

Newsletter No. 26

March 2020

This 'End of Season' Newsletter is being issued earlier than normal because of the premature finish to our Sunday season caused by COVID 19.

Along with all other public events, the virus has devastated the National Trust's program. You will have received emails from Simon Ambrose updating volunteers on the general situation across all properties. The Trust has suspended all Volunteer Programs. As Colin Mickleburgh has informed us, the Sunday openings and all booked tours are cancelled.

From the National Trust web site: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/news/important-updates-coronavirus/> (accessed 27 March 2020):

Monday 23 March

Dear supporter,

Following the Government directive as part of the COVID-19 response efforts, all National Trust properties in Victoria, including the Old Melbourne Gaol and gardens at Rippon Lea Estate and Como House with exclusion of the The Stables of Como Cafe are now **temporarily closed**.

Since 1956 the National Trust in Victoria has been actively conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy. Our role has always been to inspire the community to appreciate and celebrate our diverse natural, cultural, social and Indigenous history.

Over the coming weeks we will be ramping up our efforts to connect digitally through our website and social media channels, to ensure our places can remain open virtually while we are temporarily closed.

As always, I want to thank you for your continued support and know that our mission will continue during these uncertain times. From myself and our team at the National Trust, we wish you, your families and friends continued safety and good health.

Warm regards,

Simon Ambrose

Chief Executive Officer

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

All events have been cancelled or postponed and the 2020 Australian Heritage Festival has been cancelled.

We are sorry that all our activities have been brought to such an abrupt closure, but of course this is only right in the current situation.

Cottage Management Team

Liaison	Alison Pearson	0400 543097	Maintenance	Colin Mickelburgh	0423 114619
Volunteers	Colin Mickleburgh	0447 018224	Funds/Statistics	Helen Botham	0407 814008
Housekeeping	Ellen Walters	0419 519763	Publicity	Helen Armstrong	9592 5616
Garden	Helen Botham	0447 01824	Curatorial	John Botham	0407 814008

News from the Cottage Management Team

At our meeting with the National Trust on 28 February we again voiced concern over the generally low numbers of visitors on Sundays. This is despite a positive response from the Visitor Information Centre after we contacted them with information about what we offer, which was used to brief Sunday staff and volunteers at the Centre. On three Sundays this season there were no visitors, as well seven Sundays when there were three or less visitors. We discussed options for next season and a suggestion was made that we open on the first and third Sundays of the month, from 11am-4pm, and extend the season to include May. There are visitors to the park on Sunday mornings, and we may be able to take advantage of this by being open. There would be two shifts of volunteers each Sunday (10.30 – 1.30; 1.15 – 4.15) so we'd need the same number of volunteers as if we're open every Sunday. We would like to trial this during 2020-21, and review after the season. This proposal was going to be put to a meeting of volunteers which we had planned for 1 May, but this meeting won't now go ahead. **Please let us know your thoughts on this proposal by emailing us at foltc@latrobesociety.org.au**

In September, we hope to provide staff and volunteers from the Visitor Information Centre with a tour of the Cottage so that they can see what we offer to visitors.

As mentioned in the last Newsletter we made efforts to boost publicity for booked tours and emails were sent to 60 Probus groups. This may have contributed to a good number of tours booked for the first half of this year which will unfortunately now be cancelled.

John Botham is to step down as Curatorial Coordinator at the end of the month. John has made a significant contribution to the Cottage, particularly in managing the many moving parts of the Cottage Improvement Project. His presence on the Cottage Management Team will be sorely missed, and we would all like to thank him for the passion and commitment he has shown for the Cottage.

I'd like to finish this report with some good news. Helen Botham will be taking on the role of Garden Coordinator permanently, in addition to her other roles on the Cottage Management Team. A great result!
Alison Pearson, Liaison Coordinator

Works at the Cottage

The electrical wiring plan was approved by Heritage Victoria, and work has commenced. This will considerably simplify the switching on of lights as we enter the Cottage.

There is now a master switch for all the lights in the servants' block in the cupboard on the left as you enter that central door. The master switch is the bottom switch - the other switch is for the light in that entrance alcove and the kitchen, if that light is required. Now all the lights in that building will be turned off with the master switch. Both light fittings in the entrance and kitchen have been replaced with new ones and there are two extra power sockets in the reception area. One behind the reception desk which now has the Square device and mobile phone plugged into it. The other is behind the TV and it is controlled by a switch below the TV.

In the Cottage, a master switch has been added near the floor to the left as you come in the door by the bedroom. New light fittings have been fitted in the closets, dining room and drawing room.



Work to remove the security alarm box from the front entrance to the servants' block will not now take place.

