

BRANCH CUTTINGS

Issue 46 - February 2015

This branch is affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society & National Trust of Australia (NSW)



'ST BRIGID'S' – A FOLLY ? by Elizabeth Halloran Richards

The word 'folie' in Old French means having the 'quality or state of being foolish; want of good sense, weakness or derangement of mind.' By 1654 they also

considered a 'folie' to be 'a delight' or 'favourite abode'. Middle English pragmatists gave the name 'folly' to a 'costly structure considered to have shown folly in the builder'(OED).

All have been applied to me over the past twenty seven years, and to 'St Brigid's', my peripatetic timber church.

In 1988 I exchanged the hurly-burly of Sydney for a new life in Charters Towers, an historic mining town in north Queensland.

From a handful of tantalizing photographs, I had purchased *Mornington*, a stylish low-set Queenslander built in the 1890s. The house spoke volumes for itself and the zig-zag brick edging of the formal garden enticed. Long interested in vernacular buildings and historic gardens I began a most rewarding restoration by replanting a lost chusan Palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, to re-establish a vital triumvirate and stabilizing the wire gateway arch supporting a starry sandpaper vine, *Petrea volubilis*.

An ill-conceived swimming pool occluding the original driveway meant *Mornington's* only vehicular access had to be through the rear horse-paddock.

Nevertheless I loved driving through the simple back gate, past shady trees and modest stables toward the corrugated iron garage. Unless a visitor, one entered *Mornington* through the nondescript back door and that was that.

MORNINGTON



Mornington Charters Towers 1917

a neglected Royal Poinciana, *Delonix regia*, and several miserable jacarandas back to glorious life. Established mangoes, rain trees, eucalypts, leopardwoods and two giant Indian tamarinds captivated me and unable to resist, I seized upon the palm genus with barely controlled enthusiasm, planting royal palms, *Roystonea regia*, golden canes palms and many others.

Shaggy bananas soon softened a raw corner, likewise a fence with a hedge of crimson oleanders.

Another fence became host to that indestructible shrub of many a dry farmhouse garden, blue *Plumbago auriculata*. I had long realized true hardy species need not be disparaged but rather embraced. Using them with élan makes a virtue of their ubiquity.

Free of boom style excess, *Mornington's* spare lines, central ventilator and classic acroteria gave its sheltering role subtle panache. Slatted blinds above cast iron panels on the wide, three-sided verandah, added a dreamy liminal space between the inner varnished French doors and the world

outside; the whole bringing to mind a sophisticated wooden marquee.

On the downside there were few bedrooms, as originally the side verandahs were used as dormitories; boys sleeping on one side and girls the other.

On monthly trips to Hughenden I had noticed a neglected



Mornington in 1992

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Sydney members enjoyed November in Central Coast's Yarralong Valley, visiting Jill Wran's lovely garden *Jum Jum*. Perfect weather, a passionate gardener and a marvellous maturing garden were a highlight for many.

Northern members have been busy watering *Saumarez's* new Rose Garden in the driest spring and summer in memory. Drip irrigation was installed into beds planted last winter. Recent photos from Bill Oates are at:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/yi9cm9wvbw8lbrl/AAAjukOecufhntwuVK-f_xrfa?dl=0

30 members held a Xmas party there enjoying not having a working bee! A recent storm toppled five Arizona cypresses (a shelter belt) north of the garden, leading to removal. These will be replaced with the same species.

December saw two Sydney events: Christmas party at member Margaret & Richard Desgrand's delightful Wahroonga home and a lecture by UK garden history author, John Dixon Hunt at the University of Sydney - part of a conference on 19th Century Studies. AGHS sponsored Hunt's visit, nationally (he also spoke in Melbourne) and through this branch. Many members went to several conference talks.

In February, Richard Aitken will launch Ruth Morgan's important book and give a Sydney talk on Portuguese gardens, a topic with relevance for coastal southern Australia. Like Spanish gardens, Australian and New Zealand plants are features.

The NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) now has a heritage committee, which is considering its scope and priorities. This is welcome and AGHS members are on it, including Matthew Taylor, Christine Hay, Helen Armstrong and Craig Burton. AILA held a recent forum interviewing (regrettably now the late) Professor Richard Clough (RIP) and a transcript will be on www.aila.org.au in time. A tribute to Professor Clough is on the Society's website under 'News' and more will follow in the journal.

Anyone concerned about planning in New South Wales (community opposition to the new Planning Bill led to its withdrawal) should read 'Planning for People – a Community Charter for Good Planning in NSW' (<http://thecommunitycharter.org/>) two pages outlining a vision, principles and desired outcomes. You might sign on – individually or get a group you belong to to do likewise, to see it adopted, state-wide. It has been prepared by a coalition including the Better Planning Network. Given its power to shape our streets, suburbs, villages and countryside, planning deserves active engagement. A new Metro Plan to grow Sydney until 2031 is on public exhibition over summer – establishing a Greater Sydney Commission (combining 41 Local Councils into six Sub-Regions) to foster implementation. Heritage 'fits' under the goal of great places to live and Environment under another: you might want to give feedback on your local area: check out:

<http://www.strategy.planning.nsw.gov.au/sydney/the-highlights/>

An encouraging thing learnt from one of Cheryl Maddocks' last gardening columns in the *Sydney Morning Herald* is the Remote Indigenous Gardens (RIG) Network, founded in 2008 by Anthea Forcett, to improve access to gardening and introduce people to health benefits from fresh food. RIG comes under Foodswell (www.foodswell.org.au) a charity promoting food production in and by remote communities for income and wellbeing. This makes sense: its constructive 'hands-on' approach. With more people living away from earth, less understand where and how our food is produced. A rise in community gardens is a response to the same separation.

The National Management Committee are considering co-funding an e-publication of a book by Professor Helen Armstrong, *'Marginal Landscapes'*, which explains why these are an important part of our landscapes, particularly post-industrialisation of cities and suburbs. Abandoned industrial sites, edges of infrastructure projects and more – left-over places are often over-looked in a 'culture of forgetting'.

Members may recall visiting *Yaralla* (Dame Eadith Walker Convalescent Hospital) in Concord West in 2004. This intact rural estate in the midst of Sydney is becoming a quasi-public park. A Community Consultative Committee is advising managing Trustees, Sydney Local Health District. This followed a 2013 parliamentary inquiry into abolishing leases for agisting horses on its paddocks. A benefit is increased appreciation of its towering bamboo, grotto, sunken garden and more. A revised conservation management plan prepared by Rappoport P/L and plan of management are at www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/Yaralla/.

The Branch has recently written advocacy letters and given advice:

- Supporting NSW State Heritage Register listing of *St. Leonards' Park*, North Sydney and *Belmont Park*, North Richmond (the latter AGHS visited in a past seminar) (more is at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/NominationsOfStateHeritageRegister.aspx>);
- critiquing a master plan to 'grow' the *University of Sydney's* Darlington and Camperdown campus between 2014-20;
- Objecting to aspects of the State Government's 'Urban Activation Precinct' master plan for North Parramatta, which will ring *Cumberland Hospital*, *Norma Parker Centre*, *Kamballa*, the *Roman Catholic Orphan School* and *Parramatta Jail* with high and medium-rise towers;
- Providing information on landscape architect Ina Higgins' work with Walter Burley Griffin's office on the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area;
- Suggesting wording for a plaque at *Overthorpe*, Double Bay on Sir John Hay's 1820s-80s experimental garden;
- Providing information on *Paul Sorensen's Leura nursery* to a fledgling Friends group;
- Providing information on the Avenue of Honour at Freshwater, north of Manly;
- Encouraging heritage listing of a war memorial planting of cypress pines at Brunswick Heads; and
- Provided advice on the best repository for a collection of old nursery catalogues.

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

NEW MEMBERS

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

**Graeme Brindley & Graeme Bassett, Alan Baynham, Alison Billing, Lucy Fisher,
Cath Gordon, Robert Hutchinson, Evan Oxland and Kaye Wallace**

AGHS FORTHCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Date: Tuesday 24th February 6pm for 7pm - 8.30pm.

