

OPENING OF BOTANIC GARDENS

CANBERRA, ACT

20 OCTOBER 1970

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

Mr Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen :

You have heard from my colleague, the Minister for the Interior something of the history of these Gardens, which have indeed been unofficially open for some three years. And I have no doubt that many of you over the weekend have walked, as my wife and I have walked through these gardens when they were unofficially open, and watched them taking shape and watched the imaginative use of running water, of native stone and of groupings of native flora in this lovely area.

It is, as Mr Nixon has said, an event of special relevance in our Cook Bi-Centenary Year because these gardens are, in a sense, a tribute to Joseph Banks and the naturalists and botanists who have followed in Banks' footsteps. Because it was Banks, even more than Cook, who urged on the British Government the foundation of the first colony on our east coast, and it was he and his scientific team who were the first to take home to England specimens of Australian shrubs and plants, collected when that team came ashore from the "Endeavour" in Botany Bay and at other points along our coast two hundred years ago.

Banks was important in his time, a wealthy young squire who spent on fitting up in the "Endeavour" for his team of botanists twice the amount of money that the "Endeavour" itself as a ship cost. To give you some indication of the thoroughness with which he did his job, when he got home with his collection of Australian flora, it was described by a world-famous Swedish botanist of the day as "a matchless, and truly astonishing collection, such as has never been seen before, nor may ever be again." I don't know what Linnaeus, that Swedish botanist would have said had he seen the matchless collection which has now come before us for its official opening today, and if this collection here in these gardens is not thoroughly matchless - although I think it probably is - but if not, and if it is not unique of its kind, then I have no doubt whatever that under the guidance of Mr Shoobridge it very shortly will be if it isn't already.

This has taken much work, much effort and much planning. I think it was Kipling, was it not who wrote : "The Lord God made a garden, and gardens are not made by saying 'How beautiful' and sitting in the shade." And that is true of any garden, but particularly of Botanic Gardens such as this, for they spring as do almost all things of significance and enduring importance, from hard work, hard thinking, hard planning, a genius for a feeling for nature, and then really solid hard sweat as well. These are the ingredients of gardens.

We have here, as Burley Griffin was told to make in Canberra, in his brief, a garden city, and I think he has made one in Canberra because we have in the city generally brought together exotic plants from other countries - and I may be permitted, perhaps, to call the oak and the elm an exotic plant as far as Australia is concerned - mixed with our own flora, and they make a delightful combination for the eye. But here in this garden within a garden is a part of Australia of Australian trees alone.

I hope that there will be many such gardens as these throughout Australia, and I hope that we will never reach a stage when our flora is confined to gardens such as these, for we would all want to see them growing wild and free around the countryside. And it is a part of community responsibility to protect flora so that this can happen. This, I believe, is becoming far more ingrained into the consciousness of Australians.

And also, perhaps, it is a task, a simple task that many might take up to do what Johnny Appleseed did through the Mid-West of America when he walked through just planting apple-seeds as he went, in places he might never see again, but they grew for the benefit of other people. And so could plants and trees and shrubs be planted, perhaps as a return to what this country gives to those who live in it, planted by individuals for the benefit of other individuals later.

Sir, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all here to this official opening and to say how pleased and proud we are in Australia to have so many delegates from the International Congress of Parks Administrators. We are glad that your First Congress in the Southern Hemisphere was here, and equally proud that your new President is our own Director of Parks and Gardens, Mr Shoobridge. So we are happy to have you in Canberra, and especially glad to have you with us on this occasion when I now declare these Botanic Gardens open.

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