

BRANCH CUTTINGS

Issue 28 - February 2009

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VARROVILLE IN THE SCENIC HILLS by Jacqui Kirkby

Varroville is located in picturesque rolling country known locally as 'the Scenic Hills' near Minto between the old Cowpasture Road (Camden Valley Way) and Campbelltown Road in the County of Cumberland. It was originally a grant of 1000 acres made by Governor Macquarie to Dr. Robert Townson in 1810. When Townson arrived in Sydney in 1807 he was the most educated man in the colony: a Doctor of Civil Laws, a natural scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, he spoke five languages and was much published. Townson named his property '*Varro Ville*' after another man of letters, Marcus Terentius Varro (116-37 BC), who wrote extensively on Roman agriculture. In 1810 Macquarie visited the estate, noting in his diaries that the farms of Townson (*Varroville*) and Thomson (*St. Andrews*, opposite) were "*by far the best pasturage I have yet seen in the colony*". He also remarked on the "*noble extensive view...of the surrounding countryside*" which he obtained from the top of Bunbury Curran Hill, the highest point on the range cutting through the estate¹. By the time of his death in 1827 Townson had made the estate an exemplar of 19th century agriculture worthy of its name².

The estate was subsequently owned by a number of other important colonial figures: most notably the explorer Captain Charles Sturt who, in the 1830s

altered watercourses and put 'water holes' (dams) in every paddock, thereafter citing it as a '*model of water conservation*' in his public speeches³ and

Justice Alfred Cheeke of the Supreme Court of NSW who established a horse stud at *Varroville* in 1858, and a private racecourse on the flats below the house (now adjacent to the M5, but just visible in aerial photos). There he bred and trained the horse '*Clove*' which won the first AJC Derby in 1865. James Raymond also used *Varroville* as his country retreat between 1839-1851. Raymond was the first Postmaster General in the Colony and introduced the world's first system of pre-paid postage. *Varroville house* c.1858-59 is the third house built on the estate and is attributed to the former Colonial Architect (1854-56) William Weaver in partnership with William Kemp, who had also worked under Edmund Blacket. It is a substantial single-storey, rendered brick house on a stone foundation, with service wings enclosing a courtyard at the rear. A large underground water tank extends westwards from the ends of the wings of the house.

While similar in style to other Italianate villas of the mid 19th century (such as *Yasmar* at Haberfield, designed by John Bibb c1852), *Varroville house*, however, is remarkable for



Barklya syringifolia , hoop pine & oleander



The old Moreton Bay fig tree

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear members & friends

Sweltering heat, frangipani, Murraya scent and Hibiscus mean it must be summer. No reason to ossify the brain though: some good reading within and great events coming up, hopefully once the heat is subsiding, with walks on in the City and in Annandale and Glebe, April rambles in Pittwater's spotted gums, a June ramble in Manly and around North Head. Talks are on our horizon too: in May Warwick Forge will regale us with the wonders of Juan Grimm's Chilean gardens and Roberto Burle Marx's amazing tropical gardens in Brazil and more talks are planned for July and August...

Another highlight will be our self drive tour to two wonderful 'Cow Pasture' gardens in Sydney's south-west in May. Varroville is featured on our cover story but as much a treat will be to visit Denbigh at Cobbitty. This is an intact continuously functioning early farm (1817-1820s) on its original 1812 land grant. It has a rare and remarkable group of homestead, early farm buildings and associated plantings within an intact rural landscape setting fundamental to its interpretation. Denbigh retains historic views across the valley to Cobbitty in the west and its establishment by Charles Hook (1809-1826), subsequent development by the famous 'galloping parson' Thomas Hassall (1826-1886) and since by the MacIntosh family connects it with very important figures in the development of this area of NSW.

A highlight in autumn will be AGHS's tour of the New England district's gardens and homes – a treat not to miss: book early. This region is richly blessed with old and new gardens, four distinct seasons and generally rich soils and rains (not always the latter!). To maximise enjoyment, the New England AGHS sub-branch will be launching a photographic exhibition of regional gardens drawn from archival collections in April at Saumarez, the National Trust property featuring an Edwardian homestead, built 1888-1906 with extensive gardens and associated farm buildings on site.

