



Sydney & Northern NSW Branch

Branch News – September–October 2017

I am recently home from ten days in Japan – most of it spent in Kyoto, walking thousands of steps per day to visit some extraordinary works of garden art. The gardens are visited by many and are remarkable. We stayed in traditional inns (ryokans) and I found gardens of all sizes sprinkled about – even atop a dessert of gelato in the form of a Japanese garden, where a sprig of mint represented a cloud-pruned tree. A garden is a privilege and a civilising force - buildings without gardens can be very austere. I discovered that a traditional timber for the manufacture of furniture in Japan comes from the Empress Tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*). The aroma of the timber keeps bugs away and it is related to balsa wood – a hardwood that is very lightweight.

The conference in Melbourne was a triumph! I would like to congratulate the Victorian Branch, who rose to the considerable challenge of hosting a sell-out event with only eight months to prepare. We were privileged to visit many fine and memorable gardens and hear from a diverse range of speakers about how Melbourne has been perceived over time as marvellous – or not. A most interesting speaker for me was Malcolm Faul who explored an undervalued resource for those interested in garden history – the sewers of Melbourne. His focus was on the modest gardens of the middle class. The diagrams prepared by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (established 1891) were so detailed they showed not just the pipework but the garden plan with the path layouts, the materials, dimensions and garden structures, including Shade Houses and others. Two gardens stood out for me as having a magical quality: *Villa Alba*, Kew and *Roseburn*, Hawthorn. *Villa Alba* was featured on Gardening Australia when Jane Edmanson visited with Dr James Broadbent in July 2006. The interiors of the villa are astonishing and had been roughly preserved under layers of cream paint applied by the Department of Health while the building was repurposed as a residence for nurses. A painstaking and time-consuming program to reveal the murals beneath has been undertaken and the results are astounding. *Roseburn* (1862) is a large home that has had only four owners and sits very comfortably in a large garden. At the perimeter is a deep garden bed behind which there is a secret path from which views back to the house are enjoyed through the veil of the garden. Magic!

A booklet was compiled for the 2017 conference to deliver summaries of, and extracts from, a dozen interviews that showcase the Australian Garden History Society's Oral history Collection. The first one I read was that of Dr Peter Valder, OAM. When the text is in italics it is the speaker's voice and the warmth of Peter's particular way of speaking leapt from the page. This collection started one year after the formation of the Society and is a wonderful record of accumulated wisdom and humour. Fairie (Mary) Wilson from Burnie, Tasmania said that after a conference: *The social side is very enlightening. Pleasant. You come home exhilarated and think: "I'd better get on with the weeding!"* Congratulations to the Oral History team, convened by Roslyn Burge, who continue to record the thoughts of our significant gardeners so that future generations may benefit.

Dr Meg Probyn presented a preview of next year's conference that is to be hosted by the Southern Highlands Branch and being so geographically convenient I think many of our members will attend. Numbers will be limited for reasons of manoeuvring through the gardens, so I think you should book as soon as it is advertised if you wish to attend.

In Sydney, our first speaker for next year is Lynne Walker from the Northern Sub-branch who will be updating us on progress at the Saumarez Rose Garden. John Maurer advised that pruning of roses planted in Stage I being undertaken. The rose garden has been very well supported by the community and received funding from donors including government and awards for the work completed. I am inspired by the galvanizing force that gardens can have when volunteers work together to make things happen. Lynne will be speaking in February and more information will be provided closer to the time.

I am looking forward to the guided walk around the Waverton Peninsula and Berry's Bay on Sunday 19 November - Ian Hoskins is delightful and he's bursting with knowledge. I am very impressed that North Sydney Council has a full time historian.

Thank you to all the members who support our Society. Please come to our Christmas Party, this year hosted by David and Angela Low. I look forward to meeting new and existing members for a feast and celebration of the holiday season.

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