Event: Launch of *Running Out* by Ruth Morgan & illustrated talk by Richard Aitken *Gardens of Portugal and their Australian connections.*

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

Cost: Members \$20 Guests \$30 includes light refreshments. Bookings essential. More details on Page 4

MARCH

Date: Wednesday 11th March 6pm for 7pm - 8.30pm.

Event: Illustrated talk by Stuart Read -*Prince Alfred Park's Crystal Palace and Exhibition Gardens*

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

Cost: Members \$20 Guests \$30 includes light refreshments. Bookings essential. More details on Page 5

APRIL

Date: Sunday 12th April - 1.30 pm -4 pm

Event: Haberfield Walk looking at heritage houses and gardens, church grounds and entering the grounds of *Yasmar.*

Venue: Address and directions to be advised on booking

Cost: Members \$20 Guests \$25 includes afternoon tea. Bookings essential. More details on Page 6

Bookings & enquiries for all events above: Email: Jeanne@Villani.com (Just a reply to this email)
PLEASE NOTE: Payment confirms Booking. Payments for all events must be made **prior** to the event by cheque to Australian Garden History Society and mailed to: Jeanne Villani, 90 Cabbage Tree Road, Bayview, NSW, 2104 or by **Internet** bank transfer to: Australian Garden History Society Sydney & Northern NSW Branch, ANZ Bank, Centrepoint Branch. BSB 012040 Account 101762565 Payment must include your **name** and the **function** you are booking for.
An Individual Membership entitles only that member to the Members Rate.
Household Membership entitles Members Rate for 2 adults & all children living within that household.
Corporate memberships entitles anyone working in that organisation to Members Rates.
Refunds for cancellations will not be made if less than 48 hrs notice is given.

COMING EVENTS FOR THE NORTHERN NSW BRANCH

February 22nd: **Alexander Carr-Bennett** Presentation by local historian, Graham Wilson OAM

Alexander Carr Bennett was a photographer in Dorrigo, Armidale and Uralla in the period just prior to and after World War One. However he was also interested in the use of electricity on seeds and he and his wife established a nursery in Sydney after the war. Why was this so? All will be revealed in an illustrated lecture.

UNE Heritage Centre, Dangar Street, Armidale. 3.30 pm. Further information: g.wilson42@bigpond.com

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

February 14th: Sandstone Foreshores Western Harbour Day Tour: Janet Morice & Andrew Starr lead a cruise west of the harbour bridge, into bays & nooks, 10am-1pm, \$55/65 includes morning tea. Book: 9360 4144 / info@hha.net.au

February 15th: Riversdale Homestead Markets, 1 Maud St./Twynam Avenue, Goulburn – gorgeous garden to tour, homemade products, afternoon teas: more info: 0409 953 859 / Riversdale@nationaltrust.com.au

February 21st: Jazz in the Garden: *Norman Lindsay Gallery*, Faulconbridge on Norman's birthday. Galapagos Duck play lively jazz in this unique setting. \$25/30. More info: 4751 1067 / info@normanlindsay.com.au

February 22nd: Jazz in the Garden: *Juniper Hall*, Paddington – Helen Fenton pays tribute to jazz standards and divas. 2-4pm, \$35/45 includes drink and canapes. Book: 9360 4144 / info@hha.net.au

February 28th/March 1st, 10am-4pm: Final opening for *Waterfall Cottage*. After 20 yrs - last time this garden will be open. \$8, children free. Teas available. 90 Cabbage Tree Road Bayview. Enquiries: Jeanne@Villani.com, www.jeanne.villani.com

March 14/15th: 'hidden' Festival of Outdoor Design. 17+ beautiful gardens & outdoor spaces, open for just ONE weekend. Entry to all gardens \$47.50. Bookings: <http://www.trybooking.com/Booking/BookingEventSummary.aspx?eid=112421>

March 19th: 10am, Garden Island Tour via the Naval History Society – site of our oldest European garden, tour areas normally off-limits to the public. \$30/33 not including ferry. More info: 0402 971 426 / www.nationaltrust.com.au

April: Great time to visit the **Blue Mountains Botanic Garden** on Bells Line of Road, Mount Tomah for autumn colours & fresh air: 105km west of Sydney; 9-5.30 Info: http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/welcome/blue_mountains_botanic_garden