Congratulations to member and former Branch Chair, Silas Clifford-Smith, who previously worked at the gardens of the Norman Lindsay Gallery, Faulconbridge. Silas won the 2008 Isabella Brierley History Prize for a biography of artist Percy Lindsay. The award is presented by the North Shore Historical Society for a major unpublished work dealing in some way with North Shore history. Percy Lindsay lived in Sydney from 1918 until his death in 1952, firstly at Roseville, later Milson's Point and North Sydney. Bravo Silas!

By the way, the Norman Lindsay Gallery garden is well worth a visit.

A recent publication of interest is Oak Flats Garden Suburb, Shellharbour City – historical and cultural overview, by Kevin Gillis, for the Tongarra Heritage Society. Copies available from Kevin Gillis, ph: 4256 2536. On the southern shores of Lake Illawarra, bisected by a long avenue of brush box trees, this suburb resulted from a series of 1917-1920s subdivisions and really only grew after the second world war. It has links to Sir George Wartburton Fuller, former Minister of Home Affairs who pushed through the legislation behind Canberra as National Capital. Parts of the street layout on Nob Hill are circular with names of politicians of the era, influenced perhaps by Walter Burley & Marion Mahony Griffins' Canberra plan.

A recent listing on the NSW Heritage Register is Redstone / the Winter House in Telopea, an outstandingly intact 1935 design by Walter Burley Griffin before he left Sydney for India – not just its low-slung 'Prairie' style house but its large intact interwar garden, enhanced by successive plantings and careful custodianship by the Winter and Melchert families since its construction. More info including a comprehensive plant list for the garden is at

http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_02_2.cfm?itemid=5056284

Also recently listed on the National Heritage List are the Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout, a masterwork of urban design signifying a turning point in Australia's settlement. It was the first place to be planned and developed, not as a penal settlement or military outpost, but as a place for free settlers. The area, 900 hectares in total (defined by the 1837 layout of streets including parks in the city centre and significant areas such as Victoria Square, Hindmarsh Square, the Botanic Gardens, Palmer Gardens and Brougham Gardens in North Adelaide), was included on the National Heritage List on 7 November 2008. More info is at <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/adelaide-park-lands/index.html>

Hope to see you at an AGHS event soon – make sure you say hello and spread the word!

Best wishes and happy gardening,

Stuart Read.

Tel: 9326 9468 or email: stuart1962@bigpond.com

A slight erratum in last newsletter: 'The shame of mondo grass' was from notes I took at Peter Watt's interview by David Marr (reported by The Sydney Morning Herald on 19/8/08. A fuller version was in the AGHS journal out last October). Apologies for any confusion.

NEW MEMBERS

The Branch would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new local members:

Nicole Alchin, Helen Banks, Loraine Baxter, BCCLS-Mt Cootha, Pamela Bell, Sally Bodor, Suzanne Cavanagh, Lee Dawe, Melinda Edstein, Margaret Fletcher, Ruth Foster, Tony Gamson, Alison Halliday, Jan Janney, Jennifer King, Elizabeth Knowles, Marrion Guri Mackinnon, Megan McColough, Christina McKinnon, Xanthe & Christopher Morgan, Ruth Nguyen, Marcia Rackham, Dorothy Raxworthy, Kylie Roberts, Alison Russell, Diana Simmons, Margaret Williams, Catherine Wilson, Michael Zinn

AGHS FORTHCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Date: February 15th 2pm - 4pm

Event: Lost Gardens of Sydney City walk (Macquarie Place, the Palace Garden, Domain & Hyde Park) easy walk re-discovering with Stuart Read three very early public squares and parks, all much changed over time.

Venue: Meet at Museum of Sydney forecourt, cnr. Bridge/Phillip Street.

Cost: Members: \$15 Guests: \$20 Bookings essential.

MARCH

Date: 8th March 2pm - 4pm

Event: Annandale and Glebe walk with Stuart Read and Janice Cave – a fascinating look at urban change from marine villas to terraces, industry to apartments, open space, harbour views and back lanes.

Venue: Meeting at Rozelle Bay Native Nursery, Chapman Road, Annandale

Cost: Members: \$15 Guests: \$20 Bookings essential.

