

COOLRINGDON GARDEN



Australian Garden History Society

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Monaro, New South Wales

by
Trisha Dixon

Australian Garden History Society
ACT, Monaro and Riverina Group
Coolringdon

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Coolringdon



*Early photo of Betty
Casey-Litchfield
(nee Craig)*

Coolringdon is just a much loved unsophisticated old garden which has been my playground since I was a tiny child. My first recollection of life was Coolringdon. I remember clinging to the whitewashed branches of the Eucalyptus, or secretly searching for the cold hearts of the lichen-covered boulders bordering the edge of the untidy stream.

There were daffodils, forget-me-nots and violets growing in the grass. Their descendants are still there, whispering with an odd collection of 'flower things' that grow themselves, regardless of colour, perfume or formation. I love them specially. I used to make flower chains for my sailor hat from them, particularly the pink clover, and now their descendants are still there mingling with the wild roses and hellebores. Then of course there were the fairies and golden pixies.

My mother used to tell me I would find most of the tiny flower people at night when a white moon was smiling and careless stars tumbled about in the grass.

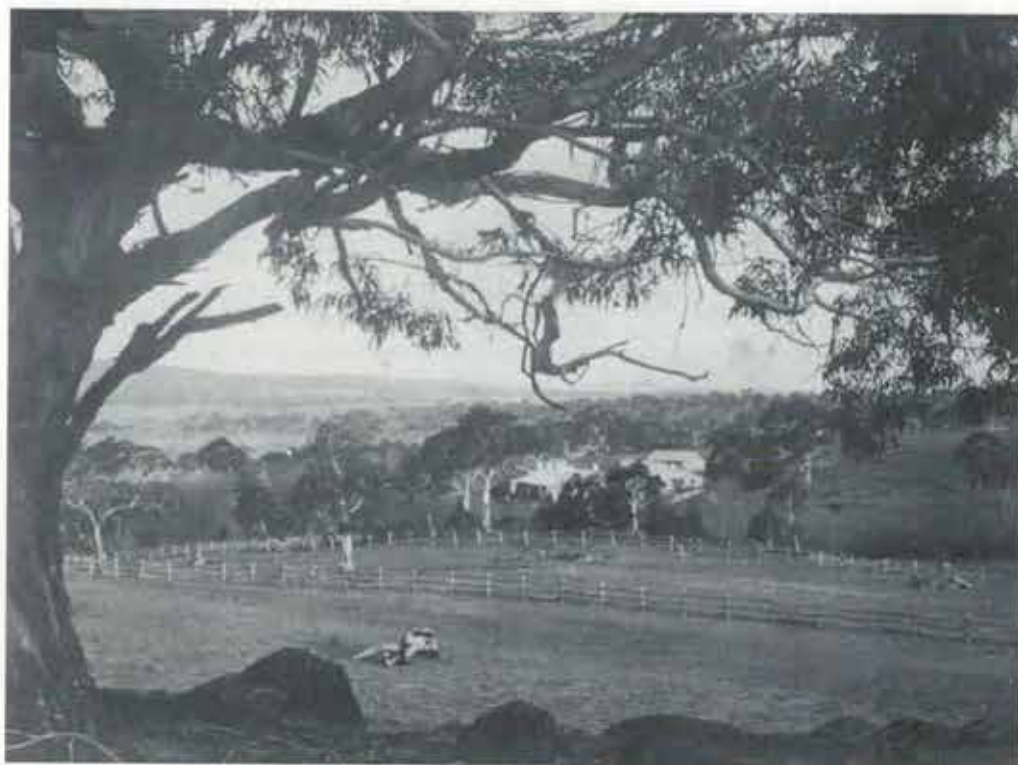
I found them of course, and so will you if you look carefully for they are still there at the bottom of my garden.

History of the Garden

Nestled into the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, Coolringdon is one of Monaro's earliest settlements. Its origins can be traced back to the opening up of the southern lands in the early 1820s.

The Monaro was first officially discovered in 1823 by Ovens and Currie and within six years, Coolringdon was a large sheep grazing enterprise held by Stewart Ryrle, who was Deputy Commissioner General of the colony.

