

CAMPERDOWN CEMETERY KANGAROO GRASSLAND RESTORATION

overview of the project

Through this project Marrickville Council and Friends of Camperdown Cemetery have continued the restoration of a significant area of remnant native grassland in the grounds of Camperdown Cemetery. The restoration work has increased the coverage of native grasses and groundcovers in the cemetery by 300%. Visitors to the cemetery are now more aware of the ecological significance of the grassland and the cemetery and its open spaces have been promoted as an area of cultural significance.

The grassland, dominated by kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*), was identified as an important community by the Botanic Gardens in 1997. The grassland is an understorey remnant of Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest, an endangered ecological community that was once the main vegetation type in the Marrickville area. Although kangaroo grass is the dominant groundcover species, there are 20 other native species that occur within the cemetery. Efforts to protect and restore the community commenced with the formation of a steering committee in 2000.



Kangaroo grass around headstones at Camperdown Cemetery

how the project was carried out

The Friends of Camperdown Cemetery met on a monthly basis to carry out restoration work under the guidance of a qualified bush regenerator. The approach used was to focus on careful weeding of the site rather than replanting. This helped to retain the

unique scientific values and genetic integrity of the original grassland, and minimise disturbance to historic plantings and grave sites. Woody weeds throughout the remnant were gradually removed by Marrickville Council.

A 'no-mow' zone was marked out with a series of hardwood stakes.

Protecting the grassland from mowing gave the native plants a chance to grow, flower and seed. By 2005 the full extent of the grassland was better able to be assessed, and mapping of the grassland was updated. Regular photo monitoring has been used to document the progress of the restoration work.

The project raised the profile of the endangered ecological community and the historic value of the cemetery through local media stories, open days and the Friends of Camperdown Cemetery newsletter. A self-guided walk was developed through the remnant with an associated interpretive brochure. This brochure was distributed within the local community and is available onsite for visitors.

outcomes now and in the future

It is estimated that there has been a 300% increase in the coverage of native grasses and groundcover plants since the project commenced. To guide future work within the remnant a Restoration Strategy has been completed for the period 2007–11.

Nineteen volunteers have been involved in the restoration work and the project has maintained a solid core of interested people who have increased their skills and become further involved in volunteer work through the Marrickville Landcare Group or the Marrickville Community Nursery.

The viability of Camperdown Cemetery becoming a seed bank will be assessed in seven years.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The complexity of the grassland community was initially a challenge for volunteers working on the weeding. It was originally planned to work on small areas and completely remove all weeds. However it was found that targeting a small selection of weeds each month allowed volunteers to work with greater confidence and to work across larger areas. This targeted removal prevented further seeding and spread of the weed species. Through careful systematic weed removal the group has assisted the grassland to regenerate naturally therefore maintaining the genetic integrity of the vegetation community.

A challenge for the future is to decide how best to manage the Kangaroo Grass. The group have found that after two or three years of growth the grass tends to shade itself out, and research suggests that it may need to be reduced or cut so that new healthy grass can germinate. The group have commenced some controlled testing to ensure that the most appropriate form of management is adopted.

Through this project Marrickville Council and Friends of Camperdown Cemetery have helped to preserve both the ecological and cultural values of a historically significant cemetery and developed a long term strategy for continued management and restoration of the site.



Kangaroo grass