

Stewards of Koolunga

Connection to the history of the Chandler Boronia & Daffodil Farm at Koolunga Reserve

Retention of pine trees and development of replacement program

Koolunga Native Reserve Future Directions Plan



Image – Boronia township @1940s, showing significant landscape of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm

The Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm operated in Boronia from 1898 to 1971. The Stewards of Koolunga believe that the Future Directions Plan needs to have a strong focus on the history of the site as part of the farm, and a key way to do this to respect and retain the historic landscape form of the farm with associated signage or other interpretation.

The background to the development of the farm and its link to Boronia's settlement is described below. This information comes from material provided to the Stewards of Koolunga by Glen Turnbull (former president, Knox Historical Society) and from the book "The Family of William Chandler, Horticulturist" by Helen Coulson, commissioned by the Chandler family. Other information on Sir Gilbert Chandler comes from his [obituary](#) by Rupert Hamer (former Premier of Victoria).

Chandler Family history and establishment of the farm

William Chandler settled at The Basin in 1872. He planted a large oak tree, which still stands and bears a plaque dedicated to the Chandler family. This was on a 40-acre property on the corner of The Basin-Olinda Road and Sheffield Road. The property was known as Crown Allotment 72B in the Parish of Scoresby. William, an experienced market gardener, started to clear the land and planted vegetables. Later, he turned to growing fruit and various flowering species. In particular, William started to plant and grow boronia plants in the 1880s. William Chandler's property at The Basin was named 'Como'.

A son, Herbert Chandler, took over the operation of 'Como Nurseries' from his father on the original property. Herbert developed 'Como' into a world-famous concern. He was captain of The Basin Fire Brigade for 20 years and was President of The Basin Progress Association for many years. One of his achievements with the Progress Association was to assist in the proclamation of Wicks Memorial Reserve at The Basin. In 1964, he was awarded the Federation of Australian Nurserymen's Association gold medal for the "*Chandleri Pieris Japonica*", a Japanese Pearl-type flower plant. This was the first time a gold medal was awarded to an Australian plant.

Another son, Alfred Chandler, bought various properties in Boronia over time. At his significant property a daffodil and boronia farm was established south of Boronia Road and east of Dorset Road. This consisted of several 10-acre parts of Crown Allotment 69A in the Parish of Scoresby. He grew rows and rows of daffodils and sweet-smelling boronia plants bordered these daffodil rows. There were also rows of pines (*Pinus radiata*) as windbreaks and plantations separating the flower-growing fields. The original pine trees would have been established by Alfred Chandler from the 1910s era onwards, and any existing trees from that time would be about 110 years old.

In March 1915, Alfred Chandler suggested the area be named Boronia (other people wanted a name based on various spellings of 'Chandler'). This separate area needed a name because the whole district from Bayswater to Boronia to The Basin was originally known as "Scoresby North". Alfred was a Ferntree Gully Shire Councillor from 1901 until 1935. He was Shire President in 1908/1909, 1918/1919, 1923/1924 and 1934/1935. Alfred was also President of the Municipal Association from 1933 until 1935. He entered State Parliament and was a Member of the Legislative Council (M.L.C.), for the South Eastern district from June 1919 until February 1935. The Chandler Highway linking Kew and Alphington was named in his honour. Alfred was justly regarded as the founder of Boronia. Upon his death in 1935, it was noted in an obituary (The Bulletin, 20 February 1935) that the daffodil farm was "the largest in the British Empire". The article also said "Chandler's daffodils were famous amongst foreigners who had never heard of him as an M.L.C. or knew what an M.L.C. was. His prowess as a gardener even won praise from Peter Barr, "the Daffodil King", when he visited Australia a few years back".

Alfred's son, Sir Gilbert Lawrence Chandler, horticulturist and politician, was born on 29 August 1903. Known as 'Gib', he joined the family's Everson Nursery at The Basin, as a partner. His career followed that of his father. From 1935 to 1955, Gilbert served on the Fern Tree Gully Shire Council (president 1938-39) and in March 1935 succeeded Alfred as a representative of South-Eastern Province in the Victorian Legislative Council. Following electoral redistributions, he represented Southern Province (1937-67) and Boronia Province (1967-73). Gib was to spend 38 years in parliament. In June 1955 Chandler became minister of agriculture (by his own choice - the new premier Sir Henry Bolte had wanted him to be minister of education) and continued to serve in that portfolio until his retirement from parliament in May 1973. At that time, he was the longest serving State Government Minister in the history of Victoria.

Under his leadership, the Department of Agriculture began a remarkable development which contributed to the advancement of Victorian primary industry, especially in animal husbandry, research into animal and plant diseases, and the economic management of farms. The Gilbert Chandler Institute of Dairy Technology at Werribee was named in his honour. Possessing a kindly, avuncular manner, which tended to mask his deep convictions and very great capacity, Chandler undertook community service far beyond his parliamentary and ministerial duties. As chairman of the Churchill National Park's committee of management and a committee member of the Fern Tree Gully National Park, he showed a wide-ranging interest in conservation and in preserving the beauty of the Dandenong Ranges. He was instrumental in Government moves to buy back areas of the Dandenongs, particularly the western face above The Basin, Boronia and Fern Tree Gully in order to help preserve the wooded environment for which this unique area has become famous (maintaining a unique legacy for the City of Knox and all its residents). He chaired (1944-46) the government's bush fires relief committee and served as President of the Boronia Basin division of the St John Ambulance Brigade. Appointed C.M.G. in 1958, he was knighted in 1972.