A number of key figures in the history of the Monaro have woven their lives into the history of Coolringdon — Ryrle, Wallace, Bradley, Brodribb, Craig, Casey and Litchfield. The most enduring being that of Betty Casey-Litchfield (nee Craig) whose family have owned Coolringdon for the past ninety years.



*Turn of
the century
photograph of
Coolringdon*



The earliest Statistical Return for the Monaro, completed in 1831, lists 'Coolerandong' as it was then known, as having been established for two years by Ryrie. The largest sheep run of the 24 properties taken up at that time, 6000 sheep were recorded. It is thought that a rough bark hut was the earliest housing on the property. This was followed by a more substantial dwelling, which today forms part of the homestead complex. Over the years, additions have been made to the 1830s dwelling, with the most recent renovation being the extension of a wide terrace overlooking the front garden in the 1960s.

In 1848, Commissary Ryrie and his son-in-law Dr Wallace were granted the lease of Coolringdon's 10,500 hectares. William Bradley was next on the scene at Coolringdon. Undoubtedly a visionary, Bradley was a massively built hard-working man of great integrity and humanity. He fed and paid his employees well, worked alongside them (he could shear a sheep or drive a team of bullocks) and expected loyalty and diligence in return. While Ben Boyd was rushing towards insolvency with his vast Monaro holdings, Bradley was prospering.

Coolringdon was the centre of his solid empire of 20 stations, all on prime land. It was said that his holdings were so vast that it was possible to walk from Bredbo (north of Cooma) to 13 kilometres north of Bombala without stepping off his land — a distance of 111 kilometres.

When Bradley purchased Coolringdon he 'bought sheep at 6s 9d per head with the station given in.' When Bradley sold the property to Hugh Wallace in 1866, the sale notice read 'a stone house of ten rooms with verandah and large cellars... a detached stone kitchen and scullery with two rooms for servants, a bathroom and office and a large nursery...'

Coolringdon was sold back to the Ryries in 1877 before being purchased by Mr Robert Craig from Eucybene near Adaminaby in 1908.

Many of the trees in the outer park and surrounds date back to the early settlement of Coolringdon but much of the present layout and design can be attributed to Mrs Betty Casey-Litchfield and her parents, Mr and Mrs Robert Craig.

The garden today encompasses a large area of parkland, formal terracing, walks along the creek, sunken garden and courtyard planting. A broad terrace extends from the front of the house overlooking the formal garden and into the parkland beyond. A scarlet rugosa hedge tumbles down the hill to a wooden gate leading through the tall stone wall to a path leading across the creek and through the elms, robinias and poplars that line the 'fairy tale walk'.

Betty Casey-Litchfield's earliest memories of Coolringdon are of the fairy tale walk and the hollow behind the big rock at the far end of the walk where she would go as a young child and write her verse. Betty has been writing poetry since she could hold a pen.

