

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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Living Memorials and Significant Trees

- Audrey Van Den Berg

Significant vegetation has been identified within the East Gippsland Shire by the Australian Garden History Society (Victoria), the National Trust, and other organisations. These are significant because they are rare, endemic to the area, honour people and services, because of their age, size, and shape.

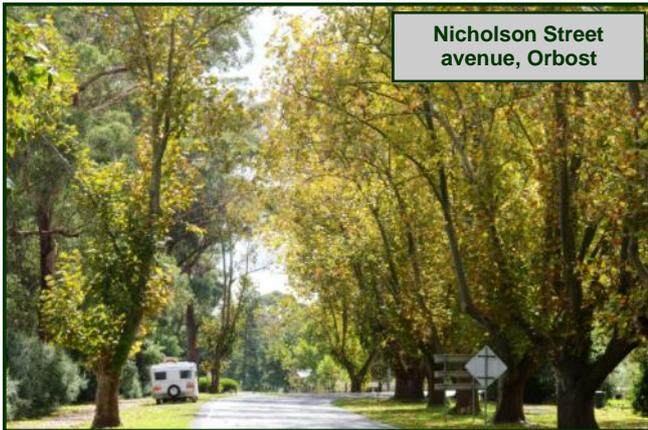
In Orbost township, most people have been to the Library and East Gippsland Shire Business Centre in Ruskin Street and may have noticed the **Indian Bean Tree** (*Catalpa bignonioides*) standing at the front of the building, just behind the hedge. This tree has nothing to do with India but is actually North American in origin where the indigenous people used it for medicinal purposes. It is an unusual tree in the Orbost region, possibly planted some time after the first Orbost Shire building was constructed in 1909.

Another rare planting for this area, and not easy to notice is on the corner of Lochiel Street and Nicholson Street, in the caravan park. This is a large **Chestnut Leaved Oak** (*Quercus castaneifolia*) planted in c.1950s, native originally to the Caucasus region and Iran.

More noticeable is the lovely avenue of mature trees at the southern end of Nicholson Street and along the Marlo Road. The **Plane Trees** (*Planatus sp.*) near the Caravan Park may have been planted in the early 1900s followed by a 1918 **Soldiers' Avenue** planting by the Orbost Shire in



Bottle Tree
(*Brachychiton rupestris*)
Coulton (Cameron) property, Orbost



Nicholson Street
avenue, Orbost

Nicholson Street in honour of World War I soldiers. These and other early plantings such as willows along the Snowy River and street plantings of Oak, and Flowering Peach were designed to give a European flavour.

Significantly, there are a number of plantings of Australian species such as **Spotted Gum** (*Corymbia maculata*) around Orbost. This tree is locally rare, occurring naturally in Victoria only in an isolated location along the Mottle Range Road between Orbost and Buchan.

The **Jarrahmond Avenue of Honour** is well recognised as a fine planting of Oak (*Quercus robur*), with the later addition of Flowering Peach and Cherry, planted initially in 1947 to honour Jarrahmond men who served during the Second World War and had attended the local Jarrahmond School. Significantly, this avenue of trees stretches from the gate of "Fairleigh" to the gate of "Greendale". These properties were home to Bill Lynn and Mac. Russell both of whom were killed during the war.

One of the newest memorial plantings in Orbost is the **Dwarf Pencil Pines and Rosemary** adjacent to the refurbished War Memorial in Nicholson Street. This honours all local personnel who served in all wars and peacekeeping operations in which Australia has been involved.

Still within the town of Orbost, located within the **Kindergarten and Infant Welfare complex** is a large Liquid Amber. This may possibly be the one planted by the Governor's wife, Lady Brooks on 17th October 1955, to commemorate the opening of the James Kerr Infant Welfare Centre in September 1954.

At the **Orbost Cemetery**, the planting of a Serenity Garden has been donated by the Friends of Orbost Op Shop. This is located under three very old Elm Trees and is a beautiful place to sit and contemplate while admiring the view. Also at the Cemetery is a line of Pencil Pines which edge the eastern entrance boundary. These were planted by a crew of "Green Corps" workers in 2002.

