

# Conference review

## Meandering about the Murray: 28th Annual National Conference

Taking as its theme 'Interpreting the landscape of the Albury region', the Society's 28th Annual National Conference was a popular one. Booked out early, almost 200 people participated and despite problems finding gardens to visit (due to the drought), a very full program over four days was undertaken. The first day and a half was as usual given over to lectures.

**Dr Bruce Pennay** took us from the Wiradjuri's river 'Millewa', to Hume and Hovell's 'Hume River', and on to Charles Sturt's 'Murray River'. He described the waves of public projects which have shaped the city from river crossings, road, rail, a potential Federal city, to its part of the process of post World War II migration and on to the most recent attempt to get people to live in inland Australia, the Albury-Wodonga project. An interesting setting of the local scene was told with knowledgeable humour. (See story on page 6.)

**Dr Daniel Connell** described the journey of Australians from colonial times to the present in trying to find a way to be better river managers. In particular he focussed on the central part the Murray-Darling River management played in the early debates surrounding Federation and beyond. He pointed out while the present situation was cause for great concern and effort, we should look back to some of the serious and intelligent attempts to do it better, tried at the end of the

nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century.

**Glen Johnson** took us along the river via the arboreal habitat formed by the corridor of river red gums. He showed us the extraordinary diversity of life these magnificent trees support and the way in which they fit into the ecosystems of dry Australia by being green corridors on the meandering rivers often separating the wet from the arid interior. **John Hawker** next led us through the 'treescape' of introduced species which now gives the texture of a cultural landscape rather than a natural landscape, and so led us into 'gardening of the environment'.

**Dr Richard Groves** introduced us to differences in the concepts of 'introduced plants', 'naturalised plants', and finally for a small but very significant subset of both to become 'weeds'. He did this by tracing the trajectory of largely garden escapes, from the Macarthurs at Camden Park and African Olive, to Mrs Patterson (with two 't's)—who may receive more blame than she should for the spread of Riverina violets—to Saint Edna Walling and her Baby's Tears, which perhaps should have been called by its NSW name, Bony Tipped Fleabane, which Richard suggested might have limited its use!

**John Dwyer** took us on the journey of the *Hypericum* (St John's wort) invasion. From Bright and its racecourse it appears to have travelled, largely by road, to now cover some 900,000 hectares of Victoria despite attempts at biological



Exploring Woomargama. The view from the courtyard at Woomargama looks over a ha-ha to the paddocks beyond.



Photo: Brian Voce

*Paterson's Curse (Echium plantagineum), now a major weed, was a topic of conference lectures and featured prominently in the landscape of the Albury area.*

and legal controls. He showed us how ‘effective’ legal proclamation had been (not much!) and made us pause to think whether natural remedies are worth the price! The speed of this plant’s spread is an object lesson is what can happen when plants jump the garden fence.

**Dr Sarah Ryan** and **Kay Johnston** took different journeys to come to the same conclusion. They looked at the way we have shaped both nature and gardens to arrive at a point where we have to work *with nature* probably for our own survival and the survival of the rest of the ecosystems which we cherish. **Prue Smith**, who knows the gardens of the region well, gave us a sense of faith in the future by reminding us that historic gardens of the future are still being created in Albury and its surrounds today.

**Trisha Dixon** related the connections between writers and a sense of this place. She urged people to read the work of Rolf Boldrewood (who lived in Albury) *Robbery under Arms*, and as her talk unfolded she made the links with as diverse a range of writers as Barcroft Boake, Elyne Mitchell, Patrick White, and Banjo Patterson—an eclectic mix indeed.

**Dr David Dunstan** presented a story of heroic efforts to start a new industry in a new environment beaten in the end of by the vine

louse, *Phylloxera*, and changes in the tariff system. Sadly the decay of even the physical remnants is rapid and David’s book, *Better than Pommard* (new edition out next year) might be the only record of it in years to come.

And finally we had an excellent overview from most of the gardeners whose places we visited over the next two and a half days. The best conclusion I can use, however, is provided by the beautiful words of that great Australian poet, Bruce Dawe, who was commissioned to write this piece a few months ago for the opening of the new Albury Library:

*Here in this place both past and future meet  
And in the living present join their power;  
And, as in every union that’s replete,  
There is a richness which transcends the hour,  
And makes it memorable for years to come  
So time will add its own encomium ...*

*Since each of us, they say, is a living river  
This tribute to our lives and to our land  
Will serve to unite the gifted and the giver  
And reinforce what we all understand:  
That arts and learning merit our devotion  
Just as our rivers feed both land and ocean.*

**Max Bourke AM**



## Mission Statement

The Australian Garden History Society is the leader in concern for and conservation of significant cultural landscapes and historic gardens through committed, relevant and sustainable action.