

AN INSPIRATIONAL GARDENER

With the CWA Kandos Gardens Fair planned for 2/3 April my thoughts turn to two gardens that gave inspiration and pleasure to the people of Kandos more than seven decades ago. There is no doubt that aspiring gardeners who lived in a dusty cement town with minimal water needed inspiration.

In a former article I described the beautiful gardens created for the cement works by head gardener Bill Cant and his team, but I think it is worth revisiting.

For many years the works gardens were a well-loved town facility and the most popular venue for Kandos residents and visitors on a Sunday afternoon.

There were paths, a fountain and fish pond; sweeping lawns dotted with ferns, palms, shrubs and specimen trees; a scattering of seats; avenues of trees; and colourful plant beds.

At different times of the year there were spectacular floral displays of poppies, dahlias, climbing roses, delphiniums, zinnias and gladioli, often made up of more than one thousand corms, bulbs or plants. All were watered by the new water conserving sprinkler invented by the works plumber.

Cant built up a reputation for his gladioli and dahlias, which were distributed around Australia. One dahlia he named 'The Old Man' was twelve inches across the bloom. His Kandos rose was on display at the Adelaide Botanical Gardens (called 'Just Joey' I was told). At one stage he grafted a standard rose to produce four distinct varieties of bloom: white, red, cream and yellow.

'Chief Magi Cant' was the name given to him in 1937 by a local reporter. "He has done wonders here with his magic wand in the shape of a spade...he has transformed a hideous and shapeless mass into a thing of joy and beauty... people imagine they are in a land of enchantment...beautiful gardens abounding in fragrant blooms of glorious colours."

Around the same time, another man, Tommy Shrimpton, was establishing his reputation as an inspirational gardener. I don't know where the name Tommy came from. It is certainly a more amiable name than his real name Arthur Hutt Shrimpton. Perhaps it was his father's name (T Shrimpton).

Tommy arrived in Australia at the age of ten having been born at Oxford England in 1890. He and Edith née Atkins from Dungog, married in 1913, a year after he joined the Railway Department. They lived in Ryde and then Bathurst and for many years Tommy travelled the railways of NSW as a relieving officer.

In the mid-1920s Tommy Shrimpton spent several periods in Kandos as relieving officer and was no doubt the initiator in 1926 of the "neat little garden plots" on the railway station. They demonstrated, according to the 'Mudgee Guardian', "that the trouble is worthwhile". By 1935 he became a permanent fixture at Kandos and was often referred to as the "popular night officer". He and Edith and four daughters, Marjory, Edna, Gwen and Joan, were well-established in their home at 8 Piper Street Rylstone.

Tommy's transformation of the railway station received accolades. "Mr T Shrimpton, night officer at Kandos, is to be congratulated in establishing a fine garden and showing some real splendid blooms", wrote the 'Mudgee Guardian'. "Prior to Mr Shrimpton's appointment to Kandos such a thing as a garden on the station was ridiculed on account of the rocky nature of the ground and the absence of soil of any kind. 'Tommy' receives many congratulations daily all of which he really deserves."

Like Bill Cant, Tommy Shrimpton won numerous prizes at the annual Rylstone-Kandos Show for his floral blooms and in 1940 his garden won second prize in the Department of Railways Garden Competition.

Six years later the 'Mudgee Guardian' rhapsodised again: "Train visitors to Kandos feel refreshed after the arduous trip when they alight and gaze on the wonderful array of blooms at the railway garden. Mr Tommy Shrimpton our assistant station master deserves great praise for his wonderful display. The congratulations he received from the Railway Commissioner on the latter's visit were well justified."

Tommy had also grown a productive garden at home, metaphorically speaking: Marjory, a nurse; Gwen, a teacher; Joan, a bank officer; Edna, a WRAN. "A fine record indeed for Mr and Mrs Shrimpton having their daughters playing their parts in their respective spheres."

Edith and Tommy lead active and involved lives on Henbury Golf Course and in the Red Cross, CWA, Progress Association and Railway Ambulance. He achieved the position of Assistant Station Master at Kandos but refused other opportunities, wishing to stay instead in the towns where he and his family had settled.

In 1950 Tommy Shrimpton's health deteriorated and he had extensive periods of sick leave. On 20 September 1951 the paper reported that the "obliging assistant stationmaster was off duty owing to illness". That was the day he died.

Tommy Shrimpton's life was a spectacular but short bloom, nurtured in the garden he chose. Edith lived to 100. Most of those 37 years she lived at Piper Street, active in community affairs.

Sadly I don't have any photos of Tommy Shrimpton's garden. We are left to imagine.

On the weekend of 2/3 April you can find inspiration in eleven open gardens in Kandos and surrounds, successfully established in a harsh environment.

Some are as old as Tommy Shrimpton's and Bill Cant's gardens. They showcase a variety of garden styles including native, courtyard, sculpture, parkland, classic, Mediterranean and terraced.

According to W.E. Johns, creator of Biggles, one of the most delightful things about a garden is the anticipation it provides. Come and be inspired.

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