

Newsletter

January 2009

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Meetings are to be held in the State Library, Floor 2, Room 2D at 11 am Friday on 13 February & 13 March. All members are welcome to attend.

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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Other committee members –

Elsbeth Douglas,

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Nina Wood

Maurice Wilson.

COMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY– Illustrated talk: Past Gardens - Present Design

- Our entertaining speaker is Dr Jeannie Sim, Senior Lecturer in Landscape Architecture at QUT.
- Jeannie discusses historical garden design ideas in Queensland and how these can be inspirational for landscape and garden designers.
- She presents some of her recently developed observations about rainforest gardens and bush house gardening.

Time: 2 pm Sunday 15 February.

Meet at: Herbarium, Mt Coot-tha BG

Event charge: members \$10, guests \$15, afternoon tea included.

Register by 11 February to Gill Jorgensen 3341 3933 or

jorgenkg@picknowl.com.au

MARCH – Old Bishopsbourne (St Francis Theological College)

• Visit Old Bishopsbourne at Milton with its substantial grounds, including early garden fragments, early gateposts, a 1912 Robin Dods designed stone chapel, 1930s terracing and buildings associated with St Francis Theological College [from 1936].

Time: 2 pm Saturday 21 March

Meet in: [The grounds of the College, entry from Baroona Rd not far from the corner with Milton Rd.](#)

Event charge: members \$10, guests \$15, afternoon tea included.

Register by 17 March to Gill Jorgensen 3341 3933 or

jorgenkg@picknowl.com.au

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

I am sorry to report that our Treasurer Bob Myers has suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and is in Greenslopes Rehabilitation Unit where he is making good progress. Telephone calls and visitors are welcome. We wish Bob all the best for a quick recovery.

The Qld Branch, Australian Institute of Horticulture has kindly offered AGHS a display space at the entrance to their Queensland Garden Fair, where we can promote and encourage membership of AGHS. It will be held in the Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens Auditorium on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 February. The AGHS committee is organising a video display of our activities and a photo montage of historic gardens. However we need a few more AGHS members who can help man our stand for a couple of hours, so please contact me if you are able to help out.

All members should have received in the mail, a brochure about the 2009 AGHS tour to the New England district. Qld members can avoid an airfare to Sydney & back by driving to Armidale to join the tour. Let me know if you are interested in car pooling for the drive down & back and I will see what can be organised. As I will be interstate until January 4, please contact me after that.

If you are thinking of attending the 2009 AGHS National Conference, it will be in Geelong from October 16 to 18, and will focus on the Western District of Victoria.

We welcome new members: Denise Long and Malcolm Hicks.

Keith Jorgensen

DRY SCRUBS AND TRIMMED AZALEAS:
 QUEENSLAND BRANCH VISIT to ROSEWOOD AND THE NERIMA GARDEN, 26 OCTOBER 2008
 by John Taylor

On a warm spring Sunday 12 members and friends enjoyed visiting some gardens displaying very different landscape styles. The highlight of the trip for me was going to the Rosewood Scrub, a tiny remnant of the dry scrub (semi-evergreen vine thicket, or dry rainforest) which once grew between Rosewood and Fernvale.

Since 1994 the Ipswich branch of the Society for Growing Australian Plants has worked to conserve and display the plants of the dry scrub. Society volunteers have planted thousands of plants of about 150 species on 2 ha of council parkland. Seed and cuttings have been collected from remnant patches of the scrub and propagated by SGAP members for planting in the garden. No attempt has been made to recreate the natural structure of the ecosystem - the plants are in beds set in grassland. The beds contain plants arranged by themes, such as medicinal plants and plants used by Aboriginal people, so it really is an arboretum, or even a botanic garden. A guidebook to the plants is available. Rosewood itself is an acacia, *A. fasciculifera*, which has intensely coloured wood.

The plants of the dry scrubs are of great interest, and many have become vulnerable due to habitat destruction. They vary from familiar genera and species to the very unfamiliar. Many of the plants are attractive and our guide, the knowledgeable Arnold Reick, thinks that these species should be widely grown in parks and gardens in south east Queensland. Our fascination with the plants was moderated by the impact of drought – some plants are dead and many are struggling to survive in the very dry conditions.



