovative ways of maintaining the natural heritage of their developing suburb. The Beaumaris Tree Preservation Society was founded in 1953 and soon adopted the arresting slogan **'To chop is to cheapen: bury your axe!'**

Members of the Beaumaris Conservation Society, which succeeded the Tree Preservation Society in 1970, continue to strive to follow that advice. But these attitudes and decisions were unusual in the 1950s and 60s, and it is worth searching for the factors that caused people to go against the common practices of the time, gaining for Beaumaris a reputation as a leafy bushland suburb.

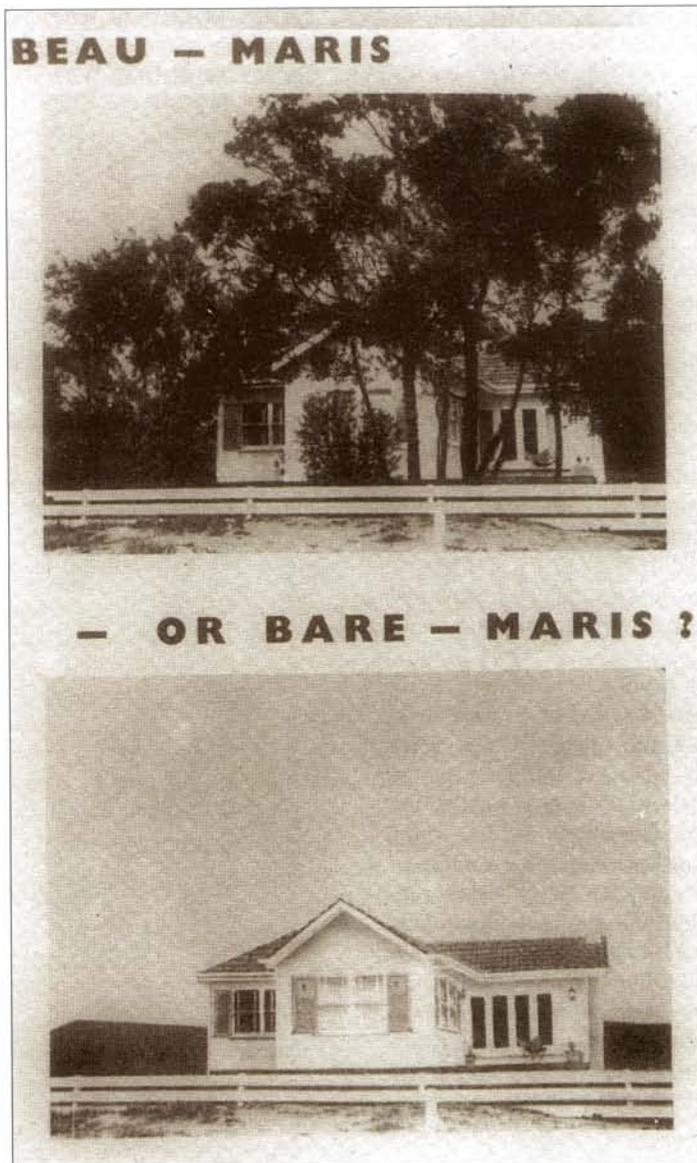
The area retained wide expanses of heathland, with patches of trees including eucalypts and wattles, and after the wildfire of 1944 tracts of regenerating Coast Tea-tree. Many of the new post-war residents decided to build homes among the trees rather than clear their blocks and then build. The well-known architect Robin Boyd wrote of the resulting uniqueness of Beaumaris, commenting on the appropriateness of contemporary design in this suburb.

Bea Hosking, a founding member of the Tree Preservation Society, was one resident who had loved wildflowers since childhood and therefore wanted to conserve them in her home area. She and other members of the Society developed the practice of visiting new home builders and encouraging them to look after the flora on their land.

The committee publicised their message, printing booklets to introduce readers from both

1950s flyer from
Beaumaris Tree
Preservation Society.

COURTESY VAL TARRANT





the local area and further afield to the value of the Beaumaris natural world. *Native Plants and Seaside Gardens* (Beaumaris Tree Preservation Society, Melbourne, 1958) opens with an article on the 'Legacy of the Aborigines'. The authors, Norman Tindale and H.A. Lindsay pointed out, in an approach unusual at the time, that in preserving the flora and fauna of Australia, people are safeguarding Aboriginal heritage.

Other writers, including W. Cane, propagator of native plants at 'Clearview Nursery', Maffra, explained how to grow native plants; and noted naturalist Jean Galbraith supplied further information about their selection and propagation.

At this time, while residents were caring for the indigenous trees and wildflowers already growing on their land, most were happy to plant any Australian flora on nature strips or in their gardens.

University of Melbourne Botany Professor John Turner's article on 'Sand Dunes and Heathlands' (*More About Native Plants and Seaside Gardens*, Beaumaris Tree Preservation Society, Melbourne, 1956) pointed to the value of the heathlands:

'Instead of the heath of Europe with its brief blaze of purple heather and heaths but its poor and restricted flora we have our local heathland, with 60 or 70 varied species of heath, tea-tree, wedding bush, legumes, fly catchers, orchids, and the like ... [We have] at Beaumaris a suburb which, to some extent at least, will retain an Australian flavour.'

Turner added that the survival of heaths and dunes was important not only for their beauty and historical association but also to scientists.

Notable gardener and garden designer Edna Walling contributed a quotation from her book *The Australian Roadside* which supported the conservation of local flora: *'Men show their greatness more by circumnavigating flowers and mosses than they do by sailing over them with bulldozers.'*

Such articles by well known and respected public figures assisted the Beaumaris Tree Preservationists in their efforts. They also held well-attended meetings with speakers including landscape designer John Stevens and Professor Turner, arranged wildflower displays, created posters showing local wildflowers and held competitions for children.

The group established friendly relationships with local council the City of Sandringham, and was eventually able, in the late 1950s, to gain support from that body and many enthusiasts for the reservation of a small tract of land bearing indigenous flora in Gramatan Avenue, Beaumaris (Melway map 86 C6).

Despite the recent construction in Beaumaris of numbers of large houses surrounded by small gardens with few or none of the local wildflowers or trees, the conservationists' legacy remains. Bayside City Council (which absorbed the City of Sandringham) and the Beaumaris Conservation Society are committed to maintaining a well-established indigenous plant nursery and to the conservation of bushland reserves and foreshore vegetation.

Readers can find current information at www.beaumarisconservation.net
www.bcs.asn.au



Photo of Beaumaris heathland by Dr Jim Willis, 1939. Under it he wrote: "In this area we had a flora of worldwide interest ... Nearly all is threatened to the point of extinction ... unless we [establish sanctuaries] possessing these distinct plant species." Fortunately several remnant patches of indigenous vegetation have been preserved in the Beaumaris area.

PHOTO COURTESY VAL TARRANT, DIGITALLY RESTORED BY PHIL INGAMILLS

(Inset) Bayside City Council Community Indigenous Nursery staff member Erika Andersen (right) with volunteers Di Pearce and Robert Hocken.

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