

Profile: Julie Collins



Dr Julie Collins pictured in preparation for the recent *Cultivating Modernism* exhibition, at the Architecture Museum of The University of South Australia, a museum for which she is the Collections Manager.
Photo: Richard Aitken

I have always found gardens to be a great way of connecting with people. From breaking the ice with neighbours by exchanging a few words about the endless wait for rain, to wandering through the paddocks with my uncle pointing out tiny local orchids on his farm, the living, breathing, and always changing landscapes which we inhabit have never left me short of words.

A desire to create inspiring places led me to university to study architecture. After completing my degree with an honours thesis looking at Australian ideas of home, I decided to pursue a PhD in architecture examining the relationship between the places designed for home and for work. While studying, my supervisor Don Langmead introduced me to the collection of archival documents that was to form the basis for the Architecture Museum at the University of South Australia. Back then it was mostly stored in cartons, with Ann Riddle, archivist and geographer (and Australian plants enthusiast), working her way through accessioning the collection. I was intrigued and more than just a little excited at the prospect of being allowed to dig through these piles of old drawings, photographs, letters, books, and ephemera, uncovering stories of our built environment. Suddenly history came alive for me. Donald Leslie Johnson had begun assembling this collection in the 1970s, when I was just a child, rescuing beautiful water-coloured architectural plans from certain destruction. Now, here was an opportunity to bring them out from hiding into the light. Following Ann's retirement, and my graduation, I took over as collections manager and researcher at the Architecture Museum, directing my research towards the field of Australian architectural history.

I have always believed architecture is a broad church and my interest in the designs of gardens and landscapes was able to be satisfied through research within this field. Working with colleagues Christine Garnaut and Susan Lustri, the Architecture Museum grew as a place that could enable research into architecture, planning, landscape, and garden histories. One of the ways we found to bring our research to a wider audience was through exhibitions. 'Reform, Fitness and Fun', co-curated by Susan Lustri, Louise Bird, and myself in 2009, uncovered the history of playgrounds in South Australia. From the early twentieth century, these civic outdoor spaces for children reflected social and cultural understandings of childhood, education and play. More recently, the Architecture Museum partnered with Richard Aitken, supported by the Australian Garden History Society among others, presenting the 'Cultivating Modernism' exhibition to an Adelaide audience at the Kerry Packer Civic Gallery within the University of South Australia's Hawke Centre.

My involvement with the AGHS dates back to my joining the Society at the time of the 2006 annual national conference in Adelaide where I heard stories of gardens and gardeners from around the country. My love of research, writing, stories, and the reflections of society and culture that can be studied through gardens and landscapes drove me to further explore and talk about these places. My own research over the last few years has been focussing on health and landscape. I have examined gardens designed for healing of the body, such as the early twentieth century grounds of Nunyara Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Belair and, more recently, for healing of the mind. Working with fellow researchers Susan Avey and Peter Lekkas, the grounds of Glenside Hospital (formerly Parkside Lunatic Asylum) have been explored and the decline of the landscape as an active part of the treatment of mental illness charted throughout the past 130 years.

The memories associated with gardens run deep and are bathed in the light, sounds, smells, and feel of plants. I will never forget how, when visiting my great-grandparents' house, clasping a bunch of cut flowers in hand, rose thorns pricking through the soggy tissue paper, we would share tea and cake, then all troop out the back door to take a tour around the garden. Grandparents, parents,

and children would closely examine what vegies were doing well, how much the avocado tree had grown, and then enter the cool fernery, where I experienced the childhood joy of popping fuchsia buds open. My great-grandparents are no longer with us, but the memories of them live on with

the memories of their garden. It is the strength of such place-based memories that lies behind my belief in the importance of writing garden histories, something I hope, through my involvement on the Editorial Advisory Committee of *Australian Garden History*, I can help to continue.

Diary dates

FEBRUARY 2015

Thursday 12 Twilight ramble and New Year drinks ACT/MONARO/RIVERINA

This year we will ramble over the ANU Campus, commencing at the Lindsay Pryor Walk. 5.15pm, pedestrian crossing opposite Ursula Hall, Daley Road, where the Lindsay Pryor Walk starts. We will conclude in the Law School courtyard. Cost: \$10 members, \$15 non-members, includes refreshments. Contact (on the day) Judy Pearce on 0417 250 058.

Sunday 15 Gold Coast Eco-village QUEENSLAND

Visit to Gold Coast Eco-village and talk by Kate Heffernan (horticulture consultant and member of Friends of the Gold Coast Botanic Gardens), led by Glenn Cooke.

Tuesday 17 Historic Boroondara (Kew) Cemetery VICTORIA

Join Helen Page, past Chair of the Victorian Branch and member of the Boroondara Cemetery Trust, for a guided walk followed by a BYO picnic in adjoining Victoria Park. 6pm, main entrance to the Cemetery, 453 High St, Kew. BYO picnic. See Branch webpage for further details. Enquiries to Anna Long on 0406 551 864 or chris.long@internode.on.net

Sunday 22 Alexander Carr Bennett NORTHERN NSW

Local historian, Graham Wilson OAM, will speak about Alexander Carr Bennett, a photographer in Dorriggo, Armidale, and Uralla in the early twentieth century, who experimented with seeds and later established a nursery in Sydney. 3.30pm, UNE Heritage Centre, Dangan Street, Armidale. For further information contact g.wilson42@bigpond.com

Tuesday 24 Gardens of Portugal and their Australian connections SYDNEY

Illustrated talk by Richard Aitken. 6 for 7–8.30pm, Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill. \$20 members, \$30 non-members, includes light refreshments. Bookings essential, to Jeanne Villani on (02) 9997 5995 or Jeanne@Villani.com

MARCH 2015

Thursday 12 Yarra Valley garden tour VICTORIA

Yarra Valley garden tour, which will also include a visit to Lubra Bend. See Branch webpage for details.

Saturday 14 Working bee, Mount Boninyong VICTORIA

Join us for this working Bee at Mount Boninyong, Scotsburn, near Ballarat. From 10am. Contact Fran Faul on (03) 9853 1369 or email malfaul@alphalink.com.au

Sunday 15 Wivenhoe and Bellbird Park gardens QUEENSLAND

Visit to two private gardens – one at Wivenhoe, and one at Bellbird Park. Check Branch webpage for further details.

Wednesday 18 Autumn lecture—Avenues of Honour VICTORIA

In this lecture Sarah Wood will speak about Avenues of Honour. See Branch webpage for further details.