



LIVING MEMORIES

Celebrating Guildford's Sugar Gums: A History

Introduction

The 'sugar gum' is a eucalyptus tree. Its botanical name is *Eucalyptus cladocalyx*. It can grow to 35 metres high in ideal conditions. It is a tall, upright tree with smooth barked trunk in cream, brown and orange tones, its dark glossy leaves contrasting with creamy white ascending branches.



Sugar gums were originally found only in South Australia, in the southern Flinders Ranges, on Kangaroo Island and near Port Lincoln on the Eyre Peninsula.

They have since been planted across Australia as they became popular for street tree plantings and for use in the timber industry.



By the late nineteenth century in South Australia they had become popularly known as 'sugar gums'. Cattle enjoyed their sweet-tasting immature foliage (later found to contain a high level of the chemical compound glucoside). The prolific white blossom proved a substantial source of nectar for bees, and by attracting them could improve local pollination and availability of honey.

The striking foliage and majestic form of these trees made them popular subjects or background for the nineteenth-century Australian Impressionist artists such as Hans Heysen

*Sugar Gums on James Street, Guildford
Photo: Barbara Dundas*

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Mr John Ednie Brown and the Sugar Gums

The man most noted for his efforts in popularising the planting of sugar gums in South Australia and then Western Australia, was John Ednie Brown (1848-1899).

Scottish-born, he left school at 15 to work with his father, a deputy-surveyor of woods and forests, and developed a love and extensive knowledge of trees.

He was appointed Conservator of Forests in South Australia in 1878 and is noted for his important writing *A Treatise on Practical Tree Culture in South Australia*.

He promoted sugar gum trees as desirable trees to plant in semi arid and low rainfall areas in Australia. He found their timber was useful for the building industry and encouraged

development of plantations of these trees.

In 1896 John Ednie Brown was appointed as Conservator of Forests in Western Australia. He developed a State tree nursery near Guildford (relocated to Drakesbrook in 1897) to raise a variety of trees, including sugar gums, for planting in forests, parks and country areas.



John Ednie Brown



A Special Kind of Tree

- ☞ Sugar Gum wood has few defects and is prized for its durability so it's well suited to furniture, flooring and railway sleepers
- ☞ Termite resistant
- ☞ Well adapted to regular bushfires
- ☞ Best planted in full sun and well suited to clay soils
- ☞ An efficient user of water and drought and frost tolerant
- ☞ Sugar gum flowers attract bees.



Eucalyptus cladocalyx in bamboo
Photo: Barbara Dundas

Bamboo Planters

Mr. Ednie Brown experimented with a system of planting successfully developed in India. He grew sugar gum trees in bamboo tubes about 5 inches (12 cm) long.

The seedling could be planted straight in the ground with the tube, thus protecting the seedling and its roots from damage.

Between 150 and 200 of these tubes could fit in a small box for transporting long distances. Thousands of gum trees were grown this way each year by the State Nursery and transported great distances across Western Australia.

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GUILDFORD MUNICIPAL COUNCIL.

A meeting of the Guildford Municipal Council was held on Thursday last. Cr. R. J. Wilson presided, and there were also present Crs. S. Jones, C. Abbott, Jas. Jecks, and F. J. Read. The Mayor wrote regretting that owing to an accident he was unable to attend.

The following accounts were presented and passed for payment:—W. Padbury, £5 18s. 4d.; G. S. B. Bonney, £10 10s.; H. Tasker, £1 7s.; G. H. Barker, 4s. 7d.; Adelaide Timber Co., £1 6s. 8d.; Sands and McDougall, £1 10s.; W. G. Davies, £4 2s. 6d.; postage and petty cash account, 13s.

The chairman reported that no further progress had been made with the Government bore, and it was not yet certain whether the Calyx drill or Mr. Morrison's would be used. It was decided that the Mayor be requested to ascertain from the department whether, in the event of the site in Stirling Square being selected, they would guarantee the permanent use of the bore for the council.

A letter was read from the inspector for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, drawing the council's attention to the inadequate allowance of fodder to animals in the pound. Cr. Read moved, and Cr. Jones seconded, that the allowance be the same as at Perth, namely, 12lb. of chaff night and morning, and the charge to be 3s. per day.

In connection with a communication from the Under Secretary for Public Works, urging the desirability of placing finger-posts at the intersections of the different roads in the district, it was decided to ascertain the cost of same.