The **Orbost Golf Course** has a number of significant memorial tree plantings and plaques, including a plaque

and avenue in memory of **Greg Wilson** who died in action in 1941. Other golfers honoured for their diligent support of the Golf Club include Dr Nettleton. Near the start of the first tee-off area is a *Magnolia grandis* planted to celebrate the centenary of the Club (1906-2006). Large Pine trees have been planted at an earlier time at the entrance to the Golf Course.



Greg Wilson memorial plaque,
Orbost Golf Club

Older Orbost gardens, some possibly dating from the 1890s can be identified by the planting of trees popular at that time, copying the trend for exotic trees in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. For instance, the garden of Orbost's first doctor **James Kerr** who came here in 1888 and his wife Hilda (nee Temple) in Raymond Street has a large **Bunya Pine** and **Morton Bay Fig**. Such trees, along with Irish Strawberry, Bottle Tree, Cape Chestnut, Camellias and Cabbage Tree Palms are found in what were once the properties of the Nixon, Cameron and Scott families.



Moreton Bay Fig
(*Ficus macrophylla*),
Sanna (Kerr) property,
Orbost

Old fruit trees dating from an earlier era of self-sufficiency still bear fruit. **Walnut trees** also grew well. Indeed, walnuts were grown commercially on several farms from c.1890s. One orchard dating from these earlier times is still growing on the Cotter farm on the Orbost-Buchan Road at Newmerella. Another large orchard of walnuts is known to have existed just across the river on the Jarrahmond side on the property selected by John Cameron in 1884.

Ferdinand Von Mueller, who visited the Orbost district in 1854/55 and became Director of the Royal Botanical

Gardens in Melbourne was likely an influential figure in these early plantings. Indeed, **Cabbage Tree Palms** (*Livistonia australis*) which grow naturally in the Tabbara/Brodribb area and no where else in Victoria were noted by Von Mueller during his 1854/55 trip and again by Professor Baldwin Spencer from the University of Melbourne who came here in 1889.

Several early settlers took a keen interest in their natural surroundings and became botanical collectors. The Orbost Museum holds several albums of specimens reputedly collected by Carl Grove and John Cameron.



A group of full-grown palms growing by the side of Cabbage Tree Creek, (W.B. Spencer, 1889)

Another popular Australian tree grown around Orbost is the **Lilli Pilli** (*Syzygium smithii*) which is a very attractive tree with cream-white flowers and brilliant magenta coloured berries. These berries are not only very attractive to birds but can be eaten raw by humans or made into jams and preserves.

Old school and house sites can often be identified by the remnants of old plantings, particularly Pine trees, Oaks and bulbs. For instance, evidence of the site of James Cameron's house and farm in what is now Lochiel Park can still be seen on the banks of the Lagoon. Bulbs flower here in Autumn and Spring.

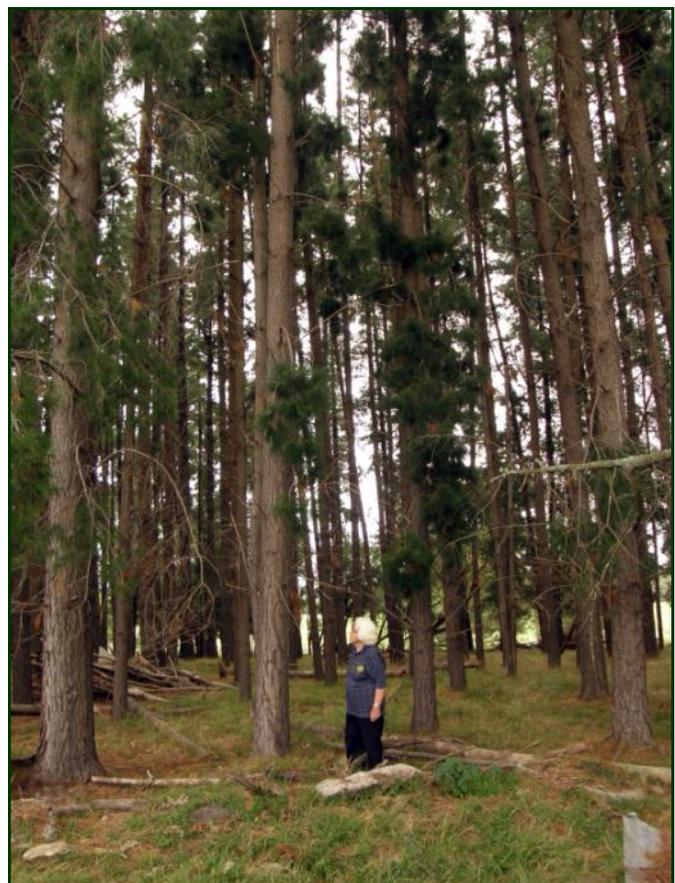
Some present-day citizens of Orbost have fond memories of playing under or climbing amongst the branches of Oak

trees during their school days. Primary Schools usually had some sort of garden and now, many years after the school has been closed and all buildings gone, there sometimes remains a **Living Memorial** of bulbs and school-yard trees. Sadly, many have now completely disappeared.