April 11th: 8am-4pm, **12th,** 9am-4pm. **Plant Collector's Fair**, Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon. Wide range of unusual plants for sale, interesting speakers, food and company. More info: <http://www.collectorsplantfair.com/>

April 19th: Berrima Heritage Festival, 10.30am **Managing heritage landscapes: buildings and their settings**, talk by Stuart Read All Saints' Church Hall, Market Square. More info: chris-thompson@bigpond.com

April 23rd: Garden Design talk: Kate Cullity of Taylor Cullity Lethlean, Royal Auto Club, 89 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 6-8pm, \$60 members, Friends of Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Bookings: 9231 8182 / friends@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

May 14th: Paul Sorensen's NSW career & works talk by Stuart Read Wentworth Falls School of Arts, WWF Garden Club, 9.45am - morning tea, 10.30am - talk. More info: phone Celeste: 4784 2321 / celesteshadie@hotmail.com

June 18th: Garden Design talk: Michael McCoy, Royal Auto Club, 89 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 6-8pm, \$60 members Friends of Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Bookings: 9231 8182 / friends@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

"Running Out? Australian water histories" book launch

Five years have passed since the New South Wales government lifted its tough water restrictions on households and businesses in Sydney, the Illawarra, and the Blue Mountains. These strict limits on watering the garden have given way to 'Water Wise' rules that advocate a more conservative approach to water use outside the home. Further west, however, farming communities are doing it tough as a long, hot, dry spell takes its toll on primary producers and their families. Worsened by a changing climate, this gulf between urban and rural Australians is growing across the country in the twenty-first century.

In her new book, *Running Out? Water in Western Australia*, historian and AGHS National Management Committee member, Dr Ruth Morgan, looks at how these water challenges have played out in the southwest of the continent. Her book uncovers the fear of running out of water that has long gripped the region's inhabitants and loomed large on the state's political agenda. It has shaped how urban and rural Western Australians learned to live with the effects of a variable climate on their water supply, lifestyle and livelihood. *Running Out?* is a story of hardship and persistence; of inclusion, exclusion and defiant profligacy in the face of growing scarcity, through a period of great development and social change.

Ruth will share her research and its relevance to Australian garden history as a prelude to Richard Aitken's illustrated lecture on the Gardens of Portugal.



GARDENS OF PORTUGAL AND THEIR AUSTRALIAN CONNECTIONS

Illustrated talk by Richard Aitken

Richard Aitken presents a fascinating talk sharing his recent experiences exploring the gardens of Portugal. These little known but beautiful gardens share a climate and more than a few plants with our own here in New South Wales. One of the leading minds in Australian garden history and garden culture, Richard will bring his unique perspective to AGHS members and friends, in what promises to be an entertaining tour through Portugal's fine gardens.

Richard Aitken's talk will be based on an address he presented at a colloquium in Lisbon in July 2014 at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (National Library of Portugal), which accompanied an exhibition of rare gardening texts from the BNP collections (curated by Ana Duarte Rodrigues), as well as Portuguese gardens visited during 2013–14. He has recently written on the Portuguese garden *Quinta da Regaleira*, in Sintra, for *The Gardener's Garden* (Phaidon, 2014).

Richard adds: *my interest in Portuguese gardens is a relatively recent one. If Australians think about the Iberian Peninsula at all, they tend to dwell on Spain and the acknowledged masterpieces of the Alhambra and Generalife, or the Catalan architecture of Gaudi, but the south-eastern portion of this land mass is rapidly becoming the 'must see' destination. I have had the good fortune to visit Portugal twice in two years and on the last visit had an extended stay that took in a world environmental history congress in Guimarães with AGHS colleagues Christina Dyson and Ruth Morgan (and a gaggle of other Oz and NZ environmental historians) and time in Lisbon, Sintra, and Coimbra, providing a wide range of climates and gardens. The Portuguese are friendly people, with many speaking English; an equable climate, permitting a wide range of garden plantings; good food and wine, an inexpensive cost of living; a sophisticated culture and proud national identity. Garden history has a presence in Portugal, although as my colleague Eduarda Paz reminded us in the most recent issue of Australian Garden History, there is a long way to go in both historical research and analysis and in heritage conservation in Portugal. (Does this sound familiar?)*

But it was the Australian trees—their size and variety—that really blew me away. The subtropical splendour of giant araucarias, louchly protruding from clipped Baroque parterres and massive eucalypts and tree ferns in cool temperate dells. This unexpected delight severely challenged my ideas of eighteenth-century gardens. What were these plants doing there? And how long had they been growing? Hopefully I can provide some answers in this talk and open the discussion.



