



Friends of Royal Park, Parkville AGM October 4, 2023

GUEST PRESENTATION

“The Story of the Flemington Rd Lemon-scented Gum” Robyn Laurie, with Alan Wise



REST IN PEACE
OUR BEAUTIFUL
LEMON-SCENTED GUM
FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

Introduction

Robyn Laurie is a long-time resident living close to the Park in Parkville West. As too is Alan Wise, his wife Ann Read and Cathy Olsson, local residents all instrumental in the campaign to save the Flemington Rd Lemon-scented Gum ... and in the propagation and planting of new trees grown from the original – all part of this ‘story’.

The FoRP welcomed Robyn and Alan to our AGM to tell the sad and happy story of the iconic Gum.

The presentation commenced with playing the ‘campaign’ song by Mary Holdsworth and Patricia Mortensen from the CD “Heart Upon The Shore” and the showing of a 15min video/documentary, made by Elle Marsh VCA University student, of the campaign to save the Flemington Rd Lemon-scented Gum in 2016. The tree was one of five that stood in a tree island in Flemington Road, not far from the intersection with Church St and Elliott Ave and Mt Alexander Rd.

The campaign began when VicRoads notified local residents the trees would be removed as part of road widening associated with CityLinkTullaWidening project. The signature ‘gateway’ tree was a 100+ year old Lemon-scented Gum – described by Gregory Moore, Chair of the National Trust’s Register of Significant Trees as having “very good form, a fine shady specimen” and “this has grown so well in such a difficult position over such a long period of time” Early photos of the tree in 1914 and 1969 confirmed its signature/ gateway status at the site.

In April 2016, a call to arms saw ‘Guardians of the Flemington Rd Gum’ formed. Protests were mounted, meetings held, flyers produced, support gathered, petitions lodged, the tree removals questioned, arguments for alternatives put forward, local politicians involved, 24-hour vigils were held in the cold winter weather. ‘STOP THE CHOP’ was the rallying cry.

VicRoads’ rationale put forward to remove the trees was for “safety” and “traffic flow” reasons. Alternate traffic solutions, saving the trees, were rejected with VicRoads costing at \$5m to reroute road lanes.

On June 25, contractors arrived to start the cutting the tree branches off, however they were stopped by the police who considered it was too dangerous to the residents chained to the tree ... Ann Read was later arrested. Nesting magpies lost their home; possums their habitat. But the contractors returned – at 1:30am, together with 8 trucks and accompanied by 30 police. Twenty five percent more of the tree was removed. The final death of the tree was on July 26 – RIP. A wake was held at the site. Robyn told of the exhaustion of the Guardians from the whole saga. Viewing the video brought tears to eyes.

Robyn then continued with the ‘happy’ part of the story. A deal had been struck with VicRoads and Transurban in the tree’s final days for the large logs to be saved and Councillor Cr. Rohan Leppert arranged for the City of Melbourne to provide storage until the future of the logs was decided.

In the meantime, Cathy Olsson gathered nuts from the tree and sought expert horticultural advice how to propagate new plants from the seed. Then disaster struck – possums devoured all but three of the batch of seedlings she’d grown. Thank goodness another ‘Guardian’ has more seed in reserve.

So it came to pass on Nov 21, 2022 two 2m high progeny of the Flemington Rd Lemon-scented Gum were planted in a corner of the Park, not far from the original road island reserve. The salvaged logs from the original tree were placed around one tree in a fitting memorial setting. But doom struck, strong winds snapped the tree shortly after planting ... but luckily Cathy had another propagated tree to replace it. What a history, what memories it carries with it as it grows.



[To see many photos of the campaign to save the Flemington Rd Lemon-scented Gum and the propagation and planting of its progeny, visit the Facebook of ‘Guardians of the Flemington Rd Gum – RIP’.]

[To see a video of the above presentation at the FoRP AGM on Oct 4, go to the Friends of Royal Park YouTube channel https://youtu.be/-dB1-1C9NSs?si=kfxS_6SXqtVJjDcC]