Arnold Reick in the Rosewood Scrub Arboretum



Callitris baileyana in foreground with brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla*)- the large silver-leaved tree- behind

In my view the park is important in building knowledge on how to grow the species in the dry scrubs and in creating awareness of the importance of this vegetation type that 150 years of settlement has all but wiped out. Travelling to Rosewood you can see how European settlement and land use has affected the landscape. Native forest and scrub remains on the higher ridges and steep slopes. The flat land was cleared originally to grow sugar

cane, but now is used less intensively, and as a result abandoned farm houses marked by a jacaranda or a bougainvillea can be seen. Mullock heaps indicate where early underground coal mining took place. The mining continues, but by open cut with unfortunate impacts on the visual amenity of the landscape, and on the integrity of the creeks.

The day had started at Laidley, in the park at Narda Lagoon. This park was minimalist, mown dry grass with a few scattered trees, dusty, but relieved by the lagoon, which was bright green due to its being choked with water hyacinth. The beetle introduced to control this weed was nowhere to be seen.

The area was named Laidley Plains by botanist Allan Cunningham while exploring Moreton Bay district in 1829, during which he found Cunningham's Gap, the way to the Darling Downs. John Laidley was an official in the New South Wales government. The village of Laidley has a very intact streetscape with some attractive early buildings, especially hotels and churches. Lunch was at Bicentennial Park at Walloon where the point of interest is sculpture of the little girls who drowned while collecting water lilies in the flooded creek. The tragedy was commemorated in a poem by Henry Lawson.

Grandchester lies between Laidley and Rosewood. Queensland's first railway was built between Ipswich and Bigges Camp in 1865. The name was later changed, Grandchester being a Latinized rendering of Bigges Camp. The eponymous Frederick Bigges was a squatter who camped there first in 1842. What was once a town is now a locality but the old station and the steam powered sawmill are worth seeing.

Finally, the trimmed azaleas. They are in the Nerima Japanese Garden in Queens Park in Ipswich. The oldest part of the garden, at the entrance, was built in 2001. It has a lake and the water and greenery which were a welcome change from the generally dry places we had been in up to then. The garden is well worth a visit, as it has some attractive Japanese design features and very fine bridges, waterfalls and stonework.



The lake and waterfall at Nerima Garden, Ipswich. The tree on the left is *Taxodium*, swamp cypress

The mixing of traditional Japanese elements such as the trimmed azaleas, gardenias and bamboos with Australian plants such as lilly pillies and hoop pines was intriguing and produced a very unusual landscape. The higher part of the garden in my view gave an impression of being unfinished – maybe the garden is too large, and a smaller, enclosed, carefully planted and maintained garden would be more successful in carrying Japanese gardening styles into south east Queensland. **Thanks to Graham and Elspeth Douglas for organising such an interesting day.**

QUEENSLAND BRANCH VISIT TO COOCHIN COOCHIN

by Glenn R Cooke. Colour photos by Keith Jorgensen

The Queensland Branch's visit to the historic property, Coochin Coochin, took place on 7 December 2008 on a typically sultry, summer day. We were fortunate in the timing of our visit as the homestead gardens, indeed the whole landscape, was impossibly green and burgeoning. We were advised by our hosts, Tim and Jane Bell, that the property received over 10 inches of rain during November, which a first in the 29 years that Jane has been living there.



Coochin Coochin garden c.1920 showing formal beds of stocks and the swan flag that shows the Bells were in residence



Mrs Gertrude Bell with a display of agapanthus, 1931

Both images courtesy of the John Oxley Library, Brisbane.

Our first view of the homestead was of a vast Hoop Pine at the entrance, however we were advised that it wasn't and indeed a comparison of its pendulous foliage with a Hoop Pine planted by the Queen Mother in the Wallaby Paddock at the back of the property shows distinct differences.

Jane introduced our group to the history of the property while we enjoyed the morning tea she prepared on the wider 'dancing verandah' as some of us sat on the generously proportioned beam that edged one side— why don't more verandahs have this very useful addition.

The property was originally settled by David Hunter as Dalhanty Plains in 1842 with a grazing lease of 120,000 acres in the Boonah-Teviot Brook valley. Typically in Queensland's early period of settlement the property was on sold to John Kent two years later who renamed it Coochin Coochin, a word from the local Ugarapul tribe for black swan which were once plentiful in the area. One of Australia's most prominent artists of the mid nineteenth century, Conrad Martens, sketched the homestead on his visit to Queensland in 1851 (there is a sketch in the Queensland Art Gallery).