APRIL

Date: 5th April 9.30am - 4.30pm

Event: Pittwater Day - Meet Craig Burton at Church Point for a short wander and talk, catch the 10.30am ferry to Scotland Island. A slight climb and walk around the western side of the island which is flat. Self cater picnic near the wharf, back onto the ferry at 1.45pm to Lovett Bay. Craig will talk adjacent to the Wharf about the larger landscape history then ascend to the Hardy Wilson designed house, Tarrangau, built in 1925 for the poet Dorothea McKeller. Meet owners Bob and Susan Story (Susun Duncan-author of Salvation Creek and The House at Salvation Creek) for afternoon tea and a talk about the house and gardens. Catch late afternoon ferry from Lovett Bay to Church Point

Venue: Meet at The Pasadena, Church Point 9.30am

Cost: Members: \$35 Guests: \$40 plus cost of ferry. Numbers limited. Bookings essential.

26th April -2nd May: AGHS tour to New England district: Bundarra, Armidale, Guyra, Glen Innes, Uralla and Walcha. Be amazed at this region's rich garden history, houses and landscapes. Starts and finishes in Sydney. Bookings/enquiries: 03 9650 5043 info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au

MAY

Date: 10th May 11am - 4pm

Event: Cowpasture Day - enjoy a picnic day in 19th century rural landscapes at Denbigh, Cobbitty and Varroville, Campbelltown's scenic hills (see article P.1 & 8) and . Remarkably intact colonial gardens cared for by sensitive owners in delightful rural settings.

Venue: Meeting at car park beside John Oxley Cottage, Camden Valley Way, Elderslie. Maps and directions supplied when booking

Cost: Members: \$35 Guests: \$40 Numbers limited. Bookings essential.

Date: 25th May 6.30pm for 7pm

Event: : Warwick Forge, Director of the Australian Landscape Design Conference, will talk on the Chilean gardens of Juan Grimm and Brazilian gardens of Roberto Burle Marx. A rare glimpse into some modern masterpieces

Venue: Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill,

Cost: Members: \$20 Guests: \$25 includes light refreshments. Bookings essential.

JUNE

Date: 14th June 1pm - 4pm

Event: Manly, Shelly Cove and North Head wander - Alan Yuille will lead us on a ramble through a most interesting part of Sydney, with interwar flats, Catholic castles/hospitality schools, ex-Defence sites, harbour-side parkland and bushland

Venue: Meet at corner of Bower Street and Cliff Street, Manly

Cost: Members: \$15 Guests: \$20 Bookings essential.

**Bookings & enquiries for all events above: Telephone: Stuart Read: 9326 9468 (ah.) Email: stuart1962@bigpond.com.au
or Jeanne Villani: 9997 5995 Email: Jeanne@Villani.com**

PLEASE NOTE: Payments for all events can be made by cheque to Australian Garden History Society and mailed to: Peter Cousens, 93 Lennox Street, Newtown, NSW, 2042

or by bank transfer to: Australian Garden History Society Sydney & Northern NSW Branch, ANZ Bank, Centrepoint Branch. BSB 012 040 Account 1017 62565 Payment must include name and function.

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

27th March: talk on Spanish Mission gardens by Matthew Taylor.

20th century Heritage Society (NSW), bookings/info: Craig Pearce, 0411 829 050, info@twentieth.org.au

April 7th: 7.30pm Brush Farm Historical Society talk: Early Sydney vineyards including Brush Farm. Stuart Read talks on early Sydney vigneron including Gregory Blaxland's 1810s-20s estate. Sydney supplied vines to later centres in the Hunter, Barossa or Coonawarra. Brush Farm House, off Lawson Street, Eastwood. Bookings: phone: Greg Blaxcell 9874 2266 or email blax-ellg@ozemail.com.au

April 19th/20th Member, Meredith Kirton and her husband Michael Bradford are opening their garden as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme. As a well known author and horticulturist this will be a one off chance to see Meredith's ideas in practice. The property was an original crown grant to Meredith's great grandfather George Dowling Kidd. For 6 years they have been in the process of turning a cow paddock into a garden. The Top Place, 164 Stewarts River Road, Johns River, meredithk@pacific.net.au, mob. 0417 698 559

May 2 1 pm – approximately 3 pm. Maiden Theatre, Royal Botanic Gardens. Joint AGHS event with Friends of the Botanic Gardens. How did the cabbage tree hat become the Australian iconic headwear? Volunteer Guide, Jenny Pattison will lead a walk to view the cabbage tree palms. On returning to the Maiden Theatre, Jenny will discuss the convict origins and demonstrate the intricate process of making a cabbage tree hat from boiling the unopened cabbage tree palm frond, to the shredding and plaiting, and the original tools used.

