

**BILL GREVILLE** This was written by Bill Greville and given to Jim Reynolds at the Ballarat Botanical Gardens in May 1995.

**BALLARAT: 509 York Street. March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1985.**

I commenced work with Ballarat City Council in 1936 at the Botanical Gardens as a junior nursery man and gardener under Tom Toop as Curator. The three years I worked under Mr Toop my duties were to assist both Mr Coutts and Tom Beaumont who were responsible to Mr Toop for most propagation of plants for the Glass Houses and flower beds.

My duties as junior was, under supervision, to mix the various blends of soils and to crock the various sizes of pots for the potting of the different types of plants for the Glass House displays. When these plants finished their display in the Glass Houses it was my duty to knock out the old plants and wash the terra cotta pots in preparation for reuse at the next display.

The soil used in those days for the potting mixtures came from the sods from the side of a creek out on the common which is now the Wendouree Housing Estate. The leaf mould used was from the previous year's leaf rakings although all Oak leaves were retained on their own for the Begonia mixture.

Coarse Lal Lal sand was used for all mixtures and the sods of soil which had been stacked several feet high and allowed to mostly dry was chopped down with a mattock so as to retain as much fibre as possible to help keep the soil porous.

The mixture for the Begonia soil as I recall from those days was as barrow measurements:

- 4 barrows loam
- 2 barrows Oak leaf mould
- 2 large buckets of Lal Lal sand
- 6 x 6" pots full of fowl manure
- 1 shovel full of crushed charcoal (Car charcoal burner type)

The ratio of that mixture could be increased as to the quantity required. The mixture was turned 4 times by shovel then moistened to the required condition for potting.

A most important item used before potting all plants was to place a small portion of dried hops on the top of the crock at the bottom of the pots as this prevented the soil mixing with the crock and ensured good drainage. It was part of my job to spread the hops out to dry after they were delivered from the brewery.

In 1938 Mr Toop informed me that another junior (Don Black), was to be employed at the Gardens and was to take my place with the nursery duties etc. Tom Toop then, on occasions, taught me the rudiments of grafting, rose budding etc, and most importantly, the taking of cuttings from the growing Begonias. The best instrument for taking Begonia cuttings, he emphasized, was a surgeon's scalpel which he used and was supplied by a friend, Dr Shiel, who apparently collected used ones from the Operating Theatres of the hospitals.

During 1938 I was transferred to the outer Gardens and placed to work with the Soilman, Bill Lindsay. Those days all flower beds, including the Dahlias, were trenched and leaf mould placed on the bottom. As regards the flower all spent flowers as well as the leaf mould were trenched.

Apart from assisting with the outside pruning, planting etc. I was required to assist Harry Coulter who was in charge of the two large glass houses at the Southern end of the Gardens near the Fish Hatchery.

The most important duties there, apart from assisting with the painting when required was the cutting over and staking of the Single, Frilled and Crested Begonias and pruning the dead flowers from the Gloxinias. I helped Harry Coulter on many occasions with the glass houses during big occasions and thus gained a lot of knowledge from a very clever and experienced man.

During the winter months we, of the outside staff, had to cut the miles of hedging that comprised the very popular Maze and, with that finished we all pruned and dug by spade all shrubberies which included the long Back Walk. It went the full length of the gardens. Lawns were top dressed with ashes where needed from the big burn ups of tree pollarding and prunings and the occasions, when available from the Cattle Yards, sheep manure.

Approaching November and Dahlia time the Barley that had been sown in all the Dahlia beds to be trenched in for the green manure was carried out and the stakes to support the Dahlias driven in. Only two sizes of stakes were used – six feet by two inches for the large Dahlias and five feet one inch for the smaller varieties which included Chalmes and Pom-Poms.

Every second year the Lily ponds were cleaned, the fish caught and the ponds cleaned out. After cleaning out the lilies were divided and repotted in their containers with loam, cow manure and topped with Lal Lal coarse sand.

In 1937 when the Ballarat centenary was to be celebrated, Tom Toop was put in charge of decorating all the ledges of the City Hall with the wooden containers planted with a large variety of annuals suitable for the occasion. Tom Beaumont and myself along with casual workers had the responsibility of watering the lot which meant carting water in containers up two flights of stairs to the second story of the Hall; however all went well and the containers on the ledges were a great success and the likes will probably never be seen again.

War had been declared in September 1939 and as all my mates were enlisting in the A.I.F., I decided to join them and enlisted early 1940. I gave notice to Mr Toop and told him of my enlistment. He then congratulated me and said he was very pleased that the Gardens were represented.

During the several months I served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment in Tobruk I received on a few occasions letters from Mr Toop. I answered them giving an account as I thought the Censor would allow but when I resumed work at the Gardens in 1944 Mr Toop acknowledged receiving the letters and how pleased he was getting the reply. During 1944 I was stationed at the Heidelberg Military Hospital and treated for a war caused disability (deafness) and as at that time men were being released from the services who had defects but could do a day's work, a boost for the essential work areas. Whilst on leave I called at the City Hall and contacted Colonel Morton, the Town Clerk, and told him of men being discharged for essential work. Tom Beaumont had been called up for military service and as Mr Toop had retired Bill Lindsay who had been made Curator was having a tough time keeping the garden presentable. Colonel Morton contacted the local M.P. Mr Pollard who in turn contacted Forde the then Minister for the Army and I was discharged in 1944 to return to my duties in the Botanic Gardens.

