

Defender of Victoria's parks, public lands and heritage

OBITUARY

Julianne Bell

30.5.1940–27.1.2017

Julianne Bell, dedicated and courageous protector of Victoria's parks, public lands and cultural heritage, died on 27 January.

Julianne was variously described as intelligent, fearless, courageous, feisty, witty and "you had better have done your homework on an issue before taking her on". Julianne's death was a shock and profound personal loss to all who knew her.

Julianne grew up in Camberwell, attending Fintona Girls' School. As a schoolgirl, she was a champion horsewoman, Victorian backstroke champion and later a black-run skier and a yoga teacher. She travelled overseas often, teaching English in Greece and pursuing her interest in history.

Her last job before retirement was working with Minister Gerry Hand in the Immigration Department.

Julianne went down to the Franklin River blockade in Tasmania in 1982. From there she became an ardent defender of Melbourne's green heritage, including Royal Park, a core factor in the city's global reputation as the world's most livable city.

In 1996 she was a founding member of the Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG), dedicated to ensuring that any development was consistent with the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan. The park was being neglected and 13 hectares of parkland were cleared for a car park; there were many other threats to Royal Park's future. Julianne served as secretary, convenor and then committee member of RPPG.

The battle to preserve and protect the Royal Park has been ongoing. Julianne worked tirelessly to ensure the master plan was adhered to. In 1998 she was instrumental in the 'discovery' of Walmsley House. This historic iron house was saved and listed on the State Heritage Register and National Trust heritage listing. The golden wych elm in the grounds was listed on the Significant Tree Register of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

In 1999, battles over the location of the State Netball Hockey Centre (SNHC) were lost after legislation permitted its establishment. However, through Julianne's efforts, the existing buildings were returned to parkland rather than parking lots.

Julianne led the campaign to save the Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital and its beautiful grounds, coordinating the efforts of environmentalists, local residents, unionists and politicians. This campaign was lost when legislation was introduced for the Commonwealth Games.

In 2005, a successful campaign ensured that the new Royal Children's Hospital did not result in any net loss to Royal Park.

Julianne recognised the need to preserve Victoria's heritage of public spaces and land from the pressures of an increasing population



Julianne in familiar pose campaigning to save Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital from development in 2002

Photo: James Boddington

and in 2003 founded an incorporated body for this purpose named Protectors of Public Lands (Victoria). This organisation operates as a coalition of Melbourne and statewide groups, overseeing and caring for public assets in their localities. Its slogan is "Keep public lands in public hands". Julianne served as secretary until her death.

Julianne saw her greatest victory as stopping the East West Link in 2016. She was present for every minute of the six-week hearing, supporting the barrister whom PPL (Victoria) and RPPG had engaged to present the case against the project. This commitment took a toll on her health. The battle against a freeway through the park had commenced in 1999.

She continued to battle for Royal Park up to her death, objecting to a new permanent sports field with a pavilion and lights on Flemington Road and increased parking taking over more parkland.

Julianne's PPL campaigns included saving Port Campbell's fragile cliffs and war memorial reserve from an oversized development, and Camperdown's historic elm avenue of 500 trees. The attempts to save Gough Whitlam's home and the 110-year-old Flemington Road lemon-scented gum failed, but not through lack of endeavour.

Julianne was presented with certificates from the RPPG for her enormous dedication to the protection of parks and heritage, and she received a special PPL 'Golden Possum Award'. Julianne's work to protect the possums of St Kilda's Catani Gardens was legendary.

Julianne's funeral service was held on 3 February at St Michael's Anglican Church in Princes Hill, with a large attendance of family, friends, statewide activist colleagues and local, state and federal politicians from all political parties.

Julianne had initiative, confidence and integrity of purpose. Her mentoring of a statewide network of activists in advocacy and political lobbying will ensure that developers and politicians continue to be held to account. Her legacy and spirit live on.

Anne Phefley compiled this tribute with help from many members of PPL (Victoria) and Royal Park Protection Group.