Rat Control

You may have seen when visiting the Cottage our new feline resident. She is a lovely tabby and seems to enjoy patrolling the area, and we wonder if this is why we haven't had rat problems recently. We have named her Minnie after La Trobe's cat. He wrote to Agnes on 28 February 1852: *'We have still an old cat Minnie which perhaps you patted as a kitten'*.

Colin Mickelburgh, Maintenance Coordinator writes: Cats have been the best catcher of rats since the start of time but our pest control contractor claims to have perfected an electronic detection method involving remote sensors. The new technology means that we will only require a technician on site when rodent activity is



Minnie the cat

detected by the sensors as opposed to the current method of regularly baiting traps both inside and outside the cottage. We are very interested to see how this will work and will be keeping a vigilante eye for any signs of an intrusion and hoping the cat continues enjoying its stay at the cottage.

Garden

We held a working bee on 17 March, supported by Eliasha Muldowney, of the National Trust Horticulture team. She led the work to rejuvenate the Weeping Elm bed. On that day we also planted a *Polygala*. This is a common garden plant in Melbourne, and in fact in some areas is a declared weed, but it was on the list of plants sent to La Trobe from the Sydney Botanic Gardens in June 1844. It has been planted by the dining room door.

Although the Cottage lawn does get quite long at times, the Serco Mowing Team are keen to help us keep the Cottage looking neat and are doing their best. We will attempt to eradicate some of the weeds in the lawn this autumn/winter.



Polygala

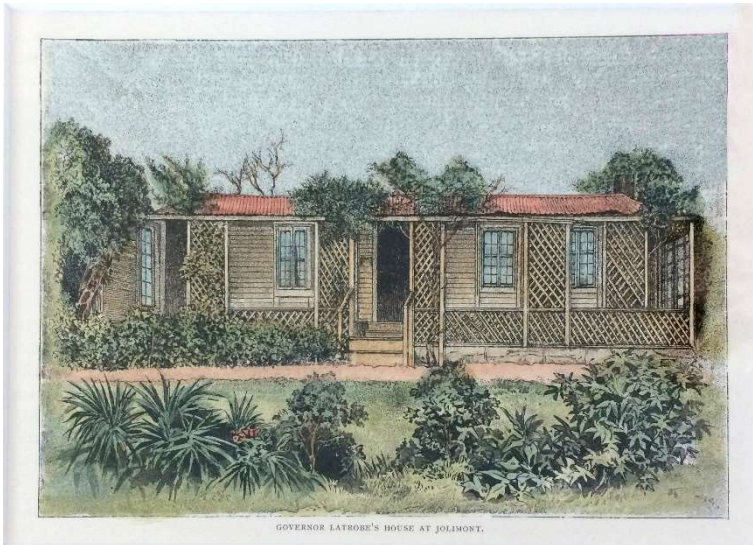
Cottage Events

26 January, Special Opening at La Trobe's Cottage

The Cottage was open between 1pm and 4pm, coinciding with the opening of Government House on that day. We had 45 visitors, all of whom took a tour of the Cottage.

Sunday 1 March, 2-4pm, La Trobe's Art

For the last of our three 'Themed Sundays' this season, we celebrated La Trobe's Art. A large number of prints of La Trobe's pictures were exhibited in the Cottage, and original art works, not usually on display, were loaned for the day and displayed in the reception area. The display generated much interest among the public and also members of the La Trobe Society who gathered at 4.30pm to celebrate La Trobe's Birthday.



Unknown artist
Governor Latrobe's House at Jolimont, c.1887
Hand coloured engraving
Private collection

Albert Thomas Mockridge, artist
Residence of Governor Charles La Trobe, Jolimont,
1937
Watercolour
Collection: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)



Charles A. Whitman, artist
Back verandah La Trobe's Cottage, c.1914
Water colour
Private collection

La Trobe Society events that have been cancelled due to COVID 19:

21 April: Joint La Trobe Society/RHSV AGL Shaw Lecture – Speaker: Dr Simon Smith, ‘Law, Lawyers and La Trobe’.

26 May: FOLTC Annual Lecture – Speaker: Dr Eleanor Robin, ‘Swanston: Merchant Statesman and a Founder of Melbourne’.

14 June: Sunday Talk– Speaker: Megan Anderson, La Trobe Society Fellow, ‘Extravagance, Tradition & Power; an exploration of Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe’s uniform’.

We are sorry not to be able to see you at our traditional end-of-season meeting. Please give us your thoughts about Sunday openings, and if you have any other comments you’d like to make, or questions, please email foltc@latrobesociety.org.au

We will aim to keep you up to date with any news about the re-opening of the Cottage; we hope to arrange a meeting before the start of the new season in the Spring.

Thanks to all Cottage volunteers for your support during this season. We hope you all keep well during this difficult time, and we look forward to seeing you when this health crisis is over.

