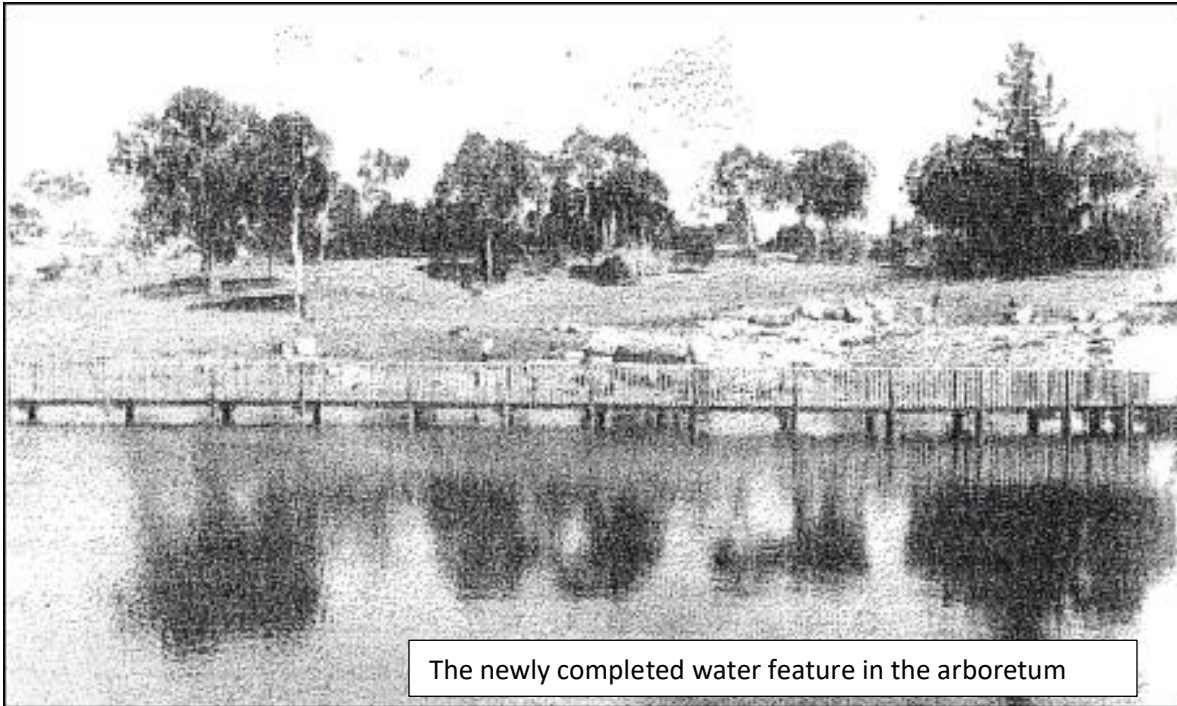


## History and Development of the Armidale Arboretum

*The following information was taken verbatim from a pamphlet designed and written by Maria Hitchcock*



The newly completed water feature in the arboretum

The 16-hectare Armidale Arboretum was originally gazetted as a Public Reserve in 1882. The site was neglected until the mid 1960's when a proposal to rezone the land for residential use provoked public protest. When the original zoning was reconfirmed and a Board of Trustees had been established, the Trustees commissioned Mr Rob Margules to draw up a development plan which was paid for by a group of interested citizens. At the same time Prof. John McGarity prepared a soil study. A planting programme began, including the windbreaks and buffer zones at the western end of the Arboretum.