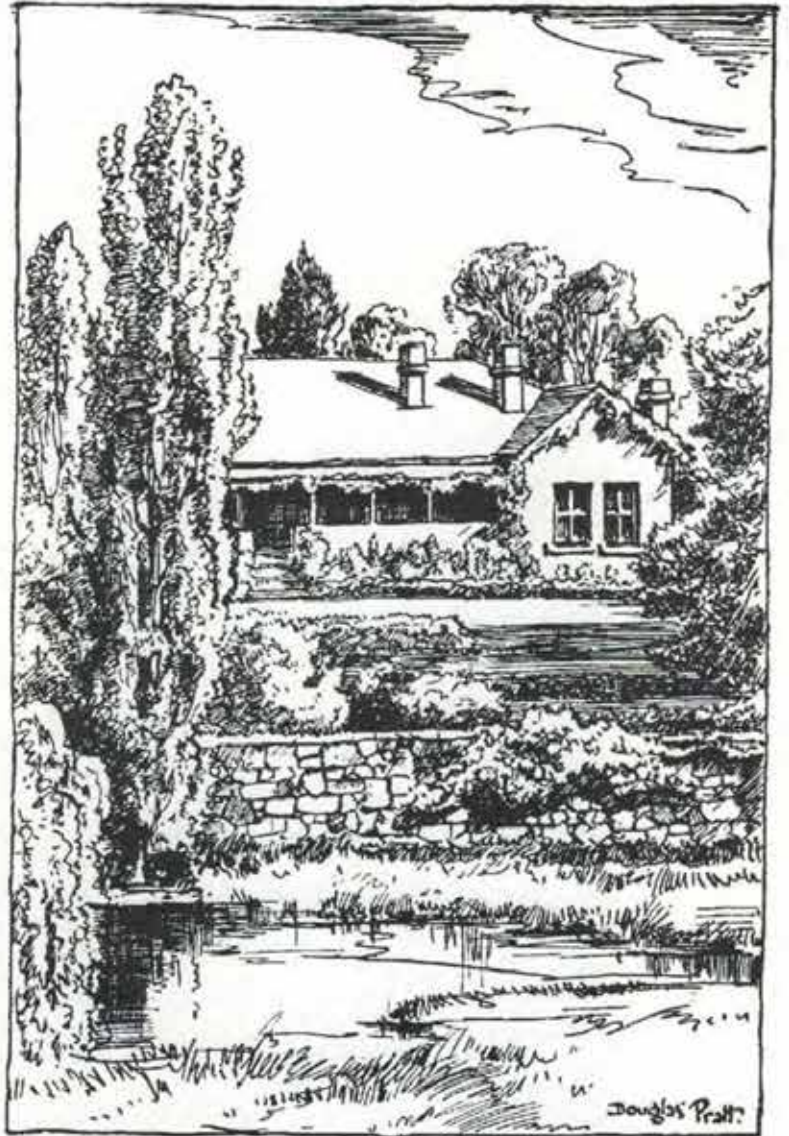
'My very first memories were of going out into the hallway at night and I would sit on the floor under the light and write. They (the poems) were in my head all the time — I just loved writing.'

Dancing round the tree trunks
Crimson, golden brown
Silver edged with moon dust
Leaping up and down

Gaily round the tree trunks
Rolling down the hill
Whirling like wild butterflies
Suddenly quite still

When I tried to catch them
They laughed and laughed at me;
How could a simple mortal
capture enfants from a tree.

- Autumn



*Sketch of
Coolringdon by
Douglas Pratt*

A gentle ambience descends on the garden in autumn. Along the fairy tale walk, the pathway is carpeted with leaves from the viburnums, privet and wild grape that form a tunnel overhead. At its base, tiny native violets reach up through the fallen leaves. In the parkland beyond, oak, ash, elm and poplar leaves carpet the ground providing a blanket for the hundreds of daffodils that provide a splash of sunshine in early spring.

The property entrance driveway is flanked by a 1.5 km avenue of 70 year old radiata pines with the driveway to the homestead marked by an avenue of 150 year old English elms. The formal garden area surrounding the house is bounded by a tall stone wall, constructed in the 1930s by a local Scot named Frank Wormald.

Within the walled garden, a wide gravel driveway leads to the house, flanked on one side by an ivy covered low stone wall and on the other by a hedge of old roses with snow-in-summer spilling on the gravel. Snowberries soften the wide steps leading to the terrace which overlooks the garden.



Please don't sweep the crimson
leaves from the terrace,
leave them undisturbed and beautiful
just as they are now,
Don't sweep away the golden leaves
from beneath the poplar,
Leave them scattered all over the lawns,
Each one magnificent, bewildering;
Each one a fragment of an earth-born star.

- Pieces

*Betty and John
Casey at the
front steps of
Coolringdon*

On the western side of the walled garden, a canopy of robinias provide shade for the massed underplanting of hellebores and Solomons Seal which have naturalised in the dappled shade. The hellebores flower throughout the cold winter months and in spring, the fragrant racemes of the robinias mingle with the cream blooms of the Solomons Seal.