The Town Clerk reported that the council had been granted 100 trees by the Forestry Department for planting in commemoration of Her Majesty's Record reign.

The Chairman stated that tenders had been called for the erection of the new post-office, which would be a very presentable building.

The Town Clerk was instructed to write to the Postmaster-General asking that all telegraph and telephone posts within the municipality should be painted. It was pointed out that telegrams were not delivered until after 7 p.m. or before 7 a.m. It was agreed that the matter should be brought before the Postmaster-General.

After discussion relative to works required in the municipality, the meeting closed.

The West Australian - 14 June 1897

Queen Victoria's Jubilee and WA's first Arbor Day

Along with the promotional work of John Ednie Brown, two particular events in 1897 led to extensive plantings of sugar gum trees in Guildford and other parts of Western Australia. These were Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee – a celebration of the 60th anniversary of her coronation as Britain's monarch – and the inaugural Arbor Day, created to teach recognition of the effects of deforestation and afforestation.

Queen Victoria was England's longest serving Monarch. During her reign the British Empire expanded and many new colonies were settled. The royal birthdays, coronations and visits were celebrated by the colonies across the world. In WA, every town and community celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee with balls, sports days, grand dinners and ornamental tree plantings.

It was suggested that the first Arbor Day should be held in connection with the Jubilee celebrations.

In 1897 the Forestry Department gave West Australian schools a variety of trees for planting on 20 June - Arbor Day. Children at Government Schools also received a silver commemorative medal and Infant School children received a special enamel mug on this occasion. Arbor Day continues to be commemorated annually, to teach children to value and respect our

trees. John Ednie Brown provided seedling trees to many schools and councils from his State Nursery. Guildford received 60 such trees for its school children and 200 for the Council for its Arbor Day and Jubilee celebrations.



Western Mail 15 August 1913 - James Street showing the young Sugar Gum trees

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Guildford's Sugar Gum Trees

The Jubilee Celebrations in 1897 coincided with the duplication and relocation of the government railway line. In 1881 the Eastern Railway was constructed from Fremantle to Guildford. When work commenced to extend it through the town in 1882, the people of Guildford requested the railway be diverted down the middle of the main street, rather than in a straight line through their central town park –Stirling Square.

The railway caused great inconvenience in the main street, the trains were noisy and dirty and horses were often frightened by the big steam trains.

Hence in 1897 the railway line was to be duplicated and relocated from the centre of James Street to a new route that cut through the southern section of Stirling Square. The railway line and park were then fenced and new tree plantings were established in James Street, around the new southern boundary of the square and in an avenue from Meadow Street to St. Matthew's Church. It is believed that many of these trees are the sugar gums that stand today.



1920s Guildford (Source: Echo Newspaper 1999)

Sugar gums continued to be planted through the town in the original, wide streets - in Swan Street (1902) and Hill Street (1904). The Councillors were proud of their town and their new trees.

Guildford's Avenues

While sugar gum trees were planted extensively throughout Western Australia at the turn of last century, they were usually planted as feature trees at a focal point in town such as railway stations or parks. In Guildford, however, they were planted throughout the town.



The sugar gums grew to create a tall central spine of greenery down James Street and a major feature on the wide street reserves of Market, Hill, Meadow, and Swan Streets. They formed a border to Stirling Square and provided a central avenue leading to St Matthew's Anglican Church, forming part of the recognisable charm and character of this early colonial town.



"I must return to my own true love of beautifying the town. I have at all times advocated street tree planting. In all civilised countries it is recognised that the tree planting acts more beneficially on the health of a population and the maintenance is amply repaid by the enhancement of beauty to the town."

*Councillor Guppy
Guildford Municipal Council Minutes, 11th April 1896*

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Sugar Gums and the State Electricity Commission

In September 1950 the Guildford Council was shocked to hear that the State Electricity Commission planned to erect a 66,000 volt power cable through the northern road reserve of James Street, which would lead to the loss of all the trees. Councillor Anderson from the Guildford Municipal Council stated that:

"Guildford's gum trees are beautiful and one of the features of the town and it would be criminal if they were disfigured".

Strong community opposition to this plan resulted in the SEC rerouting the power to the south side of the road, and the sugar gums were saved.

The trees asked no favours,
Other than to line our portals fair,
And with Eucalyptus leaves
To scent the friendly air.