In souvenirs I have copies of the letter written by Reg Pollard and Col Morton to Mr Forde for my release and of the reply from Mr Forde, granting it. Finally all credit is due to the Mayor and City Councillors of Ballarat who, at a meeting moved that all Council employees who enlisted for overseas service were to have their pay made

up to their Council pay from 6bob a day the A.I.F. pay. As I was a junior it wasn't much at the time but on turning 21 full adult pay was made up which was very handy. On enlisting all Council employees were presented with a money belt. I used mine throughout the war and still have it.

I resumed employment Ballarat Botanical Gardens 1944

STAFF:	Bill Lindsay	Curator
	Harry Coulter	
	Harry Beaton	
	Reg Middleton	
	Vic Catherall	
	Bill Graham	
	Bert Ewins	
	Bill Greville	
	Bob Greville	Junior employee
	Ernie Soncum	

I was put in charge of two glass houses at the Southern end of the Gardens which Mr Coulter had been in charge of and as Mr Toop had retired and Mr Beaumont was in the forces Mr Coulter was placed in charge of the nursery and the main Glass House in the Gardens. I was instructed to assist Mr Coulter with the nursery work whenever needed and we both commenced building up all the glass house stock, particular Begonias through taking as many cuttings as possible. Fortunately the great show of Single, Crested and Frilled Begonias in the glass houses at the Southern end of the Gardens did not have to be reproduced through cuttings as, unlike the double type of Begonia they stay true to type and colour for years and, when sown from seed develop true to type and colour. Over all the years I worked at the Gardens the glass houses over that time never varied their displays to any great extent.

The Winter and Spring shows consisted of Cinerarias, Primulas (Malacordia and Obconicas), Cyclamens, Schizanthus, Calceolarias, various coloured Hydrangeas. The Glass Houses at the Southern end of the Gardens displayed mostly the same as the main Glass House but, as one of the houses was heated during the colder months with a coke boiler, we were able to display a variety of Orchids (large and Slippers), Dornicums and, to add creeper effect along the front benches, we placed 6" pots Lobelia and variegated water creepers. As we were still building up supplies of all stock, much use was made of ferns which hadn't been divided during the war years and with the help I was able to give, we divided all of which helped to fill in the empty spots and give the impression of a great display as they threw out the colour of the flowering display associated with them.

In Tom Toop's day a variety of seed was imported from Blackmore and Langdon in London, but that was suspended during the war years as all staff had, as the occasion arose, to collect all needed seed to be sown for the annual fills of the flower beds. Both Mr Coulter and myself tried and sorted out as well as labelled the different variety of seeds and, when the time came, we sowed and later pricked out the seedlings to be planted in the outer flower beds. The Spring Show of annuals were mostly of Poppies, Wallflowers, Pansies, \_emoflia, Ranunculas, Polyanthus, Lupins, Stocks, large English Daisies, Monkey Musk, English Marigolds and we dug up and divided clumps of perennial Flocks, Shaster Daisies, Delphiniums, Perennial Asters.

Both Mr Coulter and myself helped the garden staff to cut over and prepare the 2 Hellebore beds as they flowered in the winter and early Spring and made an important show. The Summer Show consisted of the well known annuals, Bedding Begonias, which had to be divided from the previous year as we never had the need

to sow, Zinnias of different varieties, Salvias – red and the larger blue. Dwarf blue delphiniums planted alternately with the red Salvias made a great show. African Daisies, Portulaca. Some beds were planted with the large blue Salvias with the red Salvias alternately, Phlox, Helianthus, Petunias, African and French Marigolds as well as all types of Dahlias. The glass Houses at the Southern end of the Gardens were filled with single, crested and Frilled Begonias, Gloxineas, Streptacarpus, assorted geraniums, assorted Coleus, \_efilliums, Impatiens, a large variety of flichias in 8" pots, Hydrangeas in large pots. Ferns were again used to fill in the spaces in both glass houses but when the time arrived all plants were cleared out of the benches, scrubbed and disinfected and the Double variety of Begonias as well as the basket types were placed in position to develop.

With peace declared in 1945, Tom Beaumont was discharged from Military Service and returned to his former position in the Nursery alongside Harry Coulter, myself and brother Bob Greville as Junior. Routine development work continued in the nursery and when time permitted in the garden outside. However, it was obvious when Colonel Morton, the Town Clerk, visited the Gardens talking to the older members of staff, that changes had to be made. During 1946-47 Tom Beaumont was made Superintendent and Bill Lindsay Curator. Harry Coulter and Harry Benton were retired and replaced in time with qualified men. During the 15 years I (Bill Greville) worked under Tom Beaumont there were many changes of work practices and duties. All outside garden beds instead of trenching with leaf mould were heavily manured with sheep manure and dug in with the spent flowers. A lot of work time was saved with that practice. Dahlia beds were not trenched with leaf mould but after the dahlias were finished the beds were still dug over and barley sown to be trenched in during November.