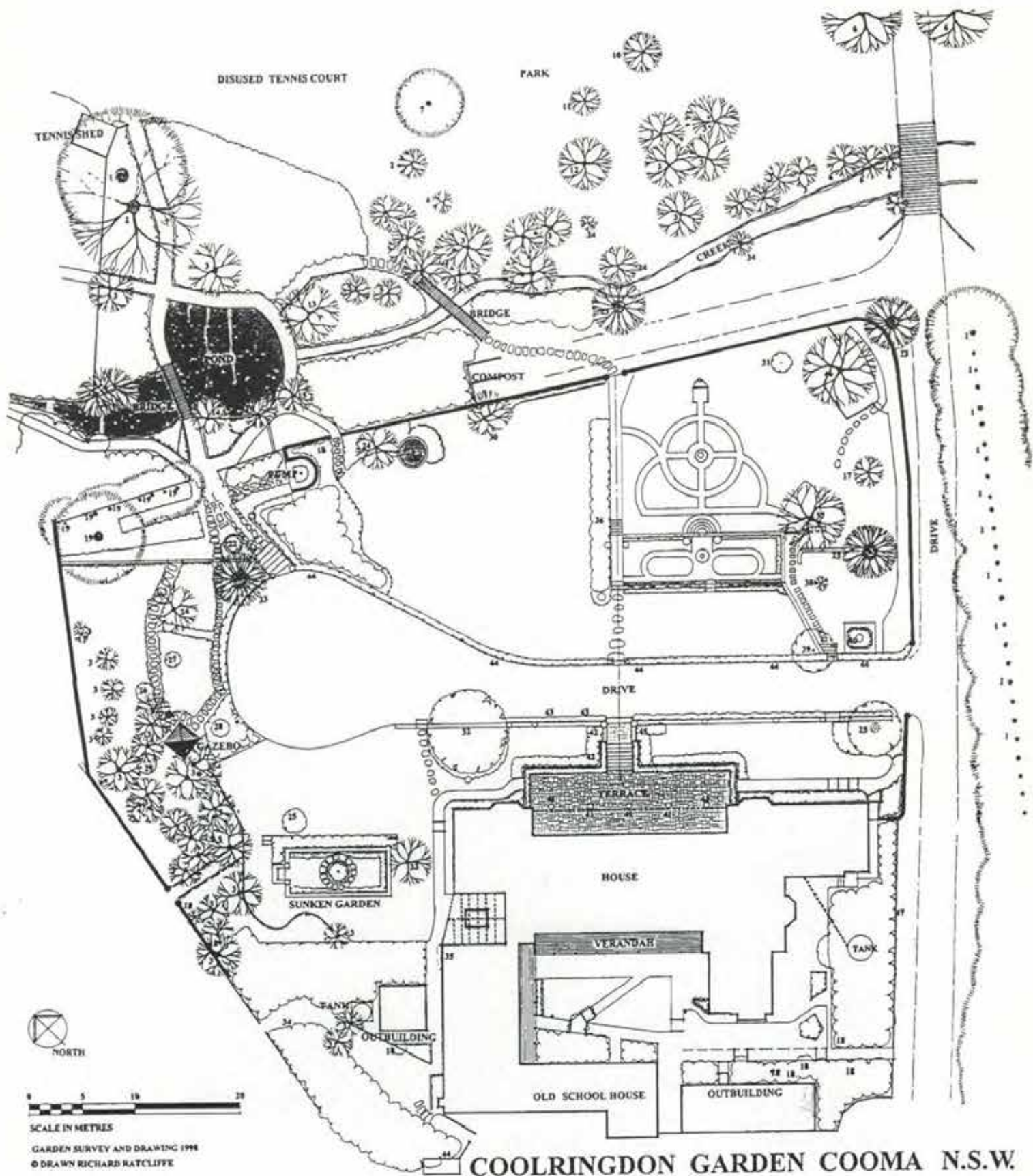
Although claiming not to be a gardener, Betty Casey-Litchfield has that rare talent of knowing when to leave well alone. *'I am really not a gardener and never do know what time of the year to put in a seed so that it will be the right colour and flower I want particularly in a certain place.'*

'It is a mystery to me how some of my friends do it; but I love its untidy confusion beyond words. I tried to create a small "white garden" which has become so popular. I look at it sometimes in dismay. I have pink petunias which I bought as white. I have a lovely purple bush of lavender which was given to me as a treasured white specimen; round the little pedestal which I have in the centre of the garden is a gay circle of yellow daisies; my four beautiful Madame Hardy rose bushes have not had a chance to flower yet — each time they formed a magnificent bud, my dear baby possums have eaten them with relish and my centrepiece of eight White Angel roses are in fact fluffy miniature pink roses rather like fairy powder puffs — so of course could not remove them!'

Today, pale lemon iris and lawn daisies carpet the sunken garden and nearby a whimsical summerhouse sprouts a grass roof. Throughout the garden, there is a delicate balance between orderliness and the unrestrained beauty of nature, and Betty has been successfully able to mingle the two.



