



Report of the 39th Annual National Conference

**Australian Garden History Society
Southern Highlands, NSW**

25-29 October 2018

Fuelling the Fire

**Symposium held at Joadja
Thursday 25 October 2018**

Gardens in Times of Peace and Conflict



**Conference held at Mittagong RSL
Friday 26 – Saturday 27 October**

The Gardens

Visits from Saturday 27 – Monday 29 October

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THE GARDENS

A major component of any AGHS conference is the gardens visited over the weekend and on the Optional Day (Monday). The delegates were treated to thirteen gardens, including the new Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. The Conference Committee is deeply indebted to the owners and gardeners of all these properties.

The Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens

The original concept for the SHBG was FOUR SEASONS IN A COOL CLIMATE and the designers *Taylor Cullity Lethlean* used this theme to underpin the design of the gardens of four distinct seasons in a mainly cold climate environment—where water resources are increasingly scarce.

The gardens, located at the corner of Kangaloon and Old South Roads, East Bowral, will be planted with a mix of exotic, native, and endemic species within a benchmark of 70/80% exotic–30/20% native/endemic. A shale woodland, the endangered ecological community endemic to the site, will also be included.



Materials used for construction in the gardens will reflect the materials available within the Southern Highlands, including sandstone, basalt rock and trachyte (microsyenite).

Botanic Gardens have study and education as core purposes. It is proposed that the SHBG will develop and undertake research on a collection of trees and shrubs, including those identified by Louisa Atkinson and Janet Cosh.

Louisa Atkinson (1834–1872), born at *Oldbury*, Sutton Forest, was active in collecting and illustrating local flora, which were sent to Ferdinand von Mueller (1824–1896) at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Von Mueller was so impressed by the accuracy and detail of Louisa Atkinson's botanical collections he named four species after her. The majority of the art collection of Louisa Atkinson is currently held in the Pictorial Collection of the State Library of NSW.

Janet Cosh (1901–1989), Louisa Atkinson's granddaughter and resident of Moss Vale, will also be recognised. Janet Cosh continued the family tradition of collecting and illustrating local flora and fauna. She provided the financial resources to establish the Herbarium at the Wollongong Botanic Gardens which now house her herbarium collection.

The SHBG will seek to educate the general public about horticulture and landscaping, plants and biological communities, and raise community awareness about biodiversity and plant conservation.

Greenbrier Park

(Old South Road, Mittagong)



The house nestled in the garden (photo: R. Constable)

Established in 1988 on three hectares, this country garden was created after the owners purchased 115 acres of undeveloped land. Set in an old Australian eucalyptus woodland, the property is 750 metres above sea level, overlooks Mittagong and commands beautiful views of the Nattai Valley and the Blue Mountains.



Looking across to Mount Gibraltar (photo: R. Constable)

The garden incorporates an English-style design with Australian native shrubs and trees. The rich basalt soils and protection from harsh winds have stimulated remarkable growth. Through the gate and along the granite path, past a very old *Eucalyptus elata* (River peppermint), is the formal garden where you will find a lake surrounded by *Iris pseudacormus*. To the right is the native/exotic garden planted up the hill with many species, dominated by *May* bushes, *Guelder roses*, *Escallonia*, *Leucodendron*, *Japonica*, *Spiraea*, *Grevillia*, *Acacia* and *Hebe*. To the left, a creek built in 1994, joins two ponds and now forms a 'natural' watercourse.

An extensive herbaceous/perennial garden has been established within the four walls of an old cottage 'ruin' where there are clematis and rambling roses. Through the gazebo, planted with *Wisteria longissima*, there is the bulb garden surrounded by a *Laurel* and *Camellia sasanqua* hedge. The perennial garden in front of the house, the lawns, streams and ponds, statues, fountains, vistas and a large variety of shrubs and trees—all result in a beautiful all-season garden.

