

Castlemaine Botanical Gardens – update on vandalism

On the evening of Wednesday 16 June it is alleged two men stole earthmoving equipment that was in the historic Castlemaine Botanical Gardens in central Victoria and proceeded to drive through the Gardens causing considerable damage.

The next day some media headlines ran that the Gardens had been ‘destroyed’ and dramatic images of a demolished band rotunda graced television, newspapers and websites. The Friends of the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, the local Rotary Club and indeed the whole local community were in shock. While the headline grabbed attention, the Friends - and through them the Castlemaine community – were offered condolences and offers of support from various botanic gardens, Friends groups and sympathetic parties from across the state.

After the initial shock and questioning of how and why such a thing could happen, the clear light of day revealed the extent of the damage. While the damage to the heritage listed Gardens is significant, with some estimates suggesting over \$200,000 worth, it is fortunately not as bad as first thought. On a positive note, it is certainly not as bad as it could have been considering the size of earthmoving equipment.

The Band Rotunda has been totally destroyed. This was a 1990s reconstruction paid for by the Castlemaine Rotary club. It was based on the original plan of 1898. Mount Alexander Shire Council still holds the original plans and those used for its reconstruction. The Shire Council has made a public commitment to rebuilding it.

The wall of a toilet block was also knocked out. No structural damage occurred to the building so it is possible to rebuild the damaged section fairly easily. Some damage also occurred to fences, a seat, the lawns etc. These can be easily repaired.

Sadly two ‘middle aged’ trees - an Ash and an Oak - of around 60 to 80 years old were totally destroyed. While of no particular rarity or significance it is a great pity to lose these as we have many trees of 120 years old and older and few in the age bracket for good succession. Still, we could have lost more, so again, it is not as bad as it could have been.

The vandalism happened as \$2.2 million worth of works is happening within the Gardens, largely funded by the Federal Government’s infrastructure grants program. These works include repairs and restoration to the 1919 tea rooms, upgrading toilets to include disability access and baby change facilities, remediation of the lake edge, a new playspace, plans for interpretive signage and a thorough tree assessment. These positive works coincide with the year in which the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens turns 150.

Two men have been charged over the incident and one has been remanded in custody.

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