*Snowberries
line the front
steps at
Coolringdon
1990*



Plant List

<i>Plan No.</i>	<i>Botanical name</i>	<i>Common name</i>
1	<i>Cupressus macrocarpa</i>	Monterey Cypress
2	<i>Salix caprea</i>	Pussy or Goat Willow
3	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	False Acacia
4	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
5	<i>Prunus cerasus</i>	Kentish Cherry
6	<i>Ulmus procera</i>	English Elm
7	<i>Cedrus deodara</i>	Deodar Cedar
8	<i>Ulmus glabra 'Lutescens'</i>	Golden Wych Elm
10	<i>Fagus sylvatica 'Cuprea'</i>	Copper Beech
11	<i>Quercus sp.</i>	Oak
12	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	European Ash
13	<i>Populus alba 'Bolleana'</i>	Upright White Poplar
14	<i>Salix irronata</i>	Blue Stem Willow
15	<i>Salix babylonica</i>	Weeping Willow
17	<i>Malus sp.</i>	Weeping Crab Apple
18	<i>Syringia vulgaris</i>	Lilac
19	<i>Chamaecyparis funebris</i>	Mourning cypress
22	<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i>	Rock Cotoneaster
23	<i>Populus nigra 'Italica'</i>	Lombardy poplar
24	<i>Malus sp.</i>	Crab Apple
26	<i>Philadelphus coronarius</i>	Mock Orange
25	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Guelder Rose
27	<i>Forsythia x intermedia</i>	Golden Bells
28	<i>Choisya ternata</i>	Mexican Orange
29	<i>Cotoneaster sp.</i>	Cotoneaster
30	<i>Pyrus sp.</i>	Fruiting Pear
31	<i>Rosa sp.</i>	Standard Rose — White
32	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	Cherry Laurel
33	<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver Birch
34	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elderberry
35	<i>Rosa x Mermaid</i>	Mermaid rose
36	<i>Rosa rugosa</i>	Rugosa rose
37	<i>Catalpa bignonioides</i>	Indian Bean Tree
38	<i>Laburnum anagyroides 'Vossii'</i>	Golden Chain Tree
39	<i>Wisteria sinensis</i>	Chinese Wisteria
40	<i>Stachys lanata</i>	Lamb's Ears
41	<i>Lonicera sp.</i>	Honeysuckle
42	<i>Nandina domestica</i>	Sacred Bamboo
43	<i>Rosa pimpinellifolia</i>	Scotch or Burnet Rose
44	<i>Hedera helix</i>	Common Ivy
45	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	nowberry
46	<i>Malus London Pippin (5 crown)</i>	Fruiting Apple
47	<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	Common Berberis

WAYWARD GARDEN

Oh, my untidy garden how I love you in the Autumn
As you trail your tattered hems across the frosted grass!
When you laugh and cry and dance, my wayward garden,
I too, pause and watch your
Leaf battalions gaily pass.

You forget your well-swept paths of early morning,
Your neat clipped hedges, and the freshly tilled flower beds.
You are thrilling with the ecstasy of living,
As you toss crushed petals
From a million flower heads.

And the tears that fall, of golden ruby, amber.
Are they tears of pain?
Do you laugh because another year is over?
Are you crying to recapture spring again?

Stay untidy for me just a little longer;
Let me hide my feet among your crumpled, rustling tears,
Brush my forehead with the naked veins of grape vines,
Colourless and stark before the
First warm bud appears.