There were a further nine owners before James Thomas Bell and his wife Gertrude bought the property in 1882 in partnership with Colville Hyde and in 1901 James Bell and his family (the Bells had eight children by this time) became the sole owner. During the first half of the twentieth century Coochin Coochin became widely known for its hospitality. Jane recounted the story that Mrs Mary Murray-Prior of 'Maroon Homestead', Maroon, paid a visit to Gertrude Bell and found that the mistress of the property was not home and later complained to her. In response Mrs Bell devised a flag of two black swans on a red background, which she raised to show she was at home and so save other visitors the trip from the road. It was nothing for 12-16 people, with unexpected visitors, to be seated for dinner. The activities of the three daughters Una, Aileen and Enid were widely reported in the social columns of the time.

The original homestead was built in 1843, using local red cedar timber. It was moved to its present site on a sandstone ridge overlooking the surrounding grazing paddocks in 1870 and extended several times over the years to a total of 100 squares. The new kitchen was added in 1872, the billiard room (with a wall-paper frieze of a fox-hunt), guest bedrooms in 1910 and the 'dancing verandah' with views to the distant ranges, shortly thereafter. The homestead today has the wonderful rambling character of a Queensland country house, and the receipt of a Heritage Grant last year to re-stump and stabilise the main living room will certainly help to preserve it.



Interior of Coochin Coochin where the Heritage Grant helped stabilise the flooring.

The gardens were largely established and maintained by Gertrude, whose father was also an avid horticulturist. According to Jane, who had access to Gertrude Bell's diaries, she greatly favoured dahlias and had many named varieties, but their circular bed has vanished in the changing life of the garden. Apparently she was assisted by Aboriginal gardeners including "Bunjoey" or Susan who often brought native plants, ferns and orchids from the bush to be planted in the garden.

In 1922 the famed writer of murder mysteries, Agatha Christie, the conductor, Raphael Kubelick, in 1949 and the former Queensland Premier, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen in 1992 planted a tree in the Wallaby Paddock to commemorate their visit. They added a common touch to the slew of British Royals including the Prince of Wales in 1920, the Duke of Gloucester in 1946 and the Queen Mother in 1958, together with a distinguished list of the Crown's Regal and Vice-regal representatives in Australia. Thirty-seven of these trees survive today despite the years and dry times. These include Moreton Bay Figs, Hoop Pines, and a magnificent orange Bouganvillea planted to celebrate the home-coming of Aussie troops after World War 1, in 1915-1918. It originally had a metal archway but it has succumbed to time as have a series of replacement fence-posts. Jane Bell pointed out that the variable growth of the trees — some thrive but others not too far away struggle, courtesy of the thin soil on the sandstone ridge. She confessed that she thought the white Bauhinia planted by Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh was on its last legs because of the drought but with the recent rain it has put on a spurt of growth.

The plants in the gardens are largely old fashioned. Beds of the old variety of 'Crown of thorns' (*Euphorbia milii*) with its old branches covered in lichen flank the entrance. Passing around the verandah through the billiard room which was decorated with a wallpaper scene of fox-hunting in England, we came to the 'Dancing verandah' where we were served a generous morning tea. We noted shrimp plants (*Justicia brandegeana*), coral plant (*Russelia equisetiformis*), agapanthus and unidentified iris. From the verandah we could look past the stand of pale pink frangipani (which grow very well in this situation) and the hedges of plumbago (*Plumbago auriculata*) over to the ranges which served as a barrier for the sheep and cattle in the early days of the property. Soya beans are now part of the cropping of the land, and the plantation of tea-tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*), that provides oil for export to Germany, has recently been doubled to 14 acres.



Side view of the north lawn showing the Coochin Coochin flag.

