

Profile: Roslyn Burge



Ros Burge pictured at the AGHS Albany conference, 2014.
Photo: Cynthia Nadai

Roslyn Burge is an elected member of the AGHS National Management Committee and Convenor of the Editorial Advisory Committee.

Sydney has been home longer than anywhere else yet it's the colour of the light, its shadows, and the shape of the land in Tasmania—the land of my birth—that strikes a deeper chord. The brilliant white/yellow paddocks of summer and Mount Roland always in the distance as I grew up are immediate triggers of a wider landscape of belonging and attachment.

Moving from Goat Island in Sydney Harbour to Tasmania meant an adjustment for my mother who found comfort in her garden. Growing up it seemed to me a haven of greenery and trees above the fence-line rather than floral plantings and, with its glassed-in back verandah and crazy-paved front verandah, was unlike any other garden in Devonport.



The 'Jean Walker fern'

Chaucer's observations were the closest my undergraduate degree took me to gardens, but my concern about the need for conservation of significant landscapes had early beginnings. In the 1980s I joined other local residents appalled at the vandalism in the remaining Cumberland Plain Woodland adjacent to Duck River in South Granville, Sydney. We met regularly, working to save this small area of bushland.

After graduating from UTS in 1996 (Master of Arts, Public History) it was a leap of faith to abandon the certainties of a corporate job to work fulltime as an independent historian. Oral history has become the largest component of my work with diverse individual and corporate commissions, heritage projects (many place based), and much larger national projects such as the *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*. Oral history interviews, whether recorded individually or as a specific collection, are a significant primary resource in which analysis of the interplay of memory, speech patterns, attitudes, and the way stories are recalled, provide another perspective among a range of historical tools. Future researchers will bring a raft of different interdisciplinary questions to their interpretation of interviews.

My own garden is a series of spaces the size of postage stamps that have grown without design. Combatting the voracious appetite of the possum population, which nightly emerges from Callan Park, and the way weather patterns and large trees impact these spaces have been an education. Many friendships and connections are represented in the plantings; a favourite is my treasured 'Jean Walker fern' that she plucked from her Balgowlah garden when interviewed in 2007 for the Australian Garden History Society Oral History Collection. Callan Park has become a sizeable distraction in recent years! The psychiatric institutions of Broughton Hall and Callan Park form a remarkable cultural landscape, one of the largest open spaces in Sydney's inner west, where plantings reflect botanic (Charles Moore) and therapeutic influences (Dr Thomas Kirkbride) and the economic prosperity of entrepreneurial families (Keep and Ramsay). In 1999 I curated a photographic exhibition within the gardens

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