



# Miss Pink's Garden Walk



## Background:

Miss Olive Muriel Pink was born in 1884 and grew up in Hobart, Tasmania and then moved with her family first to Perth, and then to Sydney where she studied art at the Julian Ashton Art School and then went on to work as a draughtswoman with NSW Railways Department.

Miss Pink's first foray into desert Australia, and into developing a broader understanding of Aboriginal culture came about when she went to stay with well-known anthropologist Daisy Bates at her camp in Ooldea, northern South Australia in 1926. This visit formed a turning point in Olive Pink's life and she returned to Sydney with greatly enhanced resolve to work toward improving Aboriginal welfare, and embarking upon her own research in the field of Anthropology.

Arriving in Alice Springs for the first time in 1930, Miss Pink was on an extended rail-based tour of Central Australia, sketching wildflowers along the way and making contact with Aboriginal people and anthropologists and scientists doing research in the region. The next two decades saw Miss Pink moving between Sydney and living variously with Warlpiri people in the Tanami Desert or around Alice Springs collecting information about culture and customs that was to form the basis of her thesis in Anthropology.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s Miss Pink lived in Alice Springs, mostly in an ex-Army Hut located on Gregory Terrace, making a small income selling cut-flowers from her garden, exhibiting her artwork, and cleaning the courthouse. She dedicated much of her time to lobbying and advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal people – particularly focussing on trying to establish a secular sanctuary for Warlpiri people in the Tanami. Miss Pink's letter writing prowess and her determination to change policy and the minds of politicians through endless meetings were formidable. Many of her persuasive, and at times vitriolic, letters survive in archives and collections around Australia. Some are also on display here at the Garden.

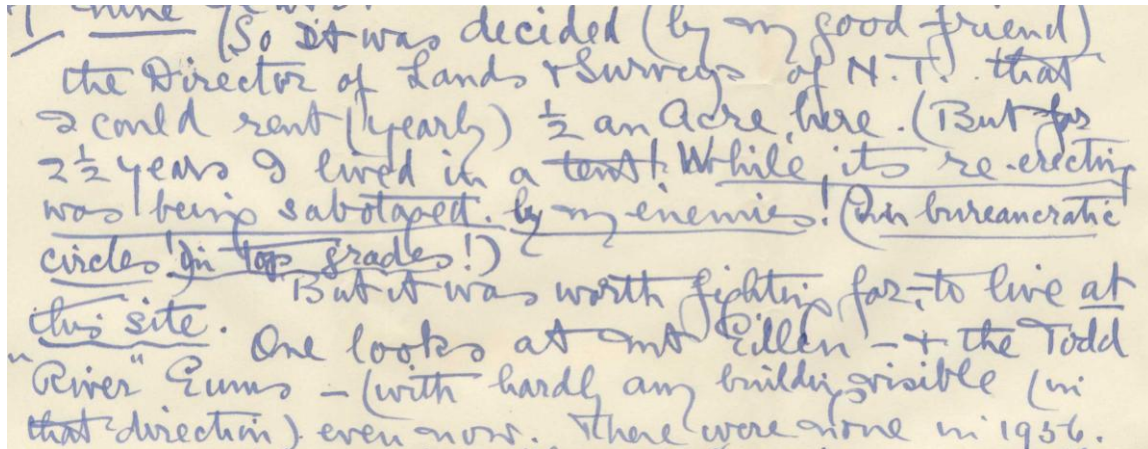
In 1956, Miss Pink was successful in lobbying the NT government to establish a Reserve on the edge of Alice Springs township. The Reserve, originally called the Australian Arid Regions Native Flora Reserve, is now known as the Olive Pink Botanic Garden, and Miss Pink was its Honorary Curator from 1956 until her death at 91 in 1975.

This walk will introduce you to a number of sites around the Garden that are of significance because of their connection to Miss Pink. The stopping points on this walk are not marked in the Garden, but this guide will describe where each site is so that you can locate it by yourself.