Retford Park

*Old South Road, Bowral
(Courtesy of The National Trust)*



Retford Park (photo Tony Sheffield)

James Fairfax AC bought the house and originally eight-hectare holding from King Ranch in 1964 and over the years added to the property. Fifty years later (April 2016) he gifted his thirty-three-hectare heritage estate to the National Trust of Australia. Mr Fairfax provided a significant endowment to ensure its ongoing upkeep. *Retford Park* remained his home as the first tenant until his death in January 2017.

A grand and glorious property, it was first established in the 1880s when Samuel Hordern (1849–1909) built the house in 1887 (designed by Albert Bond). It is set on a low rise, a grand rendered brick Italianate style residence. His son, Sir Samuel Hordern (1870–1956) and his wife Charlotte were keen gardeners and most of the large trees and camellias in the current ten-hectares of garden were planted in their time, including a park of rare and unusual oaks.

Mr Fairfax sought the advice from renowned English landscape architect John Codrington when he first became the owner of *Retford Park*. More recently, Melbourne landscape architect, David Wilkinson, designed other features for the garden, including the Knot Garden, the Green Room and the Millennium Canal (a contemporary folly installed to mark the year 2000).

Other features include the red border, known as the Persian Carpet, and the Cretaceous Garden with its 130-year-old Bunya. Rick Shepherd, the head gardener, and his small team continue to keep the garden looking immaculate, all sustainably maintained using organic principles. He has a team of volunteers helping. This is a property of major historical significance.

Oldbury Farm

Oldbury Road, Sutton Forest: David and Jane Newby



Oldbury Farm is one of the most important historic properties in the region. Built in 1828 by James Atkinson, the two-storey house with its beautiful Berrima sandstone façade has a porticoed entrance and resembles an English eighteenth century farmhouse. The original porch was probably quite a simple affair but was later redesigned and built as a Doric portico with timber supporting columns and pilasters flanking the doorway. The house is the centrepiece of the extensive garden with sweeping lawns encircled by layd Hawthorn hedges. Many very old elms and conifers dominate the garden with exquisite perennial beds and precisely trimmed conifer hedges. Ongoing development has seen the inclusion of a native garden, a prairie style garden and the arboretum, which has been a recent project of David and Ian Carroll, the Head Gardener.

James Atkinson (1795–1834) was born on his father's farm 'Oldbury' on the Medway River in West Kent. Prior to emigrating in 1819, he had worked for nine years as a clerk in the Deptford naval dockyard. Three years after arriving in Sydney, he resigned his position as principal clerk in the Colonial Secretary's Office of Governor Macquarie's administration and came to live permanently on two grants of land—'Oldbury' and 'Mereworth'.

The writer, botanist and artist Louisa Atkinson, was born in the house in 1834 and spent much of her childhood on the property.



Sketch of Oldbury Farm by Elaine Musgrave

Somerley House

Illawarra Hwy, Sutton Forest: Nadine and Cal O'Brien



The house was built in 1875 on top of a hill next-door to *Hillview*—the summer residence of the Governor of NSW from 1882. Originally owned by the Badgery family, it was known as *Mount Royal*. The name was subsequently changed to *Summerlees* and recently changed to *Somerley House* by the new owners.

The old Victorian ballroom (now called ‘The Garden Room’) is set within the eight acres of meandering old gardens. It was once the venue for elegant soirees and balls attended by notables who journeyed to the Highlands to escape the city heat in the wake of the annual visits by the Governors of NSW.

In the garden at *Somerley House* you will find a Tulip tree planted by Dame Nellie Melba in 1890 and the sad remains of a Chinese Elm—planted by Prime Minister Billy Hughes—it fell over in the storms in November 2010. This property is where the papers were signed by Sir Percy Spender in 1950 (then Minister for External Affairs in the Menzies government) to send Australian troops to Korea, while Robert Menzies (who was opposed to any involvement in the war) was overseas.



The Southern Highlands branch of AGHS managed to secure some funds from the National Management Committee to make a proper record of the garden. The recording was completed by Chris and Charlotte Webb in 2014 and has identified plants and trees (including special camellias, many of which came from the Crowe nursery at Berrima) and the historic structures including the old summerhouse, stables and cottage. This has proved to be an exciting project for *Somerley House* and for the future preservation of one of our most important gardens in the area. It is lovely to see the new owners regenerating the garden with a newly planted kitchen garden, a cutting garden, and a lovely orchard with ‘Fuji’ and ‘Pink Ladies’ planted on the back and far side of ‘The Cottage’.

