



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

### Sydney & Northern NSW Branch News

April 2016

I am still reading the diaries of James Lees-Milne. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1947, while in his role as Secretary of the Country Houses Committee of the UK National Trust and he was asked by *Lady Crewe* to speak on her behalf to the Ministry of Planning. She [said] that she opened the local newspaper....to read that...a satellite town was to be built near her home and a main road was to be driven through her garden. But her house would be saved by serving as the centerpiece of a round-about. Hard to believe and mentioned without comment.

Today our NSW government allows roads, mines, suburbs and airports to be ploughed through cultural landscapes, parklands and open space to avoid inconvenience to impatient residents or commuters. A cultural landscape evolves over a long time and can be degraded very quickly. The pressure of development impinges on our remaining green spaces and consequently the increased density makes green spaces ever more essential to maintain the principles of good town planning: urban health; efficiency and beauty. A conundrum.

Beauty is a notion dear to my being and as I move about and observe the sweeping changes that beset our city and peri-urban areas, I rarely exclaim: "Wow, how beautiful!" I return to my enclosed garden and exhale " Ah...paradise!" The built environment may be much improved by landscape – both terrain and by planting. I heard recently, Stuart Read was asked to repeat in the NSW Land & Environment Court his expression: "Buffer planting is an admission of bad design." Colleen Morris lamented the practice of landscape architects being asked to "Shrub it up" when there was a visual incursion into a significant landscape by development.

Our cultural landscapes are informed by the stories embedded within them and as these landscapes are harvested by developers - these stories are diminished. Their stories are significant and inform our national identity - they define difference and shared values. In an ever-homogenized world these values, not currently held in high esteem by government agencies and possibly by the people they represent, are threatened. Once they are gone – they are gone. I quoted Robert Freestone above on Town Planning and he describes the heritage of Australia as "*rich, diverse and often fragile.*" Its fragility leaves it vulnerable.

The Australian Garden History Society was formed in 1980 to bring together those with an interest in the evolution of the various aspects of gardens and gardening – horticulture, landscape design and related subjects. The Society is the leader in seeking conservation of significant cultural landscapes and gardens through committed, relevant sustainable action. It has around 1600 members Australia-wide with active branches in all states including 3 in NSW: the Sydney & Northern NSW Branch is the largest of these with some 320 members. We can be a thorn in the side of those that seek to take the easy road and ignore the damage to our cultural landscapes and national identity. To this end we wrote to the authorities opposing a proposal for a cemetery within the setting of Varroville, requesting they refuse this and recognize and preserve the significance of Campbelltown's Scenic Hills landscape that provides the setting for Varroville house - not only its immediate garden surrounds but the wider expansive rural landscape of the Cumberland Plain from which its once-famous farm estate prospered.

Our second event this year was a beautifully illustrated talk by Anne Smith, and it was a lovely way to learn more about Anne through her topic: *Her Favourite Gardens with History from Open Gardens Australia*. Anne has always loved gardens and the bush: she loved to climb trees and often helped parents in the garden as a child. She studied biology at Macquarie University and taught

primary school for 25 years, where she organised and supervised tree planting days. Anne studied Horticulture then Landscape Design at Ryde and then volunteered to be a selector for Australia's Open Garden Scheme, eventually being elevated to Chair of Selectors. From 2004-2013 Anne was the regional co-ordinator for Australia's Open Garden Scheme (later Open Gardens Australia) for Sydney, Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands, Illawarra Region (plus Central Coast and Hunter/ North Coast in the later years). She put together the annual program and wrote copy and contributed photos for the annual Guide Book, liaised with Selectors and garden Owners, wrote and distributed media releases and of course visited gardens. Her talents will be of great assistance to the AGHS.

At the last meeting of the executive committee, Gina Plate introduced Susan North to the committee. Susan has over 20 years' experience as a communication manager in community, media and government relations. She has specific skill in developing and implementing communication policies, programs and strategies. Susan worked as a specialist for many NSW government agencies. Given the depth and extent of Susan's career in the media, the committee co-opted her so she might guide and direct our ambitious plan to consolidate our brand, increase our profile and hopefully find ways of involving potential new members, keeping existing members and widen our reach and message. We are sure her place on our committee will be beneficial in raising the awareness and profile of AGHS.

If you have any suggestions you would like the committee to consider, please feel free to contact me.

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