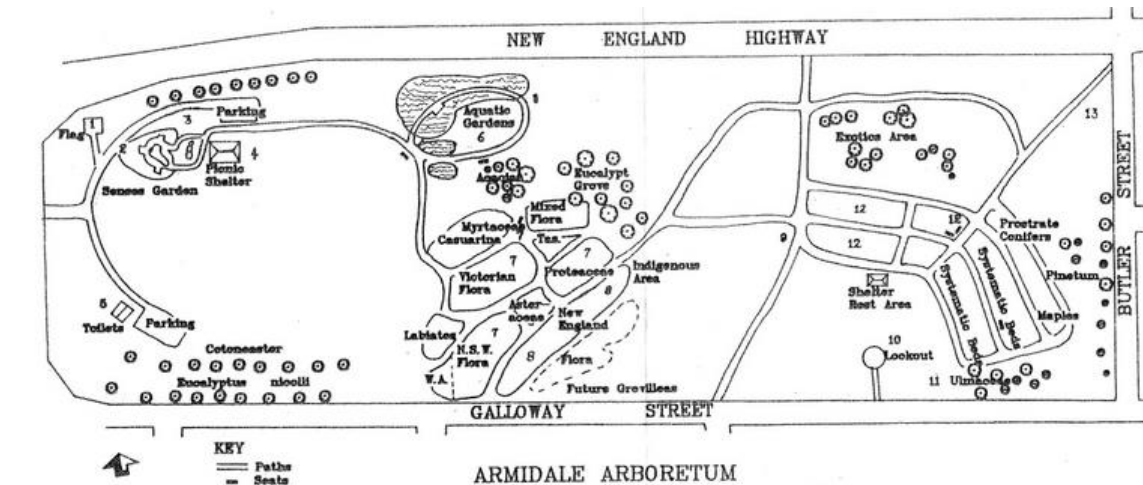
However, lack of funds curtailed the Trustees' activities and in 1979 the Armidale Council took over the Trusteeship. In 1982 Australia celebrated the Year of the Tree. A public meeting was called to consider an appropriate local project. There was a strong response at a time when Armidale was suffering the worst drought in its history (up to that point!). At the same time the district was recovering from the devastation of Eucalyptus Die back. The community meeting resulted in the establishment of the Arboretum Committee, an advisory committee of the Armidale City Council. It was charged with the responsibility of developing the site in accordance with the Margules Plan. In the following three years Fund raising schemes, Awareness Days and working bees achieved considerable public interest and limited plantings but the proper development of the Arboretum required funds beyond the reach of those involved.

In early 1985 public submissions were sought on possible Bi-Centennial projects for the Armidale district. The Arboretum Committee submitted a modest proposal for preliminary work in the Aquatic Gardens. This plan was amplified to become the \$266,000 Armidale Bi-Centennial Arboretum Plan which was launched by the N.S.W. Premier, Mr Neville Wran, on 10th August, 1985. and completed in September, 1988.

The Aquatic Gardens were designed by Mr John Wrigley. They were funded by a major part of the Arboretum's Bicentennial grant- Rocks forming the water fall came from the Uralla district. A push-button on the wooden walkway starts the pump when the water is not running. Allow five minutes for the top pool to fill. The eastern end of the lake is a bog-garden planted with carefully selected aquatic plants. Since its completion, these gardens have attracted many visitors.

The Native Gardens were designed by Mrs Maria Hitchcock. They were constructed in stages using volunteer labour and an unemployment relief grant. Students from The Armidale School and TAFE planted most of the trees and shrubs which form an interesting under-storey for the established Ribbon Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*). The large beds were mulched with sawdust and wood chips before planting to reduce weed competition. Gradually, as funds become available, planting in the area will be completed.

This very long bed is the New England Flora bed, funded and constructed by the New England Group of the Society for Growing Australian Plants as their Bicentennial project. All the plants here are indigenous to the New England area. Planting will take several years as each plant is being propagated by members using local seed or cuttings. It was designed by Mrs Maria Hitchcock to compliment the Native Gardens and to attract birds to the Arboretum.



Since the late 1990s the Arboretum Coordinator has been Patrick Laher. Members of the Armidale APS Group help out. The plants used at first were 50mm tubestock and there were many losses as no one watered them due to a misunderstanding about who would maintain them. The council was asked to remove dead plants and re-grass some areas after the results of insufficient helpers to maintain and water the new plants. It was decided to replant with 140mm pots and this produced great results.

Each year, since 2001, Patrick has tendered a report to the council outlining the activities and personnel involved in the project. He drew 'mud' maps of all plantings with details of position, circumstance and any other information relevant to the day for his own records. He also reports to the APS Armidale group each month, updating the information and he publishes it in our newsletter regularly.

As the project progressed, the plan changed regularly to accommodate the weather and availability of labour. Some beds were allowed to 'degrade' naturally as many plants were not good selections for the site. For example, *Grevillea* sp and other Proteaceae family members are difficult to grow without constant care at this site. After planting many small plants for their flowers, the maintenance increased and they became too difficult to keep.

In 2013, it was decided to plant *Lomandra longifolia* as an understorey to the larger shrubs and trees. More mulch is being delivered by council to spread in early 2015. The project should be completed at the end of 2015

A short addition in 2020 – of course a garden project is **never** finished, and there are usually monthly working bees of the Armidale APS members to spread mulch, plant, water, control weeds, trim etc etc.