\$20, members \$14 includes refreshments during the session. Ring Stuart Read or Jeanne Villani to book - contact numbers above

May 2/3 10am-4pm Paradise Gardens open weekend 147 Greta Road, Kulnura. Enquiries: AGHS member Derelie Cherry on 02 43761330

Don't forget to have a look at our website - www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au It can now be used to check for updated details of events, membership renewals including by direct debit, gift purchases and routine enquiries.

Tulkiyan -

707 Pacific Highway, Gordon
House museum



Street frontage of *Tulkiyan*

Tulkiyan is a fine example of an intact Arts and Crafts style house from 1913, designed by architect B.J. Waterhouse for the Donaldson family. What is special is that it remained in their ownership and contains such a collection of material reflecting their lives, taste and times - their children who all grew up here and never married. The site is 1.32 acres, or .534 hectares. *Tulkiyan* means "gable" in Gaelic.

Mrs Mary (Maisie) Donaldson was the daughter of Mungo Scott, flour millers, a substantial Scottish family. William Donaldson was a banker until working as an accountant for his father in law. Bill, Maisie and Margaret inherited *Tulkiyan* on their mother's death in 1950. Margaret, the last remaining sibling was persuaded to will the property to Ku-ring-gai Council in 1994.

Still furnished and decorated exactly as it was when new with many items from David Jones and Beard Watsons: visitors can compare downstairs photos from 1914's *The Sydney Mail* with today. When soft furnishings wore out they were replaced with similar ones. The fuel stove and gas lights remain, despite electric lights, stove and refrigerator. There is an amazing set of records - receipts for furniture and garden plants, personal items - postcards and souvenirs brought home for the children from an overseas trip.

Tulkiyan is an important intact example of Waterhouse's work. The house is asymmetrical with an all embracing roof line covering balconies and verandahs. All major rooms downstairs and bedrooms upstairs have access to verandahs and sleeping out was "an activity seen as being conducive to health." Apparently "B.J." also designed the original garden, although this was "made over" several times. It was laid out by Mr Mottram of Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga. Later gardeners were Mr Edwards and Mr Colbert who also worked at *Eryldene* nearby. The front fence of brick and timber compliments the house. The original front gate is beneath a brick arch with terracotta shingled hood similar the chimneys. Matching timber gates on the driveway are engraved with the name. The garage was not designed by Waterhouse but "put up" by one "Teddy". This has been demolished although The Friends of *Tulkiyan* await its reinstatement to facilitate refreshments, toilet and interpretation for visitors, as the house is a "closed" museum.

The original front garden layout and the pea gravel driveway and path remain, along with remnants of the original garden and early plantings. It is frustrating that much original documentation has been in storage for years awaiting a trained historian to prepare archives. Although we hear that original receipts exist, we cannot confirm the original plantings. Lists of (all native) plants date from 1940s-1952.

Nowadays two huge lily pillies, *Acmena smithii*, planted in 1914, dominate the front, draped in Spanish moss. The red gravel path with brick edges curves diagonally to the north to the front door at the driveway, with ribbon beds on either side. *Bouvardias* were amongst the original annuals planted, later columbines. In later years Miss Donaldson liked colourful annuals here, and chided the Council to hurry up and plant each season after they had started to do some of the maintenance when she had signed the house over, but still had residence. Two large green glazed frogs sat on the front porch and their positions indicated whether Miss Donaldson wanted visitors or not.