About 1955, after Gib had suffered a heart attack, he decided to relinquish his interest in the daffodil farm business to his sons Gilbert Jnr and Doug, trading under the names Chandler Bros, becoming the fourth generation of Chandlers to grow daffodils in the district. Gilbert Jr, with his wife Shirley managed the farm until it ceased operation in 1972. The Bowling Green Estate, which was developed on the old daffodil farm, has many streets named after Chandler family members, including Shirley Court, Marie Street, Interman Road and Thelma Avenue.

Importance of the farm and its landscape history and opportunity for the FDP

As described above and shown in photos in the document, the Chandler family and the unique landscape and character of this internationally renowned flower-growing enterprise was a significant part of the early history of Boronia and was for many years the largest daffodil farm in the southern hemisphere (over 100 acres). For many years, over one million bulbs were sold annually to Woolworths.

Although it is believed that none of those 100-year-old plus pine trees still stand in the Koolunga Native Reserve, existing trees are landscape features that reflect and pay respect to the original landscape features and significant history of the farm, particularly in the eastern end of the reserve. This area is cherished by many in the local community, as reflected in the outcomes of the Values Report undertaken by Group GSA.

This area contains rows of pine trees (from 50 to 65 years old), bordering paddocks that were used for daffodil growing. The Stewards of Koolunga believe this landscape of tree borders and its connection to the farm is worthy of protection and ultimately replacement in a sympathetic way – through a well-planned replacement program using tree species that have similar size, form and structure to the pine trees and retaining the

open-space paddocks. Interpretation of this horticultural history could also be undertaken through signs (also identified as a key community value in the Group GSA report). We believe this outcome for the tree borders can be achieved in a way that integrates with other values of the Reserve – biodiversity, open space and passive recreation - and focuses on their current and relatively small (less than 10% of the whole of the Reserve site) but important area to the local community.

The Stewards of Koolunga represent a large number of residents who want to have a say in the future management of the reserve and for that management to reflect the values and uses of the broader community. More than 750 people signed petitions to this effect that called on Council to undertake open and transparent planning for the future of the reserve.

We believe that a legacy of the Future Directions Plan should be a deliberate landscape management plan to replace the pine trees as they decline, replacing them with vegetation of a size that represents this history, shows its importance in the development of Boronia, and allows ongoing connection and interpretation of the daffodil farm history. This should be a deliberate and well-planned legacy for the broader Knox and Boronia community and our future generations.

This direction is actively supported by the Chandler family, and Shirley Chandler (wife of Gilbert Junior (dec)) offers the following statement of support:

Our family holds Koolunga Reserve close to our hearts as it is filled with many happy memories from earlier days for us. We would like to see some of the Chandler Farm history of the reserve protected and a living connection maintained for future generations.

Images showing the scale and landscape character of the Chandler Daffodil and Boronia Farm



Photo of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm looking from Boronia Road towards Ferntree Gully in 1952 showing farm landscape



Comparison of current vs. 1952 view over the site of the Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm, looking from Boronia Road showing the current location of Koolunga Reserve and remnant landscape value of the pine trees



Current close up view over site of only remaining component of the Chandler Daffodil Farm remaining



Photo of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm Gully approx.. 1965, showing significant farm landscape values near existing Koolunga Reserve, east of Shirley Court (via Neville Sanders)



Photo of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm Gully approx.mid 1960,s showing location of existing pine tree rows within Koolunga



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Photo of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm Gully approx.. early 1950s, showing retention of pine tree windbreaks immediately adjacent to existing Koolunga Reserve, east of Shirley Court (Bill Ireland)



Photo of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm Gully approx.. 1963, showing retention of pine tree windbreaks immediately adjacent to existing Koolunga Reserve, east of Shirley Court (Tony Aitken)



Photo of Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm Gully approx.. 1965, showing retention of pine tree windbreaks immediately adjacent to existing Koolunga Reserve, east of Shirley Court (Bill Ireland)



Photo Taken October 1976 from rear of 16 Westmere Drive Boronia



Photo Taken October 1976 from 16 Westmere Drive Boronia

General photos of the Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm and pine tree windbreaks



HARVESTING GOLDEN DAFFODILS IN VICTORIA.



Spring blooms for Melbourne and Sydney markets. Daffodils being picked from the farm of Mr. Chandler, M.L.C., at Boronia, Victoria. The farm is the largest of its kind in the British Empire.





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DAFFODIL FARM, BORONIA, VIC.



*Boronia Football Club, 1940s with a good luck sign made from Daffodils from the farm.
Gilbert Chandler Junior, 3rd left back row*



Gilbert Chandler Junior, aged 13, picking daffodils near the current location of Koolunga Reserve on the Chandler Boronia and Daffodil Farm 1944 – husband of Shirley and father of Kerrie, Gilbert, Dean, Rodney and Glenn.