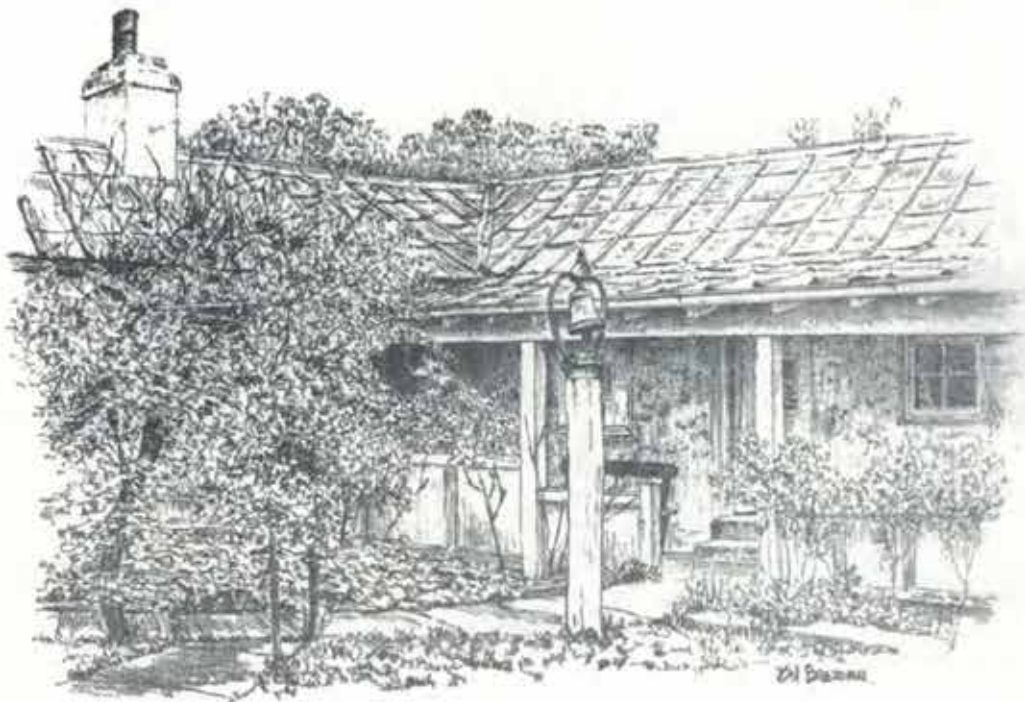
*The Italian
Garden in the
winter (far-left)
and the summer
of 1931*

This unpretentiousness is much of the charm of the Coolringdon garden. The simple erigeron is allowed to pop up undisturbed, the wonderful cream snowberry rambles along the front terrace and birds fly in and out of their nests in the ornamental grape along the front of the house.

Across the courtyard from the main part of the homestead, old-fashioned roses and honeysuckle spill onto the original building. Walking into this section of the house is like stepping back in time. The original furnishings and chattels remain intact just as they would have been left many years ago when this area of the house was in daily use.

The weathered school bell standing in the rear courtyard tolled for many years when part of the original homestead was converted into the station schoolroom. Here, Betty Casey-Litchfield was tutored by governesses, before being sent to a finishing school in Sydney where she was privately tutored for some time by Dorothea MacKellar (who dedicated a verse to Betty).

A framed photograph of Dorothea MacKellar and a bible given to Betty by her mother as a child remain in the schoolroom. More than 170 years old, this part of Coolringdon consists of eight rooms. An old worn saddlebag hangs above the huge open fireplace in the kitchen; an old brass bed covered with antique lace bedspread adorns the little bedroom off the kitchen and the old washroom and laundry still contain the original copper and scrubbing boards.



*Sketch of
the old bell
in the courtyard
at Coolringdon
by Bill Bresser
from Monaro
Country*

While Coolringdon is central to her existence, Betty holds a great affinity for the mountains and has ridden and travelled over much of the high country. Riding up Mount Jagungal knee deep in daisies; camping at Grey Mare, Valentine or Tin Hut; sitting around the campfire boiling the billy and talking to other mountain identities have all very much part of Betty's life. Snowy Plains Hut has been second home to Betty for well over 30 years. This simple hut sits in the shadow of Jagungal near the Gungarlin River. Taking stock to the Snowy Plains country each summer for the past 33 years has led to a love for this part of the world, which she has penned in many of her poems.



Weathered and torn and jagged,
Strange victims of nature's hands,
Boulders sombre and eerie
Pressed back from the wind's demands.
Small trees, like frightened spiders
Traced lines round each granite face.
Pale lemon lichen and crocus
Sought shelter and shade at their base.

- from *The Magic Valley*

*Douglas Pratt
sketch of
Coolringdon*

Coolringdon, her animals and the mountains have been the essence of Betty's life.

'That really has been my life — I was never really a social person, I just love my animals and being here at Coolringdon. There are no new satin covers — it is just as it has always been and I try very hard to keep it that way.'