On the north lawn in beds near the verandah are beds of the yellow and purple flowered Peruvian 4 o'clock (*Mirabilis jalapa*) and dominating everything is a huge Port Jackson fig. Here are also a white flowered frangipani in full bloom and another even large frangipani which hasn't yet begun to flower and two venerable specimens of the old pink hibiscus, Ruth Wilcox. There is a huge *Strelitzia reginae* which must have been planted in the 1920s when it first became available in Queensland and which has intimidated any attempts to trim it. Surprisingly, over the arch at the side is the sparse foliage of the perfumiers jasmine (*Jasminum grandiflorum*). Jane drew our attention to a rare and, she felt, highly poisonous tree as the inviting red berries were completely ignored by the local bird life. (Michael Simpson is endeavouring to provide an identification)

The significance of the house and gardens are obvious but one of our guests, Jane Lennon, (well known for work in heritage and conservation matters) gave a short address on the importance of Coochin's Coochin's cultural landscape and the necessity of preserving the site lines from the homestead.

Although the size of the property has been reduced to only a fraction of its earlier scale, fourth and fifth generations of the Bell Family still live at Coochin Coochin, maintaining the gardens and the traditions of hospitality.



Some of the usual, . . . and not so usual suspects!

Back row: Judy Austin, Gill Jorgensen, Dulcie White, Anne Baster, Graham Hesse, John Taylor, Jane Lennon, Ann Wegener, Geoff Teed, Geoffrey Victor, Jane Bell, Kylie Simpson (hidden) and Brian Lees.

Middle row: Joy Stacey, Glenn Cooke, Jan Harrington, Elizabeth Teed, Graham Douglas, Michael Simpson, Wendy Lees and Tim Bell

Front row: Elspeth Douglas, Nina Wood, Marjorie Shackleton, Nancy Schuster, Jan Carter.

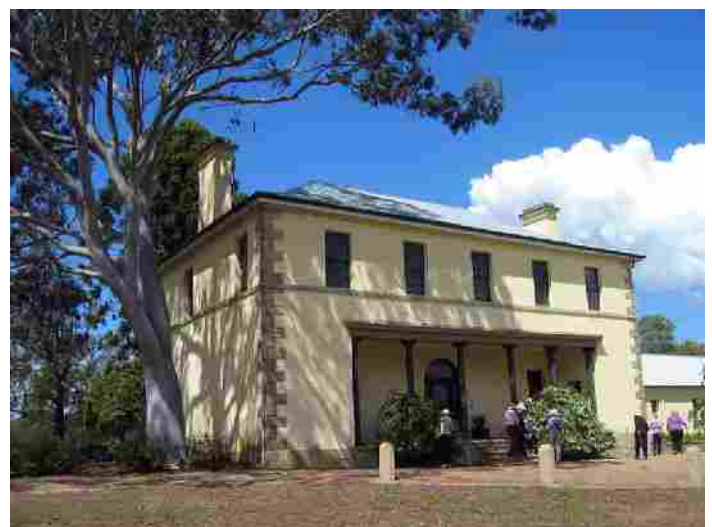
A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE PRE CONFERENCE TOUR OF TARALGA, GOULBURN AND MENANGLE DISTRICTS FOR THE 2008 AGHS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

by Ann Wegener (Photos by Keith Jorgensen)

For me it was a celebration of freedom! After 27 years associated with businesses concerned with the restoration of buildings and the sale of antiques, in Queensland, I was a free person, not concerned with the day to day doings of private enterprise. Five 'concerned' friends and my husband joined with a coach load and our tour leader, Trisha Dixon and daughter, Skye, her assistant. First stop, to set the scene and put our minds in the right place was an informative talk at the Museum of Sydney by Colleen Morris, curator of the exhibition, 'The Lost Gardens of Sydney'.



Glenfield from the new kitchen garden



The main entrance to Glenlee

Leaving Sydney we headed west to our first house and garden, Glenfield, an 1817 homestead built for Dr Charles Throsby. Now located on the outskirts of greater Sydney, at Casula, the beautifully proportioned house has been robbed of its original landscape of rolling hills and huge original growth gum trees. The 'cultural landscape' now includes a new housing development to the west and a rubbish dump and railway line to the east! The remaining 5 hectare garden has been reinterpreted by Dr James Broadbent. The site of the original gates and driveway had been maintained and the perimeter of an original tennis court planted out to define the space. The original *Meterosideros excelsa* hedge has been replanted with a taller variety, that of *Elaeocarpus reticulate* to help block out the view of the new housing development. The property, reputedly the oldest Governor Macquarie home and now owned by the NSW state government, is available for lease.

