

# ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

## Newsletter December 2025 No 5

Australian Garden History Society  
[www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au)



Branch contact: [actmrchair@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:actmrchair@gardenhistorysociety.org.au)

### BRANCH DIARY

#### LATE FEBRUARY

Visit to the Australian National Botanic Gardens

#### 28 MARCH

Visit to Lennox Gardens

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46<sup>TH</sup> AGHS  
CONFERENCE  
ORANGE, NSW  
25 – 27 SEPTEMBER  
2026

OPTIONAL DAY 28  
SEPTEMBER

THEME: FRUITS OF  
ORANGE: EXPLORING  
CENTRAL WESTERN  
NSW

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47<sup>TH</sup> AGHS  
CONFERENCE  
CANBERRA, ACT  
15-17 OCTOBER 2027

OPTIONAL DAY 18  
OCTOBER

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### BRANCH COMMITTEE

**Robyn Oates**, Chair &  
NMC Representative

**Helen Stevens**, Secretary

**Sue Cassidy**, Treasurer

**Louise Gaudry**  
**Rosanna Horn**  
**Mary Johnston**

### CHAIR'S END OF YEAR MESSAGE



Dear Members

2025 is almost over and we are into the Festive Season. I do hope that it's been a good year for you, and that you have been able to meet any challenges head on.

Our Branch has enjoyed some splendid events, visits and lectures. Hearty thanks to your Committee for all that they have done this year. Louise Gaudry, Sue Cassidy, Rosanna Horn and Mary Johnston have been a wonderful team. We recently welcomed Helen Stevens to the committee and she has taken on the role of Secretary. Judy Pearce remains as our newsletter editor, membership co-ordinator and communications manager. Nancy Clarke continues to support many behind the scenes digital and planning tasks and Gini Hole assists with all our catering.

At both national and regional levels, the AGHS promotes Awareness for Conservation and Advocacy for Conservation. Your Advocacy representative, Anne Claué-Long, has worked long and hard for this Branch and as a result we are well known within our region for sound and sensible input where change, with conservation, is occurring. The National body has had successes but there are strong head winds. The National Committee's AGM was held at the Mt Gambier Conference. The new strategic plan was approved. Our main goals are both internal and external. Within the Society it is vital that we attract new members and maintain existing members. Nationally, the numbers are dropping. The Society finances struggle when membership drops and this affects every aspect of its function. Advocacy, preservation and conservation of historic plantings, gardens and landscapes are our core business. Do encourage interested friends to contact Head Office or me to learn more about membership or direct them to the AGHS website where our new administration platform is ready to accept their subscription details.

It was wonderful to see so many of our members at the Mt Gambier 2025 Conference. You can read a summary of each day here  
<https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/publications/2025-annual-national-conference-mount-gambier/>

Next year it will be in Orange NSW, in September so pop it into your diary. In 2027 we will hold the conference in Canberra. Our Conference Committee have been working hard and already have a solid plan in place. There are so many pieces to place correctly into a conference jigsaw but it is certainly taking excellent shape. 2027 will be the centenary of Old Parliament House and the conference will explore the history of

gardening and landscapes in this 'ideal city' where mid-century modernism meets landscaping framed by the Griffin-Mahony vision and early structural plantings by Charles Weston. Here as we enter the second quarter of the 21st century, we plan to ask: Has the vision of an 'ideal city' been realised?

The Committee and I look forward to seeing you in 2026. Thank you for your enthusiasm and support this year. May your festive season be joyful and restorative,

Best wishes  
**Robyn Oates**, Branch Chair.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### LATE FEBRUARY

A visit to the Australian National Botanic Gardens is in planning for late February. Participants will learn about the history and development of the ANBG.

Further information will be sent out as soon as it is available.

### WALK IN LENNOX GARDENS WITH ROTARY GUIDES

**SATURDAY 28 MARCH  
9.30 – 11.30AM**

Lennox Gardens, in Yarralumla, has strong historic links to the early days of the national capital.

The park in its current condition was established with the filling of Lake Burley Griffin in the 1960s; however, the park's history is much older, as it was part of the original Royal Canberra Golf course which is now underneath the lake. The style is intended to be consistent with the nearby gardens of Hotel Canberra and Albert Hall.

Lennox Gardens is also home to the Canberra Rotary Peace Bell. The first World Peace Bell was unveiled in 1954 and is located at the United Nations compound in New York. Here, we will see a number of memorials and monuments which have local and international reference.