Tulkiyan brick front gate with shingled roof

There is still a bed of small pink floribunda roses that Miss Donaldson used to put up for visitors, and The Friends of *Tulkiyan* continue to raise funds. Much of the rest of the front gardens have been rejuvenated, so that it difficult to know what was original. Roses and cottage perennials dominate, as it is maintained by monthly working bees and a few hours work by Council staff. Three miniature pomegranates are planted as they feature in the plaster ceilings of the morning and drawing rooms, while the dining room design shows the fruit ripe and split open.

The site has a substantial (eastern) side garden with a sandstone crazy paved path to stairs to the side verandah, which features a compartment accessible to the pantry to deliver bread, milk and meat. The back lawn is flattened, originally a tennis

court, now featuring a mature macadamia, a *Barklya syringifolia* and new sandstone edging around 2 sides, built by Council. The other half is the site of the bricked vegetable beds, a lemon tree, formerly a picking garden and lawn, originally with clothes prop line, now removed. Chinese gardeners planted vegetables along the fence line and later Bill planted irises here. The vegetable garden remained important to Miss Margaret and even at the end of her life she still had rhubarb and strawberries. “Mr Grundy” came from North Sydney to do odd jobs in the garden and in the house.

Early photographs show the block empty of vegetation, (there were vegetable gardens and a cow paddock over the fence) in contrast to today’s huge rainforest trees along the back and sides – *Brachychiton*, *Lophostemon*, *Glochidion* (cheese tree), *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, *Syzygium floribundum* (weeping lilly pilly/satinash), *Backhousia anisata* and *B.citriodora*, *Stenocarpus*, *Hymenosporum*, *Corymbia citriodora* and 3 *C.maculata*, *Elaeocarpus reticulatus*, *Doryphora sassafras*, *Harpulia pendula* (tulipwood), *Pararchidendron pruinatum* (snow wood tulip siris), *Ceratopetalum apetalum* (coachwood), *Podocarpus* and an enormous *Eugenia brachyandra/ Acmena australis* with plum sized red fruits, planted in the 1940s. There are also smaller tuckeroo, *Gordonia*, *Rondeletia*, *Cyathea cooperi*, *Loropetalum chinense*, *Laurus nobilis* and a young *Buckinghamia celsissima* planted by the mayor for the centenary of Ku-ring-Gai Council. And a couple of as yet unidentified trees. We believe that some rainforest trees date back to the beginning of the garden, others were planted in the 1940s by Bill Donaldson. This was his passion, as there are a number of tree books still in the bookshelves. In fact Miss Margaret still had an amazing knowledge of the trees when a plan was being produced in the 1990s. The forest around *Tulkiyan* means that although it is on the highway, many never notice it and it also screens the 3 storey unit blocks built on 3 boundaries.

The house and garden of *Tulkiyan* are a complete contrast to *Eryldene*, owned by E.G. Waterhouse, (a distant cousin of B.J.) built in 1914. While there are some azaleas and roses at *Tulkiyan*, the native trees are its dominant feature.

Tulkiyan will be open during National Trust Heritage Week on Sunday 5th April 2009 from 10am with last tour 3 pm. Groups are also taken on other dates if pre-arranged with The Friends of *Tulkiyan* 9498 3754

Text & photos by Prue Anthony

Source: Noel, Bell, Ridley, Smith and Partners, 1998, *Tulkiyan* – Conservation Management Plan.



Acmena smithii with Spanish moss

Our Christmas party was held at *Yanderra* in Dural, the lovely home of Jo and Bruce Hambrett, with house designed by Phillip Cox and garden by Jo. Towering turpentine and Angophora trees frame a peaceful setting. Thanks to all concerned for a most enjoyable event.