A fine example of a Victorian lattice summerhouse

Red Cow Farm

Illawarra Hwy, Sutton Forest: Ali Mentesh & Wayne Morrissey

Developed by its creative owners around their historic 1820s cottage, the 2.5-hectare cold climate garden has been a labour of love for the two owners for over twenty-five years. This lovely garden at 'Red Cow Farm' features twenty rooms with a cottage garden, monastery garden, abbess's garden, a stunning collection of rare and unusual perennials, a bog garden and a lake. The woodland garden features a collection of rare trees and maples. There are over 800 roses dotted about the garden including old-fashioned rambling roses. The walled Monastery Garden features artworks and statues of saints, including the patron saint of gardens, St Fiacre, creating a space for solitude and reflection.



Rotherwood

Illawarra Highway, Sutton Forest: Ken Cooper



This grand country house (circa 1890) was built by Christopher Bennett (1857–1917), Sydney newspaper proprietor. When the current owners bought the property in 2004, they commissioned Howard Tanner to bring his expertise into the redesign. The house is set on 100-acres of prime grazing land at Sutton Forest and has 5 acres of gardens and lawns with magnificent old specimen trees. There are further 15 acres of parklands featuring many original oaks and more plantings of deciduous trees. The adjoining vineyard was planted in 2007 with six hectares under vine.

The brick gate lodge is the only building visible from the road—a striking lodge with its slate roof and Tudor-style battens. It's there that the delegates will alight from the coaches to walk down the gravel driveway through a avenue of tall pines to reach the house and the garden.



One of the new additions to the garden is the walled vegetable garden (see left) with a central fountain and twelve garden beds. At the corner of this walled area is a completely restored glass house with the original old metal parts but 21st century glass technology on the roof.

To the right is the curved armillary garden—so-called because placed in the centre is a beautiful spherical sundial hand-crafted in England by David Harber, the award-winning sculptor with an international reputation. This was commissioned by the owners and to

functions accurately must be created specifically to the site.



The garden has gently curving paths and beds—the *wisteria walk* curves round to the left of the central lawn.

In addition to the orchard, the garden abounds with beautiful shrubs and mature trees—magnolias, camellias, bunya pines, liquidambars (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and maples. It's one of the loveliest gardens in the Southern Highlands.

Harper's Mansion

9 Wilkinson Street, Berrima (Courtesy of The National Trust)



Harper's Mansion was built by James Harper and his convict wife Mary just after Berrima was gazetted in 1831. The house, listed on the NSW Government Heritage Register as a property of State heritage significance, is a fine example of a colonial Georgian residence and is furnished in period style. Overlooking the village, it is set in a two-acre garden—all that is left of the original 100-acre purchase of James Harper in 1834. In 1850 the garden was described in an advertisement for the sale of the house. It reads:

Fronting the house about an acre of land is handsomely laid out as a flower garden, with carriage road from the principle entrance to the dwelling house. In the rear is a large Kitchen Garden, well stocked with choice fruit trees, and a dwelling house for the Gardener. Close to the kitchen is a never-failing well of water. To the east of the dwelling is a small horse paddock, cleared and fenced, containing upwards of four acres. The rest of the land is fenced in, and consists principally of the richest alluvial soil. The timber on the land can also be made available for various purposes.



Today the garden is maintained by volunteers and while not pretending to be 'heritage', it is in keeping with the house and can be enjoyed for itself or for its expanding collection of heritage roses and camellias, its fruit and vegetable garden and its Hazelnut and Woodland Walks.

In 2009 a decision was made by the Garden Committee to restore the rose bed and to extend the plantings into the main garden to make heritage roses a major feature. This work was completed in 2012 with the planting of 60 plus roses including some of the earliest introduced into our gardens.

