

**S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
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**A C Keane
544 Brunswick St
North Fitzroy**

Retrospect

Our new member, the first from Western Australia is Mr H E Knox, "Kurrawongup", Scaddan, WA. We are glad to have you, Mr Knox, and trust you will be able to help in our activities. A brief communication re your garden and its contents would be appreciated.

The group commenced in June 1961, when we had 6 members – now we have 15 which is a reasonable increase. We have done a few things and made some progress I think – I early thought our greatest hurdle would be the then recognized one of the people's disinclination to grow native subjects because they believed it was difficult or impossible to do so, so they said, they were plants which would only grow in the bush. Failures were reported over the years and so the myth was established, and like all myths it has been hard to eradicate.

Since I have become interested in the "natives" I have often observed that the few "Australians" planted in suburban gardens are in the back streets of gardens – under other plants, in deep shade, or where the soil is poor etc, and there almost completely neglected. If you ask why you are told "they are bush plants which should grow anywhere". Of course they didn't thrive for even bush specimens want some light and drainage even if not sun.

To many of my garden friends I have given a wattle to try out and it is pathetic to find later that it has been treated as a poor relation and the verdict – "wattles won't grow in my garden".

Fortunately the SGAP is slowly educating people in this regard and with the advent of so many native nurseries, the prejudice is being overcome. Now many Australian plants are being accepted as growable in ordinary garden conditions and their popularity increasing. Within 20 years I am confident we will have won the race thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of those who established and stabilized the SGAP.

Our little group, however, is beset with a very vicious and untrue objection and one which is difficult to explain away. (There are others which I will mention in a later letter).

This is the widespread belief that wattle pollen causes hay fever. Now this is a very serious objection in the minds of gardeners and others and understandably so, since it involves the question of their health. It does not, however, stand up to any reasonable investigation; it simply is not true. I would go so far as to assert that this pollen is a rare cause of hay fever. Over many years of referring people for hay fever tests I have yet to find one sensitive to acacia pollen. I know it can happen, as it does with every plant growing, in certain cases, but at the worst, it is no more guilty than the rest of growing things. No one, after all, would refuse to grow the beautiful exotics like Rhododendrons and Azaleas, simply because some (or many) claimed they acquired hay fever from them – these plants are too beautiful to be cast aside because of a phobia but not so our wattles.

We have to do something about this – some form of counter propaganda must be devised. I have no doubt it is useless telling people they do not cause allergic diseases; no matter how strong your arguments or what authorities you quote, people won't believe this sort of argument even if they listen to you. What then? I suggest this. Remembering the adoration of certain exotics and

that people will have nothing adverse said about them, let us attempt to indoctrinate gardeners in the beauty and desirability of our favourite types. It can be done only if they know what we are talking about and they will only heed us if they are able to see for themselves what we mean. How can they know otherwise if they think only the common wattles like *A. baileyana* and *A. pycnantha* and perhaps *A. melanoxylon* exist. These are small to large trees, completely unsuitable for suburban garden use and a nuisance after their 3rd or 4th year. My wife planted a Cootamundra in her small home garden 5 years ago. Now it is entangling with telephone and electric light wires, nothing will grow near it, the delightful bluey grey foliage is a dirty dark colour from dust and in the oil laden city air even the blossom is a dull drab yellow. It has to come out of course and who can blame her and anyone else for saying "No more wattles for me". This damaging type of experience is ruining any hopes we have of establishing the genus *Acacia* in its proper place as a glorious garden specimen.

The public must be taught that there are many types of this genus of all spans, heights and diversifications, that there is one for every plot, for every place and every purpose in any garden from the smallest to the largest. This can only be done by letting them see for themselves the different types in actual fact. You will recall in a recent SGAP News Letter the Editress spoke in glowing terms of some wattles she had never seen before, in tubs at an exhibition of Australian plants. Particularly favourable reference was made to a specimen of *A. gracilifolia*. I agree that this is a most attractive plant, but it isn't in the race with several others I know of, but it does show the attention an unusual shrub (even a wattle) will attract if properly displayed.

This is the key to our future endeavours. Verbal or written attempts of persuasion will have little effect if the article itself is not on show and we must attempt to investigate and produce this or these articles for public viewing.

It is a long term task of some magnitude and to do it properly we must firstly know what we are going to display and the purpose of each specimen – in short, we must first of all select our types and later classify them according to their uses, positions, availability, etc. This could be followed by a number of verbal suggestions through your publication Mr Payne, if you can see fit and culminate in a visual exhibition at the SGAP wildflower exhibition. But these are only my suggestions – there must be many others. Please let us have them.

Could we start right now by collecting the names of wattles, every one of them from the most common upwards, growing in the gardens of each member. No matter how small your garden or how few specimens you have, please let me have their names and we will go on from this.

I had intended to discuss some of our other activities in this letter but as the work outlined above appears to be important I have given it the space it deserves, and will conclude in the February News Letter.

My felicitations for a happy Christmas and New Year.