Terracotta grille, Sintra, Portugal -Photo: Richard Aitken



Courtyard, Palacio Nacional de Sintra, Portugal -Photo: Richard Aitken

Prince Alfred Park's Crystal Palace and Exhibition Gardens by Stuart Read



C31/12/1870 Prince Alfred Park from near Cleveland Street_(State Records of NSW: 4481_a026_000364)



1870 Intercolonial Exhibition stalls in the park (attributed to Charles Pickering_State Library of NSW_a089161r



1870 interior of Exhibition Hall, Intercolonial Exhibition (American & Australian Photographic Co._State Library of NSW_12825408)r

modest surrounds. It predated Melbourne's *Carlton Gardens* by a decade. Paris's 1867 L'Exposition Universelle had extensive landscaped gardens by Jean Charles Adolphe Alphand, builder of Paris' great parks of that era. Alphand built on Paxton's efforts in England and his work was feted by English writer William Robinson, admired by (young Sydney-sider) William Guilfoyle and visited by Charles Moore, then Director of the *Sydney Botanic Gardens*. The 'crystal palace' survived until 1954, replaced by a skating rink and swimming pool (1959). Its various evolutions since will be canvassed in this talk.

Keen AGH journal readers will recall David Beaver's 1990 article 'A Park for the Machine Age' (vol.2, no.3) about this park, passed by every train entering and leaving Sydney's Central Station. Even keener ones will recall the late (RIP) Richard Clough's letter to the editor in issue vol.2, no.4), pointing out that the John Baptist family papers in the Mitchell Library give information on the park's planting design and implementation. I'll remind interested people of this in a talk coming up in March (see page 3 for details). Richard Clough's research found a tender in the Baptist (nursery) papers of 1870 over supply and planting of 1025 trees – rejected for another tender by Guilfoyle and Sons (110 pounds) – suggesting William Guilfoyle may well've helped plant this park before departing for Melbourne glory. The species list makes interesting reading!

Prince Alfred Park was formally dedicated as a public reserve in 1865, then known as *Cleveland Paddocks*, its southern boundary being Cleveland Street. In 1869 the Agricultural Society of New South Wales held their exhibition here after exhibiting in Parramatta for many years. After London's 1851 Great Exhibition with its Crystal Palace by Sir Joseph Paxton and a mounting swathe of such events (Dublin, New York (1853), Melbourne (1854 & 1861 and Australia's first 'Inter-Colonial' Exhibition of 1866-7), Paris (1855 & 1867), public pressure was mounting for a grand Sydney exhibition, not confining its exhibits to agriculture. The Centenary of Cook's 1770 'discovery' of Australia was seen as the trigger date for Sydney's exhibition event. It needed to be near a railway station to manage and attract large crowds (i.e. to make money) as well as to use this symbol – the iron horse – of the machine age. Key agents wished to repeat the success of the Agricultural Society of NSW's 1869 first Sydney exhibition – we ought to be the 'Paris of the Southern Hemisphere' fantasized one *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent.