The front of the house and ... the back courtyard



Jo speaking about the garden and ...the crowd listening

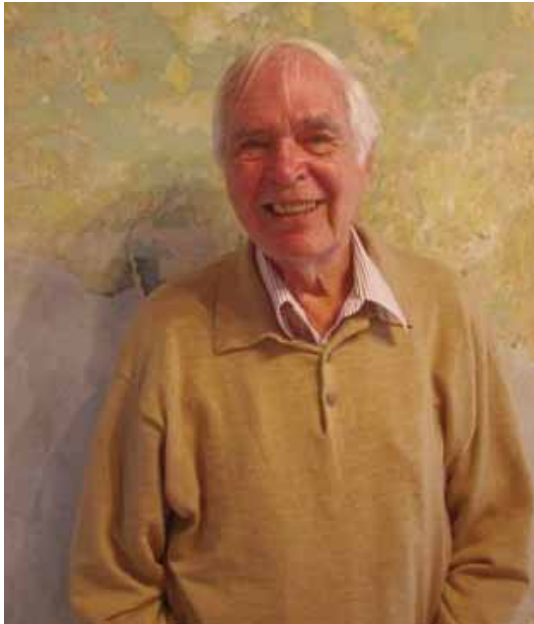


Carving the ham was Murray Hook, flanked on the left by Bill Clarke & Peter Cousens; on the right by Helen Bryant, Jo & Bruce Hambrett. Photos by Stuart Read



Excerpts from the oral history interview with
RICHARD CLOUGH

In *Branch Cuttings* #25, Roslyn Burge described the Branch's Oral History Collection she has compiled over five years. As these are crucial records, readers might like more. This is the first of a series of interviews, edited by Rosemary Potts – full transcripts are in the State Library.



Richard Clough was born in 1921 in Wagga Wagga where his family had been since the 1850s. He described early influences... “My mother’s father’s family came from Germany ... In country towns (then)... people as a side-line sold plants ... wreaths ... wedding bouquets... My great-grandmother... imported bulbs from Holland ... selling the plants... So, she was a very good gardener and ... my grandfather ... and my mother ...”

Clough studied architecture at Sydney University (SU) in 1939 and this was interrupted for two years by war. Then students who had done the larger part of their courses were allowed back to finish. After graduation he worked for SU in 1947 and then Fowell Mansfield 1948-9. It was accepted at that time for students to complete their education abroad and particularly England. At first he worked at Westwood Sons & Harrison, then for Sir Henry Tanner. Later he went on to study Landscape Design. This decisive step was influenced through having gone to university with Ian Waterhouse and getting to know his family...

“Professor (EG) Waterhouse (Ian’s father) had been in charge of the landscape at Sydney University for years ... as well as being famous for the creation of his own garden...(*Eryldene*, Gordon) and he tried to get Sydney University to establish a course in landscape architecture without success and constantly urged people to take up the study of it”.

“In 1950 the Royal Horticultural Society in London organised the Camellia and Magnolia Conference and Professor and Mrs Waterhouse came ... I had afternoon tea with them and (*the*) Professor ... was telling me that he’d had lunch with Lanning Roper ... and they’d talked about landscape design. He said, ‘*That’s what you should be studying ...*’ I made enquires and found ... a new course starting at University College London...”

“I was the first Australian I think to study Landscape Architecture at a tertiary organisation outside Australia... the course ... was run by a Cambridge graduate, Peter Youngman, who had a horticultural background... “(*He*) was ... very inspiring ... and ... knew lots of people including ... Vita Sackville-West ... (*who*) he organised for us to meet ... The ... profession ... was very small so I was able to go and visit ... landscape architects in Italy (Professor Porcinai and so on), Sweden ... Norway ... Spain ... Germany and Denmark...”

*Clough had done the course because he was interested ... “it wasn’t with any professional intent ... However, the ... the secretary of the institute, Mrs Brown, knew ... that I’d completed ... entry into... the British Institute of Landscape Architects; and ... said ..., ‘Oh, Sylvia Crowe is looking for someone to work at Basildon, why don’t you go and see her?’ ... so I went ... and she asked ... if I’d be prepared to go and work on ... the last of the first range of British new towns ... in Essex ... (*for whom she*) was ... consultant ...*

She came ... every Thursday ... gave me tasks ... and ... looked at what I had done ... Miss Crowe’s influence on me was much more important than anybody else’s ... It was her approach. She was the most intellectually stimulating person ... and ... I have never worked for anyone ... whose work was so based on well thought through principles that she never changed her mind.” “The project ... was fascinating... it was ... in a ... degraded rural landscape, very heavy clay ... in the middle of the nineteenth century it had gone out of ... production because the wheat and so on started coming from America and Australia... it was sufficiently close to the West End of London for the land to be sold off in blocks for five pounds a piece.” ... the whole area was sub-divided ... and ... during the war when people were bombed out of the East End ... - they might have had a shack ... or a tent ... moved down ... and ... lived there... and ... used their lands differently. Some grew vegetables ... some did nothing ... It was ... ecologically fascinating ... there was every stage of natural regeneration from agricultural land to oak forest and to take this ... and use what was there ... that’s the great thing about Miss Crowe’s ... (*approach*)”. In 1956 Clough returned to Australia and worked for the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) from 1959. Did he incorporate some of his learnings?