'My earliest memories are Coolringdon — the stream at the bottom of the garden where the butter and dairy products were kept and one particular day when my mother was trying to pick up a clutch of chickens that had fallen into the water. Both my mother and father were great gardeners and were very involved in the running of it.'

The old house was full of memories — invisible, like lace —
And yet as real as the blue wistaria climbing across the southern wall,
And the dark-green ivy round its whitewashed face.
I loved it very much — the tiny rooms
Shadowy and dark — the big ones full of sun — the narrow halls —
The dark oak beams across the ceilings — the thick stone walls.

The old schoolroom where the floorboard creaked, and round the narrow window, white
jasmine and moss-roses grew;
How I hated adding threes and fours and fives!
The day I painted all the bookshelves blue!

The big warm kitchen, with the yawning gap where once the old fuel stove had stood;
The deep black fireplace — some ashes left;
A pile of rough unwanted wood.

The sitting room was much the same;
The straight piano stood against the wall, and I could see slim fingers on the keys,
Was I the little girl who begged for "just one more song, darling, please"?

In the hall the old grandfather clock still stood;
I paused and thought I heard it chime;
Upon its face a sun came up, a moon went down, to indicate the time.

My fingers sought the doorknob, round and smooth,
So many hands had touched the cedar doors —
So many voices echoes through the rooms —
So many feet had tip-toed on the floors.

I gently pulled a drawer out of the desk;
Some papers lay inside, yellow and stained with age — a trinket box contained a heap of things;
A broken string of pearls — a brooch — three wedding rings.
I held them in my hand — oh, gently — who had worn them? On what bright day
Had someone pledged to honour — to love — and to obey?
Such slender rings — worn thin like threads of gold —
I slipped them on my finger — memories — so sweet — so light — so old!

If each could tell a story, who would listen?
What secrets of the past would they have told!

It was in the brown-lined den he first had kissed me;
It was in the big bright room where she had died;
I had fled into the garden with my sorrow
And against the hard sweet pine tree I had cried.

Dear old house — so strong, so brave — so old;
Some day when I, too, pass into the Great Beyond
And there is no one here to think of me,
Will you remember that I loved you very much
And keep me as a memory?

— Coolringdon 1955



*Betty with her
parents, Mr and
Mrs Robert Craig*

Betty's intimate love of Coolringdon, of nature, her animals and the Monaro is revealed through her poems. Five books of her poetry have been published — now collectors copies. Her poems have won awards, others have appeared in Australia's leading newspapers and two appeared in Australia's first anthology of verse.

Much of the inspiration for Betty's poetry has come to her while on riding her pony, which she has only stopped doing this year. *'My father put me on a pony when I was seven and I have hardly ever been off one since. I've ridden all over Coolringdon. I would just take the dogs and put an apple in my saddlebag and head off.'*

Betty oversees the running of the property and garden. Adie Zierholz has been tending the Coolringdon grounds for the past 13 years and Betty pays tribute to his wonderful devotion, cheerful good humour and energy in keeping the garden in such fine order. To Betty, Coolringdon is more than her home and garden, more than her property, it is her lifeblood.

CALL OF COOLRINGDON

I love you so much more tonight
Than all my love tomorrow!
Your soul so very close to mine
Reflecting joy and sorrow.

Each time I see a falling leaf,
Pure snowdrops in the grasses,
A part of me calls out to you
To halt; as beauty passes.

Pink buds upon the apple tree,
Flung wild in all their glory:
While underneath, forget-me-nots
Sing low their age old story.

Pale moon behind a swinging cloud,
You too will share my sorrow
And drench my garden with the tears
I cannot shed tomorrow.



A glimpse of the garden through the gate in the stone wall.



The fairy tale walk

COOLRINGDON

Who will love you, when I am
Not here to love you?
Is it ecstasy and joy that make me cry?
Just because some coloured bark
Has crumbled on the roadway
A small untidy rainbow from the sky?
Who will pick the tiny violets in the spring time?
And the crocus in their neat sweet scented beds?
Will someone plant the soft
White frilled petunias
Who bow, as if in prayer, their
Humble heads?
Will the wild ducks nest deep down
Among the rushes,
Unafraid as they are now,
When I ride past?
Can I hope tranquillity for all things
As defenceless
And so trusting in their simple
World, will last?
Who will wind the old clock
Standing on the mantle?
With its slow mysteriously
Haunting chime?
So often have I listened to that
Music
And prayed that I might halt
Those hands of time!