Once chosen, the *Cleveland Paddocks* were extensively re-landscaped and this plan retains its bones today, despite recent major alterations. Architect Benjamin Backhouse (ex Vic. & Qld.) designed the exhibition pavilions and is attributed with the park's overall design. Key Sydney nurserymen P.L.C. Shepherd, John Baptist Jnr. and Michael Guilfoyle were all on the Horticultural Committee responsible for floral displays and layout of the external garden. The show opened 30/9/1870 running a month. *Prince Alfred Park* was renamed to commemorate the Duke of Edinburgh's (Australia's first royal) visit in 1868. Its redesign was Australia's first significant 'Exhibition Garden' – predecessors having

Once I heard of someone describing AGHS as a 'secret society' – what nonsense! We welcome members and interest. Curious about exclusive clubs? Check out:

Wakefield and North of England Tulip Society Of the many 19th century florists' societies for amateurs, the longest surviving and best regarded, established 1836. The only one in Britain devoted to raising new varieties of and conserving old examples of florist tulip, species of which were first bred in England a century after the Dutch tulip mania of 1638. Tulips are in members' gardens throughout the UK, few open to the public. The current president is the Duke of Devonshire and 221 members include a hard core of 'showing' members supporting an annual Show since 1836. Eminent members include Anna Pavord.

The International Dendrology Society A love of trees is the sign of a true countryman and IDS was founded in 1952 to encourage the study of trees, forestry and conservation. It is particularly popular with owners of landed estates with parklands to preserve and cherish, such as Laurence Banks, owner of Hergest Croft. The society organises global trips to see the best examples and practices of forestry. Members must demonstrate a serious interest in trees and be proposed by existing members. There are some 1,500 in over 50 countries. Eminent members include Sir Richard Storey, BT (Former Chair).

More at <http://www.countrylife.co.uk/life-in-the-country/country-pursuits/clubs-you-cannot-join#q8pVVL47KQDY5aX6.99> And www.dendrology.org (that's 'dendron' = tree; and 'logos' = study. All Greek to me!).

Stuart Read

HABERFIELD - SYDNEY'S ORIGINAL GARDEN SUBURB

by Gina Plate & Angela Low

Haberfield, in the municipality of Ashfield is a small suburb 5 kms west of Sydney CBD bounded by Parramatta Rd, to the west, Iron Cove waterway to the east and divided from Leichhardt by the Hawthorne Canal. Originally called Dobroyde Estate, it was developed by real estate entrepreneur and town planning advocate Richard Stanton on land purchased from the Ramsay Family who built *Yasmar* (Ramsay spelt backwards). Begun in 1901, it was Sydney's first planned model garden suburb created in



Aerial view of *The Bunyas* with city skyline



The Bunyas 5 Rogers Ave

Both photos above from wikispaces.com/Haberfield+Federation+Pride



Westminster Photograph courtesy Daryl Chapman/Dept of the Environment

response to recent outbreaks of bubonic plague in overcrowded parts of the inner city. The subdivision was advertised as '*slumless, laneless and publess*'. This implied large housing blocks with sewerage.

Unusually, before any houses were built, the streets were kerbed and guttered, nature strips planted with brush box trees; the blocks were serviced with sewerage, gas and electricity. One architectural firm Spencer, Stansfield & Wormald was commissioned to design the houses - there were over 1000 on the original estate. The blocks were 15m x 45m and all were detached single dwellings. No two were alike, but common themes included slate or Marseilles tiled roofs, front verandahs and decorative features including leadlight windows depicting Australian flora and fauna, Art Nouveau timber detailing and tuckpointed brickwork. Motor cars were accommodated. These properties anticipated what became 'the great Australian dream' of a quarter acre block.

The big trees in the area today are indication of original plantings, including many frangipani, jacarandas, brush box, crepe myrtles and magnolias. Gardens typically included roses, hydrangeas, gardenias and buffalo lawn.

The majority of houses in Haberfield are protected under a 'local heritage listing' which is why so many original Victorian and Federation houses still exist. Several of these heritage listed properties will be featured on our walk including *Yasmar*, *The Bunyas* and *Derrylyn*.

The mission statement for AGHS includes advocacy for significant places and gardens at risk. In January 2014, SNNSW Branch wrote a letter to Westconnex Delivery Authority expressing concern about threats to *Yasmar* on Parramatta Road (losing up to 40m of its front garden) and *Ashfield Park* (losing 10 to 20m off its Parramatta Road frontage). The plan we were objecting to is now being reconsidered. We will be looking at both these properties during the walk.