On to Glenlee, home of David and Trish Wilson. The group was invited to inspect the interior of this house, following an informative talk by David. On arrival, at the side of the 1823, 2-storey mansion a huge Queensland variety of lemon scented gum stands - some would say uncomfortably - beside the house, its huge smooth bark looked spectacular against the masonry structure. The planting can be traced back to the 1930's. Certainly it is a specimen, its growth more vigorous than usually found in its correct location. The owner has made enquiries about whether the root system may be damaging the foundations of the house.

Also of significance, in this garden is an ancient kurrajong tree. They are not supposed to grow naturally west of Sydney, its size and age bears question as to who shifted it and how. The outlook from the rear of the house is framed by huge pines and a sloping lawn. A stroll towards the sheds took me along a wide stone paved walkway bordered by a well looked after plumbago hedge, the view back revealing the older and simpler section of the homestead.

This was our lunch stop, having really only just completed a sumptuous morning tea. We were already convinced that our tour guide was not going to fail our stomach.



The wishing well with a view to the pool and pool house.

Our last house and garden visit for day one was to the home of Karin Keighley, named Golden Vale, our first Southern Highlands garden and nearly only a windscreen view due to heavy rain. Fortunately most of us had a chance to view the garden created by Karin. Now gifted to the National Trust, this classic 2 storied Georgian sandstone house's garden is accessed by a driveway lined with Deodar cedars interspersed with ash trees. We accessed the garden at the rear side of the house past rhododendrons and a bay hedge. The deep rectangular garden has a pool and pool house at its end, built within the last 50 years. To each side of the expansive central lawn are woodland gardens containing, at the time of our visit, flowering Scillas (bluebells) and jonquils. Hidden at the bottom of the garden, and with a beautiful view to the paddocks and hills beyond, was a substantial fenced fruit and vegetable garden. The raspberry bushes were being trained to perfection by the farm-hand/gardener.

The garden became more formal closer to the house. It contained many beautiful elements. Some of these were the plantings of hydrangea, lilacs (flowering), large potted plants, standardized weeping Japanese maples and hellebores. A glimpse between the house and nearby out-buildings was very inviting!

A heavy storm had cut power at our hotel, Cragieburn, Bowral (a much added-to Victorian mansion), so we were taken to another venue for dinner. Next day, lovely sunny cool weather greeted us and we headed south.



Spring Ponds

First stop was an unscheduled visit to Trisha Dixon's childhood home, Spring Ponds. Her spritely 80-something year old parents still live and garden there, the family having owned this property since 1914. This is a beautifully intact property with sheds of rusty coloured iron, old timber fencing and gates, and a rambling homestead nestles into a beautiful garden. A snow pear, *Pyrus nevalis* beside the tennis court has a spectacular spring display.

Next stop is the property Wollongorang, which had a more personal connection for one of the Queenslanders as her father had visited this property as a child. He had been put on a train from Melbourne to travel there by himself as a 6 year old. All visitors to this house sign a wall inside the house but we did not venture inside!

The grand Georgian two storey home and garden is currently accessed by travelling beside a ponded area of water. Beautiful native grasses were swishing in the vigorous wind as we drove past. Intact outbuildings and a stone walled vegetable garden complement the rear of the house. We sheltered between the two rear wings to enjoy another beautiful morning tea.

At the front of the house, the original garden layout and carriageway is still visible, it being made up of divided concentric circles and it would be best viewed from the upper storey of the house. Vestiges of original plantings and the layout remain and the new owners of this property are hopeful of recreating the garden using new plantings.

Our lunchtime visit was to Longfield, an 1841 Georgian stone farmhouse and its associated outbuildings. The current owners have preserved the house and other buildings sensitively by preserving the integrity of the close-by buildings and courtyards and adding a conservatory styled dining room area. This space they thoroughly enjoy as they overlook 3 sides of their wonderful garden. Some of us enjoyed the space too whilst eating our lunch.