*Cr. Anderson quoted in Swan Express
27th August 1953*



James Street, Guildford to the East. Courtesy E Paton c1949 (Source: SLWA . Govt. Photographer. 816B_C/00044d)

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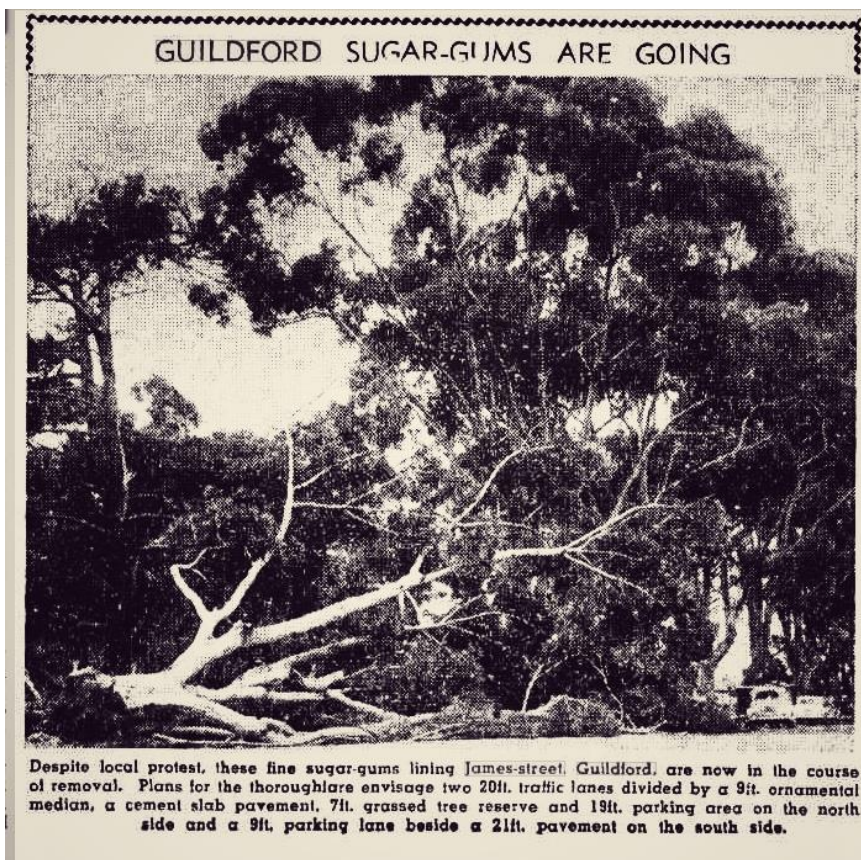
Sugar Gums and Main Roads

In September 1953 a proposal to widen James Street and remove 21 trees was presented to the Guildford Council. This work was to be funded by Main Roads and required the removal of all the sugar gum trees between Johnson and Meadow Streets.

Mayor Hicks was shocked at the Council's decision to approve the plans. There was widespread concern in both Guildford and the wider community. A petition was presented to Council and residents wrote to the papers and council. Mrs. J. Hamersley hoped the efforts of ratepayers would be successful in saving the beautiful gums of James Street:

"These must be the finest specimens in the metropolitan area and their removal will not only be felt by those who grew up with the trees but also by those who pass through the town".

Other residents argued the removal was an unnecessary destruction of one of the outstanding natural landmarks – the soaring stately gums of Guildford. The Guildford Town Clerk countered that the trees were unsuitable as street trees and should be replaced with smaller specimens set back on the road reserve.



Western Mail 22 October 1953 p49

In November 1953, fifteen sugar gum trees were removed from James Street between Johnson and Meadow Streets. However, the remaining gum trees survived as fine examples of Australian colonial streetscapes.

Guildford Sugar Gums in Recent Times

In 1975 Main Roads considered removing all the sugar gums along James Street. The Guildford community was greatly angered at the proposal. Community concern resulted in the trees being saved and the Shire of Swan agreeing in 1976, to pruning treatment 'to extend the lives of the trees and beautify the streetscape'.

The magnificent stands of sugar gum trees have remained in the streets of Guildford, with only occasional removals of an individual tree following road works, complaints from nearby property owners or the falling of a large limb.



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1999: A Valued Heritage

In 1998, the City of Swan sought advice from an arboricultural specialist on the health of 21 trees in James Street.

The report was presented to Council in January 1999. Council recommended the removal of 10 trees and a community meeting was called.

Prominent landscape architect Mr. John Oldham advised:

"It would be a disaster to remove the trees, not just for Guildford but for WA."