## 1) Miss Pink's hut site and ½ acre garden

The tin hut that Miss Pink lived in on Gregory Terrace was rebuilt on the Reserve in 1958. "Home Hut" as she fondly called it in correspondence written whilst living in the Reserve was very basic, and it wasn't until her eighties that Miss Pink was persuaded to let the late Reg Harris line part of the hut and install a small air-conditioner to make summers slightly more bearable. Her hut was located roughly where the Visitor Centre building stands today and was surrounded by a ½ acre garden area where Miss Pink grew all sorts of flowers and bulbs, as well as a number of exotic plants like Agaves. Some of the Red Gums in front of the Visitor Centre are the original ones that bordered Miss Pink's garden. The concrete slab which supported Miss Pink's watertank can be seen in the garden above the café dining area. Today the slab houses our rainwater gauge.



1 - name (So it was decided (by my good friend) the Director of Lands & Surveys of N.T. that I could rent (yearly) ½ an acre here. (But for 2½ years I lived in a tent! While its re-erecting was being sabotaged by my enemies! (In bureaucratic circles in top grades!) But it was worth fighting for, to live at this site. One looks at Mt Gillen - + the Todd "River" Gums - (with hardly any building visible in that direction) even now. There were none in 1956.

Extract from a letter from Olive Pink to Prof. W.L Crowther, 1959  
State Library of Tasmania Archive

On her express instructions her hut was demolished after her death in 1975, and the Visitor Centre built in its place.

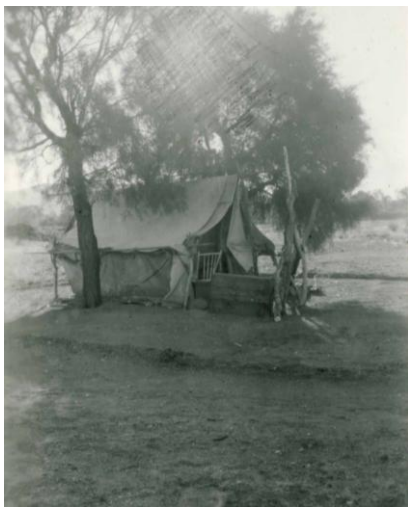


This image was taken by Miss Pink looking out at her ½ acre garden block from Home Hut. Mt Gillen is in the background.  
Olive Pink Botanic Garden image collection

## 2) The tent site where Miss Pink lived for 17 months

To find this site, follow the path over the bridge behind the Visitor Centre, then turn right toward the start of the Mallee Walk. If you stand at the Mallee Walk sign and face toward Mt Gillen, you will see two old Ironwood trees to the west of the path – these are the trees under which Miss Pink’s tent was pitched from October 1956 to March 1958. Miss Pink was 72 years old at this stage, and it is hard to imagine the harsh summer conditions she endured in her tent – there was no electricity and no running water for that first year, and the region was in the grip of a very severe drought. Despite this, Miss Pink entertained many visitors while living in her tent, serving them Bickfords lime cordial, cups of tea, or glasses of sherry with madiera cake.

The images show Miss Pink’s tent pitched on the site (below left) where the two old Ironwoods survive today (below right).



## 3) View of Mt Gillen

From the tent site continue along the path and turn right at the intersection and follow that path around to Johnny Yannarilyi’s shelter. From this point you get a lovely view of Mt Gillen, a sight that Miss Pink was particularly fond of. The shelter celebrates the contribution to the Garden made by Miss Pink’s gardener of many years, Johnny Jampijinpa Yannarilyi (pictured below right), a Warlpiri man whose family Miss Pink befriended whilst she was living out at Thompson’s Rockhole in the Tanami Desert (1942-1945).

Miss Pink described Johnny as “.....a born entomologist, and somewhat of a botanist too – I am neither!!” in one of her records book that we have in keeping here. Miss Pink campaigned vigorously to ensure that Johnny received a basic wage for the work he did at the Reserve – once again, Miss Pink was well ahead of her times in advocating social justice and equality for Aboriginal workers.