Bookings will open in late February 2026.

Enquiries: Mary Johnston [actmrinfo@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:actmrinfo@gardenhistorysociety.org.au) or Robyn Oates [actmrchair@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:actmrchair@gardenhistorysociety.org.au)

## RECENT EVENTS

### TALK: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WATER 18 SEPTEMBER

Dr Chris Carter delivered an entertaining and thought-provoking talk as the joint annual event between our Branch and the Friends of the NLA. This is the latest in a series starting from 2007.

Chris is a practicing archaeologist with over 25 years of experience working as a teacher, researcher, heritage consultant and tour leader working both nationally and overseas, including over 30 tours to South American countries. He has a BA (Hons), MA and PhD from the Australian National University.

***“You can see the impact on the landscape of the management of water wherever you go”***, Chris finished, after a talk supported by photos from his global archaeological and pleasure travels. His photos ranged from Baaka Fish Traps in NSW to storage cisterns in Andalusia.

He demonstrated that to live, humans have needed to manage water over time in progressively more extraordinary ways. Feats of engineering captured, stored and delivered water to populations not only for survival and for agriculture, but also to generate power and for ritual and pleasure. In short, ‘no water, no life’.

Chris showed photos of: *gnamma*—meaning ‘hole’—where rainwater is collected; well walls lined with stones; and springs being covered to minimise evaporation. All to improve **access** to water. Innovations implemented to **control** water include where stones were placed in a river to catch fish and where stones, later concrete, were used to alleviate drought by damming a river. Constructing a mill race also helped control water as energy to operate grinding mills. Agricultural terracing created by building retaining walls that were backfilled with soil were engineered to drain water for dry land farming or, in the case of paddy fields, to hold water.

Archaeological digs also expose methods of water **storage** and **delivery** to cities or homes. Cisterns large and small, many covered over or roofed, were constructed, to retain water and the water delivered in initially open channels, but also via underground channels. The qanat systems—long sloping tunnels drawing water from aquifers—are well-known for covering hundreds of kilometres. Roman engineers used closed pipes with terracotta sockets to pipe water into homes and downpipes to direct water vertically. Viaducts and aqueducts also covered hundreds of kilometres and closed pipes with one end lower than the other used to move water uphill. Water-powered wheels with jugs could lift water to higher ground from rivers, as well as grind grain.



*Channel of the Ghasabe Qanats of Gonabad in Iran's Razavi Khorasan Province.*  
Tavasoli Mohsen taken 6 April 2015.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghasabe\\_Qanats\\_of\\_Gonabad2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghasabe_Qanats_of_Gonabad2.jpg).

Muslims and Romans were keen on bathing as a form of **ritual** as well as for **pleasure**. They developed large bathhouses, often with highly decorated interiors—for the well-to-do at least—that remain the delight of current-day tourists. These involved moving heated water. The Inka Baths in Peru involved a series of baths in steps going down a hill, with water flowing through them continuously. Istanbul is home to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque which had a significant ablutions block, still there today, so the faithful can wash before going into the mosque.



*Ablution facilities outside the Sultan Ahmed Mosque/Blue Mosque in Istanbul.*

Bjørn Christian Tørrissen taken 7 May 2015.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blue-Mosque-Ablutions.JPG>.

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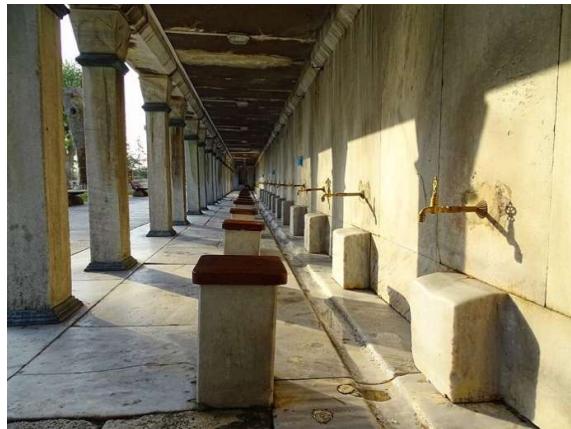
*Channel of the Ghasabe Qanats of Gonabad in Iran's Razavi Khorasan Province.*

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Closer to home, the Murray-Darling Basin is home to massive engineering works that since the early 1900s have changed watercourses allowing for water storage so that irrigation areas like the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area can exist. Massive dams have been built around the world in the 1900s that seek to **control water and change the landscape**.