OF GREEN LEAF, BIRD, AND FLOWER: Artists' Books and the Natural World

Edited by Elisabeth R Fairman, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2014. Reviewed by Cecelia Clarke

In 1961, American-born, Anglophile and patron of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon wrote of seeing, *a mysterious kinetic kinship between fifteenth century artists and our own twentieth century artists*. Covering five centuries, *Of Green Leaf, Bird, and Flower*, the publication which accompanies the recent exhibition of the same name, explores and contrasts the relationship between naturalists, collectors, artists, and their patrons then and now. This book is a stunner.

We live in a time of poorly-bound and inferior imprints of exhibition catalogues. Yale University Press, however, has taken great care with this book. With its fine quality paper, ribbon markers and collection pocket for field notes, it is as much a work of art as the featured artists' books.

It is an eclectic mix of essays, illustrations, artists' books, cut paper objects, wood cuts, and photographs. It explores the motives of the self-taught men and women naturalists to collect, to record and to analyse. Whether that be from intellectual joy of it or to be closer to God or both.

And lest we take it too seriously, the book also includes fine cartoons such as those by George Cruikshank, *Loading the Treasure* or the *Results of the Polar Expedition* (1819) which spoofs the sometimes frenzied efforts of British collectors to outdo each other for the social status their wealth could buy. This subject is explored by Robert McCracken Peck in his essay, *Natural Obsessions from Specimens to Books*.

The editor of this book and curator of the exhibition, Elisabeth Fairman is Senior Curator of Rare Books and manuscripts. She drew extensively on the collection as well as contributions from other institutions. It is a rich resource to use in juxtaposing the old and the new.

Rosaleen Wain's *Etching with colored aquatint* (1996) is shown together with a watercolour and gouache on parchment, *Blackbere* from the 16th century *Helmingham Herbal and Bestiary*. While a graphite illustration of Samuel Palmers' *Brambles* (1856) sits comfortably with poet Thomas A Clark's and Laurie Clark's detail, *One Bramble Fills the Wren's Eye*. A photograph of blackberries from a late summer garden in Chester, Connecticut (2013) completes this theme.

In the section on ornithology, we are treated to William Lewin's *Common Hoopoe* ca 1789. It was Lewin's son, J W Lewin, who settled in Australia to pursue his career as a naturalist. Readers may recall that J W Lewin was the subject of the outstanding exhibition by the State Library of NSW, *Mr J W Lewin, Painter and Naturalist* (2012).

Contemporary artist, Tracy Bush, uses discarded consumer packaging, e.g. McVities Digestives, Nestles and KFC to collage cut flowers in a format of a herbarium sheet. When shown with nineteenth century publications of wild flowers, Bush's work jarred. It was meant to. It is not a celebration of Western consumer culture, but a lamentation on the trend in brand recognition outstripping the recognition of wildflowers by many multiples.

Of Green Leaf, Bird, and Flower is a fine contribution to the lively, important and ongoing international conversation on natural history, on art and their intersection. How fortunate we would be if this exhibition were brought to Australia. It would add to the fine Australian-focussed exhibitions in natural history and art. It would both continue and broaden this important discourse.



Member, Prue Anthony asked me to include this item in the newsletter. Prue has travelled with this group before and learnt such a lot, exploring other parts of the United Kingdom. She says this trip will be right up AGHS members' alley!

HHA writes:

If you are planning to visit England this year and wish to see a range of houses, gardens and collections - many not usually open, others difficult to access - why not join the HHA tour of the East Midlands and East Anglia in June? The tour, the latest in a series exploring English regions, is led by the cultural historian Dr James Broadbent. As many AGHS members know, James has a passion for - and wide knowledge of - English houses and gardens, particularly those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

East Anglia is an area comparatively little visited but is rich in houses and gardens. Garden visits will range from the great early eighteenth century landscapes of *Rousham* and *Stowe*, the extravagance of Victorian *Somerleyton Hall* and Edwardian *Sandringham*, and the flower gardens of Nancy Lancaster and Nora Lindsay at *Kelmarsh Hall* to the modern gardens of Kim Wilkie at *Boughton* and Beth Chatto. A private visit will be made to Sir Kenneth and Lady Carlisle's garden at *Wyken*, designed by Arabella Lennox-Boyd. The architectural writer and television presenter Jeremy Musson will join our tour to show us Cambridge.