Corringle, Bete Bolong and Jarrahmond Primary Schools had pine trees. At the **Secondary College**, an avenue of pines was planted in the 1920s but most have now gone. More recently, a Gallipoli Aleppo Pine was planted in 1996 in memory of former students.

There was a time when Primary School children were encouraged by the Education Department to plant their own school Pine plantation. This was part of an education program to learn about forestry and also as a fund-raiser for the school through sale of the timber. The **Brodribb School pine plantation** (which was largely planted by children from **Orbost North Primary**), still exists although the old school at Brodribb has long gone.

Orbost Primary School had a plantation at the north end of Forest Road but only a few trees now remain, possibly seedlings from the original plantation. **Nowa Nowa School** plantation still exists. The **Newmerella School** pine plantation brought some financial return when it was felled.



Pines adjacent to Brodribb School site.

Interestingly, the **earliest Newmerella school site**, on the Orbost-Buchan Road opposite the Cotter property, can still be identified by the Living Memorial of Oak trees which were planted after the First World War. These large stately trees now provide shade for cattle.

Another Living Memorial is the **Sensory Gardens** on Forest Road. This Garden which was developed by the Orbost Garden Club, is a memorial to Orbost's earliest poet, Grace Jennings-Carmichael, who lived nearby at the Orbost Station Homestead as a young girl in the 1880s when her step-father managed this property.

Following the clearing of native vegetation, many early farmers planted poplar, weeping and basket willows, and pines as shelter trees and wind breaks. Many of these, particularly the pines, are deteriorating badly and the basket willows are steadily being removed along the river banks.

Besides these exotic tree species, the Orbost area also has **native trees of significance**.

The remnant patches of Cabbage Tree Palms and Spotted Gums have already been mentioned. The "Big Tree" on Greens Road, and Plum Pine on the Errinundra Plateau are notable, along with remnant Mahoganies along the Snowy River and some Banksias which are far older than any of the exotics. Maidens Wattle (*Acacia maidenii*) grows only in several isolated locations as does Buff Hazelwood (*Symplocos thwaitesii*).

Another recent discovery is a Coastal Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) possibly 400 years old, living alone on the Bendoc Reserve and far out of its usual coastal comfort zone. Then, there are orchids which live no where else. The picture is of a diverse and interesting flora.

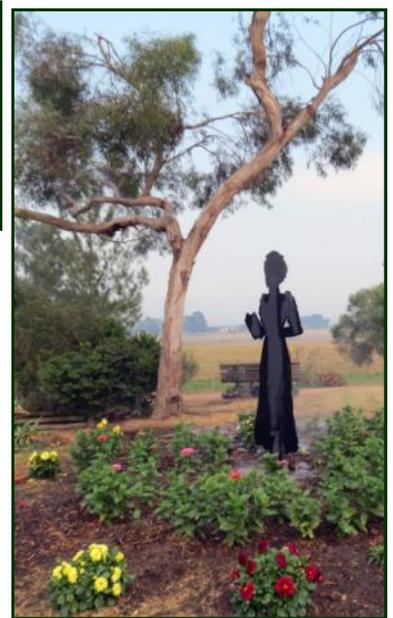


Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*), Bendoc Nature Conservation Reserve. Photo courtesy of DEPI.

Above left: Stringers Fire Tower, two spliced logs of Red Iron Bark and Yellow Stringy Bark.
Above: A Giant Tree (Mtn. Grey Gum), Greens Road, Errinundra. Photo courtesy of the Slab Hut.
Below: A very old Kanooka (*Tristaniopsis laurina*), Goongerah



Bunya Pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*), Coulton (Cameron) property, Orbost



Sensory Gardens memorial to Grace Jennings-Carmichael