Optional Day (Monday 29 October 2018)

Two town gardens were visited in the morning and three country gardens were visited after lunch—the final destination was *The Kaya* where we enjoyed a stroll round the garden and a glass of local wine.

Carisbrooke, Bowral; **Southdown**, Burradoo; **Whitley**, Sutton Forest; **Mossybank**, E. Kangaloon; **The Kaya**, Wildes Meadows.

Carisbrooke

Bowral: Merryleigh Brindley



The wedding cake tree (Cornus controversa 'Variegata') (photos: Tony Sheffield)

When the owner and her late husband John designed the garden at *Carisbrooke* they wanted to reflect memories of their country homestead garden. In the two-acres they planted a woodland garden at the front with unusual trees, including the Handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*) and the Wedding Cake tree (*Cornus controversa variegata*).



There is a rose garden and a trio of summerhouses, the largest being a French-influenced garden room or conservatory (*see photo left*).

Designed to surprise and delight, the garden reflects the style of the house itself and enjoys borrowed views of the golf course beyond the croquet lawn—the scene of some fast and furious family games. This is very much a garden for living in, not just for looking at. Children and adults alike enjoy the winding paths of the woodland and the parterre outside the kitchen. There are private places to sit, a sense of serenity, seasonal change, space for plants of all kinds, native and exotics, fruits and vegetables—reminders of the family's travels. According to the dedicated owner, this is an easy-care garden, and she has no outside help. It is a truly lovely garden which will inspire you.

Southdown

Bowral: Margaret and Peter Chadwick



The original crown grant was given to James Sheppard, a Berrima farmer, constituting 335 acres, bounded by Moss Vale, Burradoo, Sullivan and Riversdale roads. The *Southdown* residence was built c1857 and extended in the 1860s. The cottage (originally the hayloft and bunkhouse) and the stable were also built around this time. In 1887 the Hon. John Lackey MLA acquired the property, cutting up much of the land into smaller acreages so that *Southdown* was reduced to 35 acres.

(Photos: M. Chadwick)

In 1922, a Queensland pastoralist purchased *Southdown* as a summer retreat. After his death his widow leased the property to Mrs Fitzharding, who, for over thirty years spanning the Depression and Second World War, ran a riding school and guest house. In 1959 the land was further subdivided reducing the land to 12 acres, and after further subdivision, only 3.5 acres remained.



The present owners bought the property in 1996 and two years later were able to purchase the 'old piggery', an adjacent block of 2.5 acres to build *Southdown* up to a holding of six acres. Working with the remnants of the 'old garden' and trees on the block, they started to rejuvenate the garden introducing rose and cottage gardens, lawn plantings of spring bulbs and more exotic trees. The 'old piggery' has been laid out anew—parterre, potager, rose, cottage and vegetable gardens, an orchard and a small Shakespeare inspired formal garden.

Pinus radiata are a feature of the old *Southdown* garden and, despite a few human inflicted casualties, they majestically trace the boundaries

from earlier times. All the trees on *Southdown* are listed on Wingecarribee Shire Council's Significant Tree Register.

Whitley

Oldbury Road, Sutton Forest: Jenny and Robert Ferguson



A State Listed Heritage house and garden including trees and hedges. Thomas Claydon, a butcher from Sydney constructed the house between 1887 and 1892 for £2,900. It was probably a 'pattern book' house. Sir William Owen, judge in the Supreme Court of NSW purchased the property in 1893 and named it *Whitley* after the town of Whitley in Shropshire.

The outer hedges are of layered hawthorn and cypress leylandii. The Owens probably planted the

hawthorn. These were 'laid' in the traditional manner in 1983 and again in 1986 by Mark Fowles, the champion hedge-layer of England. The garden was laid out by Robyn Hawkins in the time between 1982 and 2001. What I have done in the past years since then is to introduce flowers and vegetables, build pathways and stairs, widen existing gardens and add my own statues.