“I ... certainly tried to... it’s always been my intention to follow that principle, to see landscape; especially ... in Canberra, as a means of unifying the total area... of hiding unpleasant and distasteful developments ... and I’ve

been most satisfied (*with work*)... when nobody realises ...that anything has happened...”

“I was ... Landscape Architect for Macquarie University from the beginning and it was ... similarly degraded... It had been divided up into small holdings, chicken farms...vegetable plots ...cut flowers... and some ... just left waste... I think that people who go ... these days are unaware of the (*site's*) past history... they see it now as something ... integrated ... which relates to its surroundings. I hope that in all my work... I take note of the surroundings as much as of the work that goes on within the site itself.”

Clough worked on various university campuses at the same time...

“In those days there weren't too many landscape architects around and the Commission gave me permission to work on a selected number of outside projects ... in my own time... I worked with Professor (*Lindsay*) Pryor on the Flinders ... and Latrobe Universities. And ... with Mr Lane Poole on the new Kings School ... in Sydney.”

Occasionally he worked with friends on private gardens. ... “I'd begun working with the Valders ... (*Nooroo*) at Mount Wilson... and I continued to advise them ... And occasionally I would do a garden for a friend in Canberra. But ... I'd much rather work on a factory or a sewerage treatment works ...because ... you are doing ... work which will benefit society rather than an individual.”

Richard became Professor of Landscape Architecture at UNSW in 1981. He loved teaching and giving something back... “I found ... there was a big influx of students from South-East Asia and the course was very western-oriented ... There was nothing ... that related to their cultures and so I taught Eastern Architecture to ... architecture students and ... Oriental Landscape History to ... landscape students.” *And encouraged them to take up Australian history for their theses.*

Richard has derived tremendous pleasure from being a collector most of his life, whether books or garden visits ...and nursery catalogues... “I decided once I retired to do certain things which I hadn't done when I was working...I thought nobody has studied to any great extent the rise and fall in popularity of particular flowers and... one way of quantifying that would be to look to see when new varieties ... came on to the market... I thought you could quantify ... (*popularity*) by looking to see how many new varieties were offered ... The only way I thought of doing this was to make a fairly thorough search through old catalogues... By going to public libraries ... I found that, there wasn't such a great collection ... available so I decided to concentrate... on acquiring a number ...” *His collection has now been given to the State Library of NSW.*

In terms of his contribution to Australian garden history Richard has contributed to the Oxford Companion (2002), worked with Colleen Morris and Victor Crittenden. What is his interest?

“... my support for the ... Society is ... firstly, because it publishes ... a very good journal and the only one which enables people to set out ... material ... that they've done research on. And secondly... the Society has encouraged people to look at gardens from a historic point of view. I think that the ... journal... (*as it is*) is the right sort of work for Australia at this particular point in time.”

Since the Garden History Society started ... or its first conference in 1980, how do you think the study of garden history has continued and developed?

“Well ... in various ways. I mean there are a few academics who rely on ...publications ... to get promotion and ... write not because they are particularly interested in the subject ..., not because the subject is important ... but simply to gain financial advantage ... some of the (*published*) material ... I think is of questionable value.”

“But the whole idea of garden history is spread ... not only by the Society... you come across libraries in various country towns or suburbs where a particular historic garden history material is featured, so there's a widespread interest ...Happily it's not just political ... or economic history ... I think that all aspects of cultural history are gaining... in our society.”

You were just talking about garden history...