Chris' talk was thoroughly enjoyable and informative. He convinced me that water systems record human ingenuity, social hierarchy and spiritual beliefs. But, having just visited the Alhambra in Granada, Spain last month, I needed no convincing that water systems enhance the beauty of gardens.

*Joanne Maples*



*Water feature at Generalife, Alhambra, Granada, Spain.* Joanne Maples taken 8 August 2025

## GRIFFITH WALK – HOUSE AND GARDEN CITY LANDSCAPING 8 NOVEMBER

Members and friends of the National Trust and the Australian Garden History Society walked around the suburb of Griffith and enjoyed learning about the relatively recent history of this 'mid-century' suburb from two of our members, Anne Claque-Long and Louise Gaudry as well as past and present residents.



We admired the street trees and gardens, heard about the work of architects Kenneth Oliphant and Malcolm Moir and were privileged to visit one of Moir's houses being lovingly cared for by the original family who have an extensive collection of photos of its history. We finished in the beautiful garden of one of our members. As another of our members said, there is history in every Canberra suburb!

***Mary Johnston***

Photo Mary Johnston

## VISIT TO THE WALCOTT GARDEN 24 NOVEMBER

On a pleasant late spring evening, we visited the garden of Ben and Ros Walcott in old Red Hill. One of the earliest residential areas developed in Canberra.

The Walcotts bought the 9,300 square block in 2001 from a real estate agent who had purchased it with a plan to build a series of town houses on the site. However, influential neighbours strongly opposed this and would not sanction multiple dwellings insisting that only a single house be permitted. When the Walcotts acquired this unmaintained property, it still had the original 1926 house, now dilapidated, and a very neglected garden.

The Walcotts transformed the block in 2002-3, building a new house and an extensive garden. Having lived in the USA for 30 years, even with trips to Canberra to visit family, they had to adapt from gardening in the pure sandy soils of their New York Long Island home to the shallow topsoil and heavy clay of Canberra. Their American home featured Azaleas and Rhododendrons that are not so suitable here. Consequently, they decided to focus on Australian native plants, which were drought and frost tolerant, would attract wildlife and would cope with the local soil.

They made use of the steep slope to create ponds with a waterfall feature. The garden is mostly natives supplemented with New Zealand plants of the same genera. There are some exotics, notably hardy Meyer lemons

for fruit, and four *Pistacia chinensis*, small deciduous trees, to allow the sun to warm the house in Winter and provide shade in Summer.

Unusually, there are no lawn areas. Plants are only pruned to lightly shape and to keep the many paths clear. The series of ponds retain as much rainwater as possible on the property, supplemented by bore water and some town water. Ben spoke about plant losses that have occurred due to cold winters, extreme summer heat, and sometimes falling trees. Both Ben and Ros have the lovely philosophy that these happenings are just an opportunity to plant more.



As we strolled through the garden with the Walcotts, we admired the Callistemons still in bloom and others in full flower such as the hot pink Pimelea, golden yellow Cassinia and clumps of the mauve blue Alyogyne, a native hibiscus. Excellent labels, clear to read from the winding paths, made it easy to identify the plants we found most interesting. It is no surprise that the Walcott garden has featured on television programs, in gardening magazines and, in February 2014, on an Australian postage stamp.



After the walk, everyone enjoyed the refreshments under the covered patio, chatting and admiring the view over the floating waterlilies to the garden beyond. Ros and Ben are most generous garden owners, sharing both their time and beautiful garden with us. It was very happy final Branch event for 2025.

## BRANCH NEWS

### WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The committee would like to welcome the following new members who joined since the last newsletter.

Jane Andrews, Canberra  
Jennifer Brooks, Yass  
Andrew Dimoff, Canberra  
Marg Quodling, Canberra

### FEDERATION CENTENARY FOUNTAINS

The NCA is launching a project to address the state of Federation Centenary Fountains within the Parliamentary Zone. They have not been functioning since 2014, and in their current form, pose a potential trip/fall risk to visitors in the area. The project will see the fountains transformed to include a garden bed element while still retaining a water feature as central element.

Here is an opportunity to have input on the new garden bed layout for the Federation Centenary Fountains.

<https://www.nca.gov.au/federation-centenary-fountains-interim-works>

### HAVE YOU CHANGED YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Some of our members have been wondering why they are no longer receiving AGHS updates and other communications. This happens if you forget to update when you change your email address.

The best way to update is to go to the website <https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/>, log in, click on Account Details, update your email address and any other relevant details. This method ensures that you are in control of your own details.