The owner, Pete's brother is Jim Hoskins, landscape designer and he has had some input into the gardens reinterpretation. There was a wow factor for me in this garden. Directly outside the new conservatory style space, Pete and Robyn, a Queenslander, have used thick old stone slabs to create a newly paved terrace. An original white flowering Kentish cherry remained within the terrace space and two new cherry trees have been planted. Their flowering was at its peak. From this terrace and the original house verandah, the garden lawns rolled away. At the lowest end of the garden and forming a base for the view to the distant hills, repeat plantings of mounds of grey leafed Santolina interspersed with yellow flag iris and Jerusalem sage made an impressive display. One side bed close to the house contained a huge bed of flowering Persian lilac and to the rear another example of a productive vegetable patch. This garden was well maintained and inviting. As we departed, Trish regaled stories of Miles Franklin, author, growing up on the property next door and we were allowed to let our minds wander a little!

Back onto the coach (not a bus.....it has a toilet!), the friendship groups are forming and some rekindling from previous trips. One participant, Craig Burton, Landscape Architect, draws a plan of each house and garden on site. His work, and that of previous trips is shared. It's terrific. Such a talent.



Pejar Park



Hillasmount showing the kitchen's stone wall

We head north-west of Goulburn to visit Pejar Park, the 1860's blue stone house and property brought back to life by the late Beatrice Bligh, gardener and gardening writer. One of her sons, Michael Bligh trained as a Landscape Architect after her premature death and he was in attendance to describe his mother's work. This is a garden full of beautiful plants, seen during their spring time showing. Beatrice fulfilled her dreams with her garden. She designed and had constructed a large lake visible from the house. A steep bank rose above the pond giving a wonderful sense of enclosure. Some 'stray' tulips flowering on the hill beyond gave the 'arty' feel. We observed Beatrice's 'Daffodil' lake. The sloping garden contained rows of trees filled with underplantings. There was a huge pergola and the creator had employed site lines and allées to follow the slopes. This garden engaged the viewer. With a new owner at the helm, the house renovation is nearly complete and Michael has been commissioned to advise on the garden, something he has long wanted to do.

Our final day, and by now questions are being asked, where is the next tour? . . . and many of the tour participants committed to attend. We again travel south to Goulbourn and head north through Taralga country, originally explored by John Macarthur in his search for grazing lands, to Hillasmount, circa 1876. The bridge accessing the drive will not take the bus weight, let alone the passengers, so most of us walk up a steep climb to the property at the end of a ridge and we have more time to savour the siting of the house and its outbuildings. The original house is most intact and the new owners have retained the original drab exterior paint colour, having matched it following structural repairs and have been able to keep the original, now-rusty roof. In areas of lighter rainfall and less intensity than the tropics, this is still serviceable and adds greatly to the charm.

Long and slightly elevated from ground level, timber floored verandahs housed interesting bric-a-brac and from them the view of the garden could be soaked up. Jim Hoskins had been engaged to reinterpret the garden here and he's created a masterpiece. Using the backdrop of wonderful and mature gums and pines, he has designed a long bluestone wall that drops to contain a stone-paved surround and wet edged swimming pool. A small palette of well chosen plants including lavenders and grasses have been used here. Closer to the house, echiums, white iris, cissus, lambs tongues, lilac, buddleias and wisteria compliment the khaki-coloured walls of the house.

Our generous hosts allow us to have the run of all the rooms in the house and surrounding outbuildings. Behind the main structure the hill continues to rise, and one wonders at the romanticism of the original owners having placed the buildings high above any water way. Here large boulders tier the garden and in a shaded area, acanthus, violets and other shade loving plants thrive. Gradually native flowering shrubs abate to a nearby farm gate which leads further up the hill to another lovely outbuilding.

The garden asked questions of garden history, in that by the living nature of plants, of them growing and dying, being introduced and removed, the decline of some structures, and the arrival of others. An oversized crinoline lady constructed of rusty galvanized iron sheeting and of recent construction stood proud amongst the mature gums.

Next stop was lunch and the modesty of a small farmhouse and garden eased our minds at the immense workload of many of the gardens we had seen.

Last stop was at a property called Richlands, the building commenced in 1843 and included in the complex was a house, convict accommodation, underground silos, dug out of the local bluestone and other outbuildings. Linked with continuous history to Camden Park, a Macarthur property, it could be described as semi-derelict in parts. The garden is barely maintained, periwinkle creeper grows everywhere and there is a dense mass of shrubs growing close to the house. Fortunately, the house and property timelines have been carefully researched and documented and the property at this stage seems 'safe'.

We returned to Bowral where AGHS members enjoyed a free day prior to the commencement of the annual conference.

Looking forward to the next one.....

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