The City agreed to a request from the meeting to engage 3 specialists to obtain detailed reports and a review of the planned road works. Assessments were completed by July 1999.

The Council resolved to remove 15 trees at its July meeting, a decision contrary to the officer's recommendation and at odds with information provided in the specialists' reports.

Photos courtesy C Hughes & P Molloy July 1999



The community of Guildford responded immediately. Two young people moved into the trees and set up a camp that night.

Within days, people from Guildford, the hills and beach suburbs moved and camped in tents from the west to east ends of James Street. Local businesses offered food as a demonstration of public support. Candlelight vigils and a large community dinner were held down the main street.



*David Bellamy and Barry Oldfield with Guildford resident Patsy. Molloy
Reproduced with permission of P. Molloy*

Tree experts, including Mr. Barry Oldfield and international environmentalist Mr. David Bellamy, came to offer their support for the retention of the trees.

Photos courtesy C Hughes & P Molloy July 1999



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1999: A Valued Heritage (contd.)

The Guildford Association analysed the arboricultural reports and noted that only 1 tree was consistently recorded as dangerous by all 3 specialists. The City of Swan agreed to modify its planned work to a pruning of necessary dead limbs and to hold an electors meeting.

A subsequent review of the trees resulted in the Mayor announcing:

"The arboriculturalists have changed their view on what should happen to the trees...they are not as dangerous as first thought."

The City of Swan acknowledged the significance of the trees and agreed to a programme of ongoing maintenance for the trees and infill or replanting the street with new sugar gums.

The City also presented a seat to the community on 24 July 1999 in recognition of the community's involvement in saving the trees, Guildford's focus on trees and the International Year of the Tree.



Sitting comfortably on the new bench are Patsy Molloy and Cliff Frewing.

Pruning brightens trees' chances

GUILDFORD'S chances of keeping its threatened sugar gums have been bolstered by the council-ordered pruning last month.

"The arboriculturalists have changed their view on what should happen to the trees," President Charlie Gregorini said.

Now that the dead limbs have been cut off the arboriculturalists believe that the trees are not as dangerous as they at first thought they were.

"This is one of the things council will reconsider after the (August 19, 7pm, Guildford Grammar School) electors' meeting," Mr Gregorini said.

In the meantime, Guildford residents and visitors have a council-given bench to remind them of their fight to keep the chain saws at bay.

The bench was ordered by Swan's acting chief executive Cliff Frewing after discussions with the Guildford Association.

Made for \$776 by 19th Century Nostalgia of Caversham, it was placed opposite the town's central road junction on July 24 while the pruning was being done.

"With the Guildford focus on trees and the International Year of the Tree on July 25 this was seen as an appropriate installation," Mr Frewingsaid.

Last month's James Street tree-saving activities were run from the nearby home of association member Patsy Molloy and included a visit from world environmental guru Professor David Bellamy.

Guildford Association members and others comprising the Guildford Action Group negotiated with Mr Frewing after the council received advice from their lawyers on June 14 and councillors voted that day to cut 15 trees down.

During the council's August 11 meeting Cr Gregorini said the motion to fell the trees had not been rescinded.

He said officers had ordered immediate pruning for public safety in response to legal advice.

The question of whether to go ahead with the tree-felling or rescind the motion would be debated after the electors' meeting.

Source : Echo August 1999

Photos courtesy C Hughes & P Molloy July 1999



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2009 Year of the Sugar Gums

The Guildford Association designated 2009 as 'The Year of the Sugar Gums' in celebration of the 10th anniversary of an agreement between the City of Swan and the Guildford community to preserve Guildford's iconic sugar gums.



Commemorating 175 years of the WA Agricultural Show at Fauntleroy Park 2009 Photo B Dundas

Mayor Zanino continued the tradition of planting by local government and planted a sugar gum in Fauntleroy Park, to celebrate 175 years since the Royal Agricultural Show was first held in Guildford.



Mrs Ruth Bishop



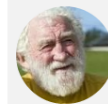
Mayor Zanino, Christine Hughes, Patsy Molloy

A new commemorative bench was gifted by the City of Swan, reflecting the long-standing connection between community and local government around Guildford's sugar gums.

A sun downer with Sugar Gum Cocktails was held at the Woodbridge Hotel. A camp fire evening was held in Stirling Square where local residents shared memorabilia and recollections.