Stay in the digital loop and never miss out on anything.

## NATIONAL NEWS

### 2025 MOUNT GAMBIER CONFERENCE

#### PRE-CONFERENCE TOUR FROM ADELAIDE TO MOUNT GAMBIER

With great anticipation and excitement, 30 AGHS conference delegates joined the pre-conference tour along the Limestone Coast via the Coorong and Robe in South Australia.

Our fearless leaders Di Wilkins and Merilyn Kuchel (the kelpie) and our chatty and knowledgeable coach driver Dean Kerslake, kept us entertained, educated and on-track from Adelaide through the picturesque Adelaide Hills. Inspiring landscapes were accompanied by commentary about current environmental challenges.

The green countryside became noticeably drier as we headed south. Our driver explained how recent flooding had washed silt into the mouth of the Murray River and St Vincent Gulf, reducing oxygen levels and causing an extensive algal bloom, fish deaths and reduced bird life in the Coorong, a sacred place and source of food for indigenous people. We saw a few pelicans, but many fewer than in the past.

The first day's bus journey stopped for morning tea and lunch in a park in Kingston. Our end-of-day destination was Robe, a delightful coastal town with a rich maritime history and a rugged coastline. An obelisk built in 1885 and a more modern lighthouse stand as a warning to ships entering Guichen Bay. During the late 1850s and early 1860s, more than 16,000 Chinese landed at Guichen Bay near Robe and walked overland through the bush for 400 kilometers to reach the Victorian goldfields.

After exploring Robe and its rocky headland, dinner at the Caledonian Inn and a good night's sleep, we visited Moorakyne, an 1853 heritage-listed house and garden belonging to Margaret and Donald Ferguson. The house has been beautifully restored. Parts of the garden are original, while other plantings have been established more recently.

Several huge Norfolk Island Pines planted in 1910 dominate the front garden. Margaret's first attempt to grow roses and box hedges was unsuccessful, so she selected hardy shrubs better able to withstand the strong prevailing onshore winds. Grasses, echiums, eremophilas, aeoniums, figs, olives and other mediterranean plants

are thriving. A rusty sculptural trio of stingrays appear to float above the grasses, reminiscent of stingrays in sea grasses off the coast. A truly delightful and inspiring visit.

After enjoying lunch along the seafront at Beachport, we visited Wagner's Rose Farm at Tantanoola where third-generation owner Brian Wagner shared his passion for rose-growing and the challenge-filled history of this family-owned business during afternoon tea. The table was decorated with gorgeous roses from the farm. Wagner's supplies roses direct to online purchasers as well as independent garden centres, rather than the large supermarket chains. They are focusing less on traditional roses now, due to fungal issues and diseases, and promoting new 'clean' varieties which are fragrant and more disease-resistant.

After a short drive to Mount Gambier, we joined other delegates at the Mayor's reception at the Town Hall. A fitting end to a most enjoyable yet revealing tour of this unique and fascinating part of Australia.

**Sue Cassidy**

Photo Sue Cassidy: *Moorakyne*

## 2025 CONFERENCE

Our Branch was well represented at the 2025 AGHS Conference in Mt Gambier 30 October – 2 November. The Conference title was *Beyond the Garden Fence* and that is exactly where it took us.

The South Australian Branch presented a series of talks focused on the origins of the landscape and soils of the Limestone Coast, landscape from the perspective of early settlers and stories of the Boandik people and their habitation of the region. Uncle Ken Jones, a local Boandik Elder and Ian Lewis, a hydrogeologist entertained and informed us with rich stories of the landscape. These stories came from their own lives and their research. Ancient sea floors, volcanoes, sinkholes and vast aquifers have shaped the lives of the people in this region for many thousands of years.



The bus tours took us way beyond that garden fence and yet in a way we stayed within it. Most popular visits were to Bio Gro and Holla Fresh.

Bio Gro is an industrial site where a privately owned family company produces organic mulch, compost and liquid stimulants for some of the most well-known domestic garden brands. Of course, this was something we were very excited to see and yes, the more expensive selections do contain a much better product inside that plastic bag. As yet they have not been able to resolve the dilemma of using plastic packaging for storage and freight.

The Holla Fresh herb farm in Tantanoola started small thirty years ago and is now the major supplier to most supermarkets in SA and Victoria. Their initiatives in renewable energy and greenhouse design have led to many awards. It was engaging to follow the process from seed to finished product, packaged and ready for the supermarket. The owners also provide warm and caring employment for more than eighty refugees who have come, via years in refugee camps, from Myanmar.