One of the two glasshouses at the Southern end of the Gardens which was heated with a coke boiler system was done away with as far as a glass house was concerned but served very well as a cool house alongside the other one.

As time went on Tom Beaumont was able to import seed again from overseas and all seed sowed in the Nursery had a good strike rate. Apart from the high class of budding Begonias and Polyanthus we imported with the other seed on one occasion seed of the Crested, Frilled and Single Begonias which will grow true to type and colour, and as I pricked them out personally and looked after them, they finally were big enough to go on display in the Southern Glass House. I can vouch for the great show they made when included with the other types in the Glass House.

As time still went on Tom Beaumont through friends and contacts with other Curators from elsewhere built up a great show of Pelegoniums and when displayed in the main glasshouse in the Gardens for a couple of months prior to the Begonia show went over well with the public. As time went on a policy of money saving at the Gardens to cut expenses arrived and a lot of maintenance work was to be done by a qualified man who was to carry out those duties as well as assist Mr Beaumont in the Nursery when required. At that time I was able to spend more time working with the outside staff in the gardens and the Southern Glass Houses but was called back into the Nursery to work during the busy periods. It was about that time that a serious mildew started to appear on the Begonias. It was the first time it had appeared since Tom Toop's days when it was never heard of. The mildew was traced to Euonamous(?) shrub which was covered all over and growing in the shrubbery with all the other shrubs in what was known as the Back Walk. Tom Beaumont and myself inspected the shrub and as, without any doubt, it was the same mildew that was on the Begonias, the shrub was accepted as the cause of the problem. I was instructed to grub the shrub out and to have it burnt.

Further more cost cutting was carried out and, when the Maze, which, after cutting, was always repaired – holes filled in with blackthorn etc...no maintenance had been done for a couple of years apart from cutting and the Maze fell into a shadow of its former best days. Strange but true, including myself, most of the staff arrived for work one Monday morning and the entire Maze had been graded out by the Council Grader and burnt. It would not be more than a couple of years later that a former Mayor and Councillor of Ballarat who was also a master plumber, Bill Roff, organised and put in many hours of labour helping to build in place of the Maze, a toddler's wading pool, which proved very popular with the parents and the kiddies for several years. As the cleaning etc by the Gardens staff members had to be of a high standard and took much time the pool was eventually filled in and done away with the same as the Maze.

As time went on the mildew on the Begonias was causing concern and was taking time to be controlled. Tom Beaumont called me into the glass house when I was tending the Frilled, Crested and Single Begonias and told me as the mildew was taking too much of my time to control they were to be done away with. Both Tom Beaumont and I knew that the Single Begonias had been a great attraction at the Southern Glasshouse since Tom Toop's days and if done away with a lot of people would be concerned. I thought I had put a good case to save the popular plants but again when working in the glasshouse the next morning the Truck Driver arrived with Tom Beaumont's orders that the entire Glass House of Single, Crested and Frilled Begonias were to be taken away and destroyed. I was gold by the truck driver that they were to be knocked out of the pots and taken to the tip to be destroyed and to this day I just have his word for it. During the many years that I looked after the Southern Glass Houses after taking over from Harry Coulter, during the warmer months of the year on weekends and holidays I was required to do all the watering of the pot plants and any cleaning over that was necessary. I was allowed one hour overtime which at double time was 2 hours pay. The Union Rep. was at the Gardens one day and told me that the award stated that I must be paid for a minimum of three hours work or to work for the three hours. As I lived a long way from the Gardens I wouldn't expect Tom Beaumont to pay me 6 hours pay without working for it so I resigned from the Gardens for other work in 1962.

It is 33 years since I retired from the Gardens and I am now nearly 75 years of age. My writing isn't the best and my memory of flower names is a little vague these days. As Reg Middleton and myself are the only two alive in Ballarat today who worked with Tom Toop, I feel certain that Reg, if given the chance to read this writing of my memoirs would agree with what I have written.

An important factor that I had forgotten was that when we were stopped from getting our soil (sods) from out of the Common by the Wendouree Shire just after the war, we were forced to look elsewhere and the Ballarat Council gained permission from the Buninyong Shire to get the required soil from Greens Lane at Dunnstown which proved much superior to the Common soil. We cut the sods from the creek banks which was black and a similar quantity from the rise which was red. Both types of sods had a high fibre content and when stacked, dried and cut down for potting the mixture was porous and rich and was used at all times and was still being used when I departed from the Gardens. Another item of interest was that the three gardeners who were retired some time after Tom Beaumont returned to the Gardens after War Service were all over seventy years of age and all gave great service to the Gardens during the War Years. This is an account of my 22 years working under the Curator of the Botanic Gardens and although my writing may not be the best and my memories of plant names not what they should be at nearly 75 years of age it is the best I can do.

Bill Greville.