The garden is divided into two parts, the European part and the Australian part. The Australian part is on the south side of the hill on two levels. White sally and willow gum are found among the blackwoods. Right at the bottom near the dam are original black sallies. In the past tree ferns were introduced with cycads and native grasses, but have not done well. This is a cold dry area also open to westerly winds. However, it provides sanctuary to assorted animals including kangaroo, wild deer, and wombats, one of which has made its home under the May Barrie rock sculpture.



The European garden surrounds the house and the lower areas leading to the nut orchard. At the front of the house in a circular lawn is a London Plane, while opposite is a copper beech hedge leading to a weeping Camperdown Elm. As one wanders down the crab apple walk, one comes to the Secret Vegetable Garden, the outer hedge of English yew and the tall inner hedge of Japanese yew. Below there is a grove of Silver birch under-planted with bluebells. The Fan

Garden behind the tennis house is filled with mixed roses, hybrid teas and climbers. Below the tennis court is the nut orchard of walnuts, pecans and hazelnuts. These are under-planted with cream and pink daffodils.

The Monkey steps lead to the old croquet lawn, now the Fountain Garden, filled with roses, lupins, delphiniums, poppies and nigella. The rear of the house was transformed into an eating area when the new wing was built in 2014. To the west of the house is the cottage garden, a miniature version of which can be found at the original gardener's cottage at the top of the hill. This is my garden—a homely grandmother's flower garden, complete with chickens, an orchid house and my very own tool shed.

(Photos and text: J. Ferguson)

Mossybank

East Kangaloon: Doug and Chris Richardson



The lawn near the house (Photo and text: D. Richardson)

Mossybank has a long history as a dairy farm and now continues as a beef cattle enterprise. Set at the end of a narrow lane, which bears the name of its historical owners, the property runs down to the Wingecarribee swamp and possesses panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. We acquired the property in 2006 in a totally neglected condition, with cattle roaming through the derelict cottage and a total absence of a garden. Our aim in redevelopment was to respect the working heritage of the property and sympathetically incorporate the introduction of a house and extensive garden. At the outset, we recognised the natural beauty of the property and its enormous potential but did not fully appreciate the extent of the task to fulfil our expectations.

The plan for the garden was devised by our landscaper Myles Baldwin. A key factor in his design was the creation of a central courtyard which defined the working area of the farm and separated it from the garden. The various heritage sheds were incorporated by providing part of the boundary of the courtyard. Dry stone walls, with all the stone sourced from the property, provided the remaining boundaries of the courtyard. His extensive planting both in the vicinity of the cottage and parkland to the north was designed to be in sympathy with the unique natural environment of the area.

Predominant in the plantings are *Hydrangea quercifolia*, *Spiraea japonica*, *Loropetalum chinensis*, *Teucrium fruticans* and various species of *Viburnum*. The tennis court area and parkland has been planted with a range of trees, including various maples (*Palmatum*, *Sacharum*, *Davadii*) and ash (*Raywoodii*, *Excelsior aura*), *Cedrus deodara* (Himalayan cedar) and *Quercus palustris* (pin oak).

The rebuilding of the cottage and establishment of the majority of the garden was completed in 2008, followed in 2012 by construction of the main house and the perennial garden surrounding the croquet lawn. Whilst the property has many features, our favourites are the heritage courtyard with its pleached hedge of London plane trees, the magnificent old oak (*Quercus robur*) at the entrance to the courtyard and the view to the south framed by the century old Cypress pine trees.

The Kaya

Cleary's Lane, Wildes Meadow: Elaine and Les Musgrave

The Kaya is a five-acre garden belonging to a horticulturist and botanical artist—no wonder the design, plantings and colours are so beautifully combined. A gravelled parterre showcases purple and grey foliage plants, including arches of trimmed ‘Crimson Century’ maples and wisteria-covered pergolas. Les and Elaine have owned the property for eight years and many changes have happened in the garden—but it wasn’t a blank canvass when they bought it. They credit the bones of the garden to the landscape designer, Chris Webb. There is much to delight the visitor—from the beautiful drystone walls of basalt, the sweeping lawns, the hedges and the collection of tall ornamental grasses and a grove of Claret ash underplanted with the deepest coloured hydrangeas.



(Photos: L. Musgrave)