#### 4) Miss Pink's wildflowers

Just behind Johnny's shelter you can see lots of examples of Silver Tails (*Ptilotus sessilifolius*), one of the many plants Miss Pink sketched while living on the Reserve. Miss Pink exhibited her sketches and paintings on occasion, mostly when she had little other income, and the little she made from charging an entry fee to the exhibition helped eek out her meagre finances. Once she was established at the Reserve, she earned the equivalent of the pension (roughly £6 weekly) as an honorarium for her curator's duties.

Miss Pink made over 200 sketches of Central Australian wildflowers – many of these she did whilst on an extended sketching tour along the Ghan rail line in 1930. She stopped off at various stations and railway sidings and made camp for a few days or weeks whilst she sketched the flowers that grew in profusion that year after drought-breaking rains.



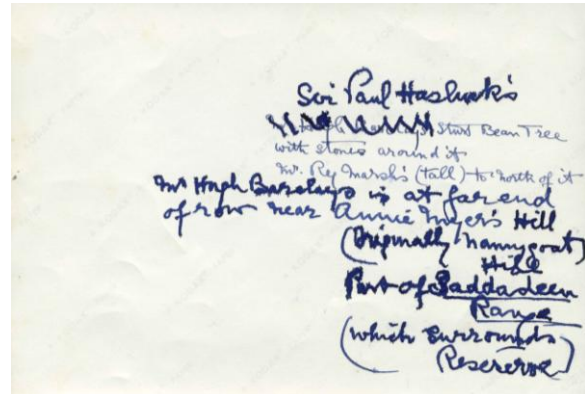
Part of Miss Pink's sketch of Silver Tails (above left) done while living at the Reserve, and the actual plant (above right) growing on the rocky slopes near Johnny Yannarilyi's shelter. Witchetty Bush (*Acacia kempeana*) also grow naturally on the hillslopes near here, Miss Pink's sketch of this species is also shown below.



Most of Miss Pink's sketches are held by the University of Tasmania, Morris Miller Library, and can be viewed online at [http://eprints.utas.edu.au/view/authors/Pink,\\_Olive.html](http://eprints.utas.edu.au/view/authors/Pink,_Olive.html)

## 5) Bean Tree plantings

Continue on this path, past the sand dunes and cross the entrance road to come to Peter Fannin's shelter. You will see two Bean Trees (*Erythrina vespertilio*) nearby. These were one of Miss Pink's favourite trees, and in the 1960s she planted over 30 of them in three lines parallel to the western boundary fence. Only ten of these have survived successive droughts and frosts, and the largest of these is now over 7 m tall, and can be viewed next to the carpark near the Blakeman Shelter. The ones close to this stopping point are smaller, as they are less protected and therefore more susceptible to frost damage. Miss Pink named several of these Bean Trees after bureaucrats in the NT government who helped her establish the Reserve. Unfortunately, none of these named trees have survived.



Miss Pink's image of the Bean Tree she named for Sir Paul Hasluck. This tree was planted near Peter Fannin's shelter on the western boundary of the Garden near the main entrance gate. Miss Pink's script describing the image is shown above right. You can also see angled pipes placed near the base of the two Bean Trees in the image, these were used to provide a deep watering to the plants. One of these watering pipes remains by the large Bean Tree near the Blakeman Garden carpark area.

The Bean Tree is spectacular in flower (see image below), and Miss Pink almost had a falling out with her friend (and later Chairman of the Olive Pink Botanic Garden Board of Trustees), John Blakeman, when he referred in conversation to the Batswing Coral Tree (one of the recognised common names for this plant). Miss Pink insisted that that was not a good name for the species, as the leaf looked nothing like a bat's wing, and the flower colour was not coral pink! Miss Pink successfully lobbied the Town Council to change the name on the label below their large Bean Tree from Batswing Coral Tree to her preferred name, Sturt Bean Tree.



**We hope you enjoyed this walk!**