

Behind the Scenes at Burnett House

I think that many National Trust Members and most of our visitors take it for granted that Sunday Afternoon Tea at Burnett House just “happens”. That’s what I thought until I recently started turning up at Burnett on Sunday afternoons.

The sign out the front says Sunday Afternoon Teas 3.00pm to 5.00pm.

Only a couple of hours you think - no big deal. So I thought I would take you behind the scenes on a typical Sunday afternoon in the Dry to see just what happens.

IN THE GARDEN

12.15 pm.

Turning up at Burnett House to find Anna Harris had already taken more than 40 chairs from the shed. 10 chairs at a time on the trolley.

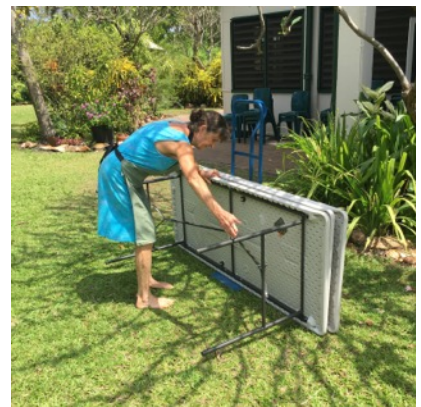
These are stacked on the verandah to keep them out of the sun. That’s 4 round trips at least, each one taking 2 or 3 minutes.



12.30pm

Next come the tables. 9 in all from the shed - 3 at a time on the trolley. They are off-loaded, set up and carried to the shade for now.

The tablecloths are taken out of storage and secured to the tables by clothes pegs at each corner and the tables are ready to be laid. Cups, saucers, teaspoons, water glasses, serviette holders, sugar bowl and table number all have to be carried from the table outside the laundry and placed on each of the tables.



A folder containing the menus, information on the House, the latest edition of Off the Leash and more will be put out later around 2.30 so they don’t blow away in the wind.



IN THE LAUNDRY

1.00pm

Meanwhile the laundry has to be set up for the mammoth task of washing up later. Buckets for scraps (not many of them by the way !), slops, coffee grounds and used serviettes.

Buckets for a prewash of plates and cutlery and washing and rinsing bowls in the double sink at the back. The servers table and umbrellas also need setting up.



1.20pm

Time for a short break before moving on to the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN

1.35pm.

First job is to make sure the 2 large urns are filled and heating up, before moving on to laying out the teapots, coffee plungers, water jugs and milk jugs ready for filling later.



The coffee plungers are filled (5 scoops for big and 3 for small) and the big tea balls loaded with 7 level teaspoons of Orange Pekoe and the small ones with 5 level teaspoons of Earl Grey, a formula worked out over many years experience.

2.15pm

The stove top is set up with the two aluminium "teapots" and the specialist teas.

2.20pm

Next comes the strawberry jam for the Devonshire Teas. 22 equal servings - (not as easy as you would think), these are stored in covered containers.



MEANWHILE BACK IN THE GARDEN

2.00 - 2.20pm

By now the first of the Volunteers have turned up and attention is focussed on moving the tables into shady locations on the lawns and setting out the chairs. A two person job at least with the tables already laid. Two tables for larger groups of 12 or more are set up on the West lawn near Audit House.

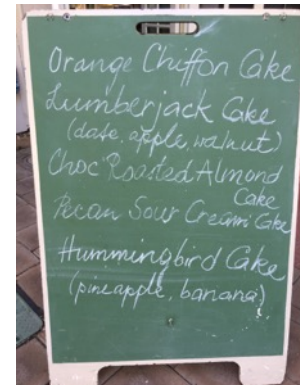
2.30pm

The first guests are starting to arrive and are greeted downstairs and invited to have a look around the House before getting escorted to a table by one of the outside volunteers.



2.45pm

Back in the kitchen, the cakes are sliced, the cream has been whipped and stored in piping bags in the fridge, the milk jugs have been filled, the tea is brewing and the urns have been topped up ready for the onslaught.



2.55pm

Back in the Garden, the first orders are being taken and it is on for one and all.



Image courtesy thedevonshireteaguide.com.au

Image courtesy tourism top end



IN THE LAUNDRY

3.30pm - 3.45pm

The first tables are being cleared by the outside volunteers and the Laundry Team swings into action, making sure that all items are rinsed, washed, dried and stored ready for re-use for the new orders coming in to the kitchen in a constant stream. The Laundry Team will be in action until well after the last visitors leave around 5.15pm.

That's a lot of cups, saucers, spoons, plates, knives, milk jugs, teapots, coffee plungers, jam dishes and glasses.

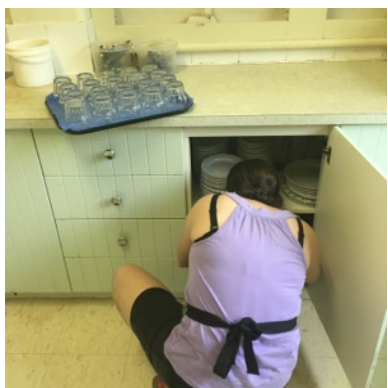
Meanwhile guests keep arriving at the front door in a constant stream.



IT'S A WRAP

5.00pm - 5.45pm

The last customers are thinking about leaving and going to pay at the Cashier's Desk while the rest of the crew are starting to pack up. Tables cleared, chairs and tables back to the shed, crockery and glassware back in the kitchen. Meanwhile the House has to be shut down and the days takings added up.



As you can see, a Sunday Afternoon Tea at Burnett House doesn't just magically happen. It takes the time and effort of a valuable team of Volunteers.

First and foremost is Anna Harris, who has run the Teas for many years. The amount of work she does is amazing - baking cakes and scones, stocktaking and shopping, setting up, putting away, filling the water bottles, whipping cream, slicing lemons, washing tea towels and tablecloths, ironing, organising volunteer rosters and much much more. She is ably assisted by Dee Preston making the teas and coffees, Kathryn Chandler with food presentation, Joyce Morrison on washing up and general supervision, Bill Porte who runs the Cashier's desk, and Chief Waitress Karen Doel.

This core team is assisted by a group of part-time helpers including Helen Bate, Alexis Clarke, Helen Dwyer, Bernie Eggington, Justine Dowling and her Girl Guides, Tami Grealy, Trish Greenfield, Ron Harris, Val Hamilton, Hema Miligajjar, Julie Mastin, Joan Moore, Chris Millowick, Renata Mohrbach, Jenny Norris, Judy Orme, Felicity Pidgeon, Brooke Phillips, Maxina Parkes, Judy Richardson, Bec and Emily Smith, Brahminy Tuminello, Pippa Featherstone and Orchard Somerville-Collie.

Together this dedicated team have served over 1100 afternoon teas to visitors and raised more than \$10,900 for the Larrakeyah Branch in the last 7 months. This effort is greatly appreciated by the Larrakeyah Branch Committee.

NOW FOR THE BAD NEWS !

Anna has recently announced that she will not be involved in co-ordinating afternoon teas next year. This will inevitably create more work for the existing team. The Branch Committee however is determined to continue afternoon teas next year (it's a Darwin Tradition after all) and is hoping that Members will be prepared to help out in any way they can - moving furniture, baking cakes, washing tea towel, etc etc. You've read the article so get the idea.

If you can help in any way please contact the Branch Chair- Orchard Somerville-Collie at collieo@ozemail.com.au