“Yes, well garden history is about gardening, certainly, as well as about gardens. I think while the study of gardens is important it's also fascinating to study gardening. The changes in fashions ... why those ... occurred and to try and understand the gardens of the past and ... that we can't actually retain them as they were. Gardens, unlike architecture, are constantly changing. ... there are a certain limited number of gardens that can be retained exactly as they were designed but in almost all cases gardens depend very much on the gardener. The ...person who created them ... shaped the plants... combined the colours... did the weeding ... made the changes. And people's interest ... wasn't in establishing a single unity that's unchanging, their interest ... was in change and if we stop change then we stop the real essence of a lot of gardens... We've got to accept change ... to realise that garden history isn't about preservation solely in the sense of keeping them as documents.

There we are, that is a sort of heresy to end up with!”

continued from Page 1

its synthesis of house and landscape. Its design takes full advantage of the sweeping views of the surrounding hills, with its generously scaled rooms, large curved ‘ecclesiastical’ plate glass windows, numerous French doors and wrap-around views of the range beyond the courtyard. The house occupies a narrow ridge on the south side of Bunbury Curran Hill and is oriented east-west, taking advantage of vistas to other Cumberland Plain homesteads, *Denham Court* and *Macquarie Field House*⁴. The siting of *Varroville house*, which avoided the house being silhouetted against the sky, was endorsed by the horticulturalist and landscape designer, Thomas Shepherd (1776-1836), probably citing the British landscape architect Humphry Repton, when describing the siting of Elizabeth Bay House in Sydney, and later discussed by British writer on estate planning, John Claudius Loudon (1773-1843) whose writings were influential in colonial New South Wales. Confirming its integration with the landscape, a recent study⁵ discovered the existence of a deliberate ‘landscape park’ intention in the land surrounding *Varroville house*: the remnants of a gravelled driveway (since intersected at Cambelltown Road by the M5) meanders through clumps of 19th century Cumberland Plain woodland, early vineyard terracing and dams, ending in a southerly approach to the front of the house with Bunbury Curran Hill looming in the distance. On the northern side, cascading dams, each with their own catchment area, emulate the made-made water features at the core of 18th century landscape gardens. The park possibly dates

from Townson’s or Sturt’s time, both men being enthusiastic horticulturalists educated in the landscape trends of the time, but could also be the work of Weaver who appears to have given the property a major make-over when the current house was built - including the adjoining cottage (c.1810 –1815 probably the first house on the estate) and the pre-1830 coach house.



Front facade of Varroville



The view west



The inner entrance gates

In the immediate surrounds the gravelled carriage drive, lawn tennis court site and plantings are elements of a substantially intact mid-19th century garden plan. The garden contains Moreton Bay figs, hoop pines, funeral cypresses, white cedars, pepper and coral trees, a Norfolk Island hibiscus, *Bauhinia*, agaves, oleanders⁶, Mauritius hemp (the stretch of original drive in front of the house⁷ is a forest of these), yuccas, aloes and hedges of *Tecomaria capensis*, common olive and African boxthorn. The kitchen garden, laid out in 1809 and described in Sturt’s 1839 sale advertisement may have occupied sloping ground to the north – west of the house⁸.

In 1974 Campbelltown City Council re-zoned the Scenic Hills into an Environmental Protection area ensuring the intact survival of 800 acres of the original *Varroville* estate and its remaining colonial rural heritage. This is currently under development pressure.

1 Lachlan Macquarie: *Journals of his Tours in New South Wales and Van Dieman’s Land 1810-1822*, Sydney 1979.

2 Obituaries in *Sydney Gazette*, June 29, 1827 and July 13, 1827.

3 See Mrs Napier Sturt, *Life of Charles Sturt*, Elder & Co., London, 1899, also sale notice in the *Australian*, 31st January 1839.

4 Colleen Morris and Geoffrey Britton considered this to be a deliberate siting intention in their *Colonial Landscapes of the Cumberland Plain and Camden, NSW: A Survey of selected pre-1860 Cultural Landscapes from Wollondilly to Hawkesbury LGA*, National Trust, 2000 for Heritage Ccl of NSW.

5 Geoffrey Britton, *Varroville: Landscape Analysis*, November, 2007.

6 Hardy Wilson described many oleanders at *Varroville* in, *The Cow Pasture Road*, Art in Australia, Sydney, 1920

7 Adapted from Scott Carlin’s Historic House Trust notes for their Cowpasture Road tours in 2007.

8 The *Australian* 31st January 1839.