Full itinerary at [Historic Houses and Gardens of England with Dr James Broadbent](#)



Wyken Hall.
Photograph Judy Pittaway

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.

Roman Catholic church at Prarie, a declining cross-roads settlement. Clad in crimped metal sheets and listing on its stumps, its air of misery was compounded by a sentinel pair of mournful Athel Pines.

Shocked at hearing the nearby Anglican Church of similar vintage had been 'leant-on' by a bulldozer, the idea of 'protection through acquisition' took root. After contacting the diocese and exchanging a nominal sum, the sad little church was mine for the moving.

'St. Brigid's' is a 7x11m kit church selected from a c1912 catalogue of Rooney and Co. Timber Merchants of Townsville. It is made of Queensland kauri, *Agathis robusta*, with the weatherboard front elevation providing, as the saying goes, a Queen Anne façade for the exposed studs of the Mary-Ann sides and back.

A Celtic cross topped the gabled porch with larger ones at either end of the church proper. Green-glazed windows have fixed Tudor gothic arches with centrally pivoted rectangular frames beneath. Inside two religious figures stood upon 44 gallon drums accompanying a splendid crenellated kauri altar.

The cladding was removed, porch and roof detached and the whole, looking rather like an open shoe box, travelled to Charters Towers on a low loader. There it was placed on its gidgee stumps, between two jacarandas, in the back garden.

The process of making four new bedrooms began, using a half-mezzanine floor to make it possible for the double flush-boarded gothic doors to open into a full height sitting room with bedrooms at the back. A covered-way was to connect house and church.

Soon 'St Brigid's' seemed to have always been there, but life took another turn and before long I sold 'Mornington' and headed 'down south' once more. Aware of many precedents and having already rescued 'St. Brigid's' from almost certain ruin, it was easy to rationalize a journey.

Further 'derangement of mind' ensued as I agonized over removing such a quintessentially Queensland building from the state. In the end sentiment prevailed and a chainsaw reduced the church to numbered sections. Loaded on pallets onto a semi-trailer *St. Brigid's* was transported to Bendemeer in NSW where peerless friends stored it for several years in a farm shed.

Never one to give up, I bought 1.5 acres of rich basalt soil on a leafy lane in the lee of Mt Canobolas near Orange in the central west of NSW.

With the assistance of James Broadbent and Michael Lehany, an exceptional partnership combining profound understanding of heritage architecture and landscape, *St Brigid's* was re-erected in the mid-1990s. The church faces the lane with a corrugated iron and timber extension placed across its rear. This has ever satisfying views across fields to Mt Canobolas, a row of venerable *Pinus radiata* and north along Molong Creek. *St Brigid's* is now one large drawing room lit by a clerestory. A grand fireplace and chimney made of honey-coloured reclaimed local bricks anchors the space.



St. Brigid's as it is today

A bobcat 'artiste' created a sunken circular driveway and garage forecourt, and with the spoil made a mount from which to survey *St Brigid's* and Mt. Canobolas. It seemed right to give the church a faux 'sub-tropical' setting. A Queensland native Bunya pine, *Araucaria bidwillii*, now some 40 feet high, adorns the driveway circle, surrounded by five *Robinia pseudoacacia*.

On the shady side 'Tropicana' is planted with cordylines and chusan palms transplanted from other sites, as well as two silvery *Butia capitata* and many *Livistona australis*. Bamboos, yuccas, *Melianthus major*, Japanese iris and violets add to the effect.

To the north a pelargonium hedge lines a path to the much-used secondary entrance. Made with the old vestry door sheltered by a singular tank-stand porch, this delightful edifice is swathed with *Akebia quinata* and *Campsis grandiflora*. A Meyer lemon enjoys the sheltered warmth, accompanied by cannas, arum lilies and Solomon's seal.

Of course there have been moments of self doubt regarding 'folly' in all its forms, yet the sight of *St. Brigid's* today, so content in its surrounds, reassures me that my periodic derangements of mind have resulted in a 'favourite abode' that is indeed a delightful 'folie'.