*Betty Casey-Litchfield in the
den at Coolringdon with her
beloved Hope and Happy —
1998*

Anyone that has had the pleasure of knowing Betty will know of the great love she has for animals, in particular her beloved dogs. Betty wrote the following account of a particularly hair-raising escapade for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Betty maintains the story is true, that she has witnesses and that her dogs have put their paw marks on statutory declarations...

HAPPY THE RED KELPIE: BEHIND THE DRIVER'S WHEEL, HE'S A REAL WAG

I am not particularly socially or politically inclined, nor am I an intellectual, but I do read my Herald sometimes. After reading two articles recently — 'Memo, Paul Keating. Here's another Bleat' and 'Old Blue rescues species by himself' — both such touchingly human articles, I was prompted to send this story about my dogs.

I have two sheep dogs, Ben and Happy. Ben is a cross collie and Happy a pure-bred red kelpie. They are not dogs really, they are two intelligent people. Had they been born humans (instead of dogs) I am sure Ben would have been a politician; which side he would have voted for I am not positive, but I feel he would have been Liberal. He leans strongly towards the pastoral side of life, particularly sheep, and deplors the exporting of livestock of any kind to foreign parts.

His thoughtful political eyes assume a veiled threat of revenge when he reads of the excess culling of our national emblem, the kangaroo, which he chases with such gay abandon, both knowing that neither will get hurt in the chase. He would be an immaculate politician, dark pin-striped suit, spotless white shirt and flamboyant tie. His loyalty would be unquestionable.

Happy, aged two, had he been born a human, would undoubtedly have been a mechanic: one of those jolly ones who are found sometimes at service stations in remote parts of Australia. They greet you with "Hi, Miss" — that boosts your ego without anything else — "Want to be filled up? Can get a god cup of tea inside if you want it. Any repairs needed on yer bus?" Happy's passion for cars is even greater than his passion for me, and that is a great passion.

I have a very old, rickety Subaru station wagon and Happy learnt the rudiments of driving in this. He quickly found he could lock me out by pulling the button on the door up and down with his teeth. Many times I have suffered humiliation through this act.

Then followed the art of mastering the radio, indicator, head lights and windscreen wipers. My thoughts were on another plant when he first experimented with the radio and I nearly lost control of the wheel when I heard a loud, rasping voice shout beside me: 'If I said you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?' Happy was sitting contentedly beside me — with the radio button in his mouth.

It was the constant tooting of irate motorists that attracted my attention to the flickering indicator, excitedly pointing red and green at the same time.

Two flat batteries I traced to my headlights being on unobserved for a considerable time, but a couple of weeks ago Happy achieved his ambition — he drove his beloved car.

I had left the poor little thing outside the Post Office at a slight angle because of the crowd. It was in gear and the brake on in double notch. I was away about 10 minutes. When I returned there was no Subaru and a blue sedan was in its place. My horrified mind thought instantly of the police, because of the angle parking. Then I assured myself, the dogs would allow no one to touch the car.

I walked unsteadily across to the War Memorial and held on to the railing hoping I was not going to be sick. Below me was the busy Woolworths crossing and beside that was a liquor shop. Through a haze of fear I saw the owner of the latter coming towards me.

"Looking for your car, Mrs L?"

Almost unable to speak, I heard a voice whisper "Oh, am I!" Chris beamed, "Well, your dog drove the Subaru past the War Memorial, over Woolworths crossing, heading straight for my plate glass window, I thought, but no; he veered slightly to the right and is now parked behind the hotel. There was quite a crowd of us watching him; he was driving slowly and carefully. We would have stopped him but he wouldn't let us put a hand on the car".

Did-d-d he run into anything or kill anyone?" I stammered.

Didn't make a false move — but he's under age, you know, and I bet he hasn't a licence. I hope I'm about if he's ever breathalysed."

I walked unsteadily across the busy thoroughfare to the back of the motel. The Subaru had come to a complete standstill less than a metre behind a large yellow van, fortunately unoccupied.

The Mechanic was sitting behind the driver's wheel, his red tongue dripping drops of excitement; the Politician sat beside him, thoughtful and slightly apprehensive.

I put my hand on the door to open it. It was locked.

