



FACTS SHEETS

Bottle Trees

While Roma is justly proud of its Bottle Trees, one issue that even locals sometimes need to be corrected on, is that of identification.

So, from square one, it should be pointed out that our trees ARE NOT boabs (or Baobabs, depending on where you are from). There is indeed an indigenous Australian species of Boab, which grows uniquely in Western Australia. Six other species of Boabs grow in Madagascar, and another species grows on the African mainland. None of the Boabs are related to the true Australian Bottle Tree.

The Boab is an *Adansonia*, while our Bottle Tree is a *Brachychiton*....any resemblance is superficial. The tree commonly associated with Roma is the Narrow-leafed Bottle Tree, *Brachychiton rupestre*; it is not the only *Brachychiton* to be found in the district, nor is it confined to the close proximity of Roma. Related to the Narrow-leafed Bottle Tree, and growing locally, are two or more species of Kurrajong, and a Broad-leafed Bottle Tree. All have similar flowers and seed pods.

We just happen to have quite a lot of them, and, largely through the fact that the town boasts a heritage listed avenue of the trees, dedicated to locals who fell in World War 1, the species has become synonymous with Roma.

Our Bottle Trees are naturally found in scrub country, often Brigalow scrub. In that environment, the trees tend to grow tall, to reach the light, while those in the open country, whether naturally or through being transplanted, often tend to become more like squat bottles.

They are not normally hollow, with cavities filled with water; of course, any species of tree might develop a hollow, and might contain free water. The term "bottle" refers only to the general shape of the tree. The Bottle Tree's timber is quite fibrous, and very moist; consequently, the trees are sometimes felled for stock fodder; a less drastic procedure is to cut the leafy branches for the same purpose.

To further confuse the issue, the juvenile leaves of a Bottle Tree may bear no resemblance to the mature leaves of the same individual tree.

While much of the natural vegetation of Roma Town would have held Bottle Trees, virtually all of those now in town were transplanted here. The trees seed prolifically, and the seeds are spread by many birds. They germinate freely, and seedlings may be found just about anywhere, in suitable ground. Seeds which fall into roof guttering frequently develop until removed.

Importantly, from Roma's viewpoint, mature trees can be successfully transplanted with little trouble, and for that reason they were introduced to the streetscape. They naturally live for many years, certainly over 200 years; in fact, very large trees which were described on Mount Abundance by Sir Thomas Mitchell, in 1846, are still growing there. They can die prematurely from a root fungus, and will not tolerate poor soil drainage.

The early methods of transplanting were often rough, but the ready availability of replacements allowed the Roma Town Council, in particular, to develop very successful techniques. You may see, in the Visitor Information Centre, photographs showing methods used in the 1930's. These procedures would shock today's horticulturalists, but the particular tree depicted is still thriving.

