



## Sydney & Northern NSW Branch

### Branch News – November 2016

Although I could not attend the Annual General Meeting this year I did manage to get to the annual conference held in Canberra – my first conference with AGHS. What an event it was. Bill Gammage opened the lecture series and he was compelling, he spoke of the indigenous farming practice where every creature cared for country as a responsibility and without fences. John Passioura illuminated the mystery of why the dams dried up in the 1950s – the answer: farming practice shifted from grazing on Kangaroo grass to clover – an astounding impact!

Colleen Morris spoke of the Colonial approach to gardening botanically and I relished her account of the controversial, and inaccurate, rebuff by botanist Baron Charles von Hügel who, in the 1830s, described the Sydney Botanic Garden as nothing more than a garden providing vegetables for the Governor's table. Colleen was followed by the most entertaining speaker, Richard Stirzaker who was described by Richard Heathcote as 'the Mary Poppins' of the conference – from his seemingly bottomless sack he delighted the audience with numerous inventions inspired by the desire to improve water management in Africa. These were my favourites, highlights from a scintillating group of learned and dedicated thinkers and practitioners. The *Scientist in the Garden* was a great success. Next year the conference will be held in New Zealand and I look forward to it.

Our branch Christmas get together was a great success. Graham and Anne Smith hosted the event in their wonderful and very large Turramurra garden. Among the attendees were Peter and Jacqui Kirkby who own Varroville – to quote Colleen Morris and Geoffrey Britton: a 'celebrated early farm estate dating from 1810 with early structures, the 1850s homestead, layout, agricultural (vineyard) terracing and evidence of early access road' - a house within a cultural landscape under imminent threat from insensitive development. They are both advocates for conserving the values imbedded within the landscape and I am delighted to say they have offered their garden for an event in 2017 for our members. With the directive of Richard Heathcote being to lead with advocacy, we intend to provide members an opportunity to engage in the struggle and to visit the Scenic Hills – details to follow.

On the issue of advocacy I am sorry to advise that the University of Sydney is proposing to erect a building within the exceptional landscape in front of the Great Hall. This generous swathe of established trees and lawns enables a clear nexus of the most important and early buildings that perch on the eminence that is Petersham Hill and the City of Sydney below. They represent the apogee of the park-like grounds that distinguish this campus from others. The proposal also reveals a disregard for the history of women that is embodied in the three tennis courts and small timber shed - all to be obliterated by the proposed building – known as 'the women's courts', they mark the acquiescence of men that granted women admission in 1881. Please make representations yourselves or find out more.

Next year we have a full calendar of wonderful events – our first is a talk by retired commissioner of the Land and Environment Court of NSW, Judy Fakes. Judy will speak about managing disputes with neighbours over trees. Lamentably, this is a time in the development in Sydney when we have lost so many majestic trees for the sake of progress – the Chair of the Heritage Council of NSW said recently that Sydney is 'on fire!' – and I would add most of us fiddle – myself included. We have a very large Jacaranda in our small garden in Newtown that sprawls across several neighbours – one approached us to have it removed because he found the birds would sit on high and poo on his courtyard. I said birds had a habit of doing such things but it is beyond my control – the tree flourishes.

The Executive Committee have one more meeting and then that's it for 2016, so on behalf of the Committee I wish all our members happiness and plenty of time for gardening over the holidays and an eventful New Year. A special hello to those don't or can't attend events, I'd like to say by being members you all contribute and enable the advocacy program of the Australian Garden History Society – thank you.

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