Art & Poetry Competition

With support from the National Trust (WA) the inaugural schools Art and Poetry competition was a great success, with entrants from all over WA. A prizegiving evening was held at Woodbridge House, with the overall winner privileged to receive an original piece donated by noted international artist Mr. Drewfus Gates.



David Bellamy

21 May 2009

To all the people
of Guildford WA.

It was my honour to campaign alongside your very special community to save those wonderful Sugar Gum Trees and all the wild things that depend on them.

I wish all the entrants to the competition well. May your poetry and art sing the praises of the commonsense of conservation and bode well for all our futures. Thank you for caring so much about this lovely lonely planet.

David Bellamy
Pommy Botanist.

Poetry & Art Competition Winners July 2009

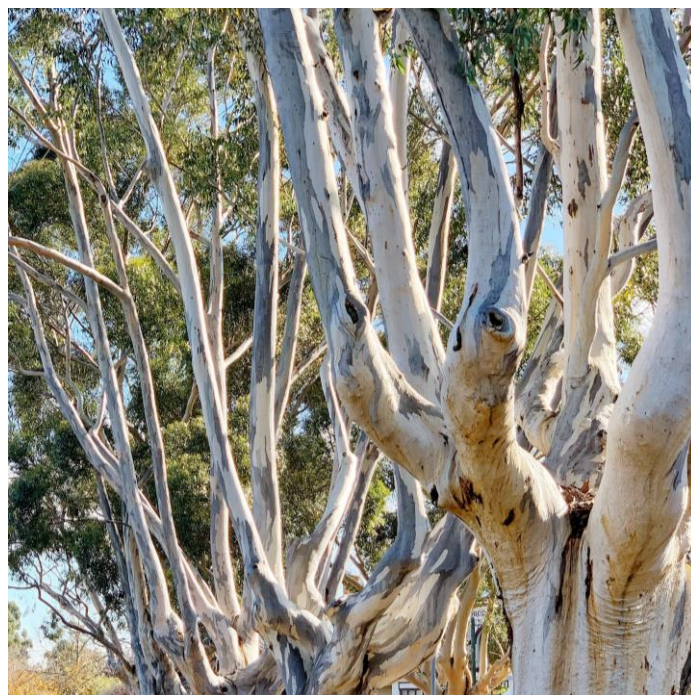
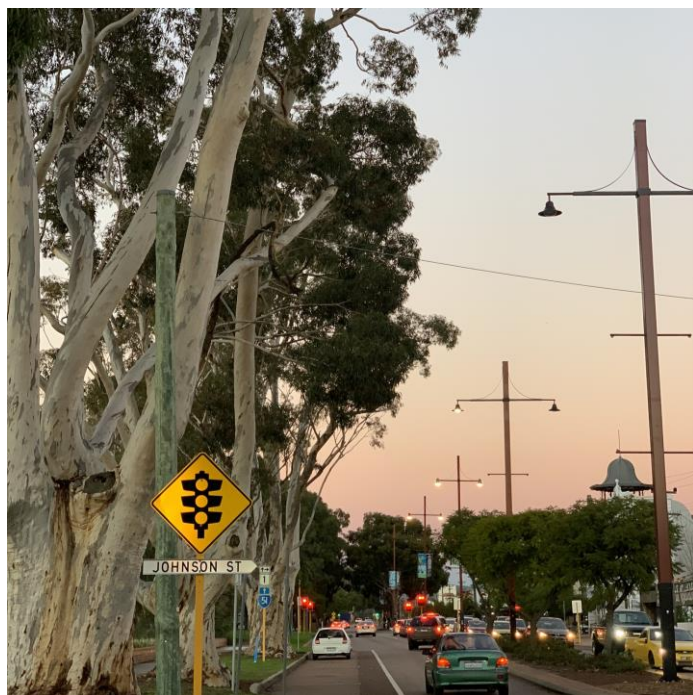


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2019 The Sugar Gums Today

Today, the Guildford sugar gums continue to line the main streets in regal splendour, proud sentinels of the town's history. Their story adds to the rich community legacy that takes its place in the proud history of Guildford.



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For purposes of further research: copies of the Swan Express, more recent Council Minutes and local photos are held by the Local History Section of the Midland Library, corner of Great Eastern Highway and Helena Street, Midland, WA.

Copies of all newspapers and other referenced material area available from State Records Office and the Battye Library. Perth, Western Australia. Appointments are necessary if class visits are planned to any of the aforementioned facilities.