*Yallum Park Homestead* in Monbulk was built for John Riddoch, a nineteenth century pastoralist and politician. This garden was a vast park. It contained a vineyard with a Malbec vine said to have inspired the Coonawarra wine industry. Yes, we did visit a winery too!

In between many other talks and visits I must mention the wonderful food at the conference centre, *The Barn*, which supplies its own beef and produce for the restaurant. The food, wine and absolutely magnificent rose gardens at *The Barn* were simply the best. Co-incidentally the owner of this large family-owned pastoral property and conference centre is also a member of the Australian Garden History Society and she was a splendid hostess.

And so, we became acquainted with the fascinating Limestone Coast within and beyond the garden fence and we dined very well indeed.

**Robyn Oates**

Photo Judy Pearce: Umpherston Sinkhole (*Balumbul*)

## NATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

### Elected Representatives

Helen Oates (Chair); Eleanor Dartnall (Vice Chair); Felicity Farrelly (Secretary); Stephen Hathway (Treasurer); Brian Thomas (Public Officer) and  
Dot Evans, Jane Lennon, Caroline Grant (Ordinary Members)

### Branch Representatives

Stuart Read (Sydney); Robyn Oates (ACT Monaro Riverina);  
Maria Hitchcock (Nrth NSW); Michaela Hill (VIC); Pamela Jane (Sthrn Highlands); Andrew Robert-Tissot (TAS); Jeffrey Jenkinson (SA);  
Jane Lennon (Qld); Felicity Farrelly (WA).

Editor: Francesca Beddie  
Executive Officer: Sarah Edwards

## THE AGHS JOURNALS

### *The Journal of the Australian Garden History Society Australian Garden Journal and Australian Garden History*

As a 'history' society, we all know how important it is that AGHS's own records are preserved and readily accessible. Among AGHS's important records are the various journals the Society has published since its foundation. There have been three consecutive journals - the *Journal of the Australian Garden History Society* (just 4 issues, from 1980 to 1982), the *Australian Garden Journal* (1983 to early 1989) and our current journal, *Australian Garden History (AGH)* (from 1989). Print copies of these were of course, under Australian Copyright law, deposited in the National Library of Australia and also in various state libraries. This meant they were successfully archived, but were available only to researchers who knew about them and could travel to the relevant libraries. Since the start of this year, copies of *AGH* have been deposited digitally under the National Electronic Deposit scheme (NED), and these are publicly available online through Trove.

In recent years, however, it has also been possible to scan, then store and publish electronically copies of publications formerly available only in print, extending access to them to a much wider audience. One of the organisations doing this is the wonderful Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) - an international open-access digital library of 'biodiversity literature'. Australia is a member of the BHL consortium, with Museums Victoria as its lead agent. Along with other similar Societies, AGHS joined BHL Australia, which undertook to include the Society's current journal *AGH* in its collection, and importantly, to scan and add back issues. This work commenced in 2017 and progressed in somewhat slow stages. There was no charge to AGHS for either the scanning or storage and electronic publishing – BHL Australia is funded through The Atlas of Living Australia.

At about the same time, and not aware of the arrangement with BHL, our Branch (ACTMR) began exploring with the National Library of Australia digitisation of the 'print only' issues of the three AGHS journals. As part of this project, we undertook a background check of the somewhat complex

history of the journals, located copies of missing issues, and obtained authorisation to digitise and publish from the other copyright holder of the ***Australian Garden Journal*** (Keva North). The proposal to work with the NLA on this project was endorsed by the National Management Committee of AGHS.

In late 2020, it became evident that the two projects overlapped, and with the agreement of our Branch, BHL was invited to include in its digitisation not just our current journal (***AGH***) but the two preceding ones. BHL willingly agreed, and also agreed to include two other titles not published by AGHS but with AGHS connections - ***Garden Cuttings*** and those issues of the ***Australian Garden Journal*** that had been published after the ties with AGHS had been severed (1989-1996). A great advantage of working with BHL was that no cost was called for from AGHS.

Our Branch's proposed digitisation project with the National Library was discontinued, though the work we had done on checking, locating missing issues, and obtaining copyright approvals meant that the digitisation through BHL could proceed smoothly, and the new work started during the COVID lockdown in Victoria. There were delays in completing it for various reasons, but in late June 2025, the project was completed so that electronic copies of the ***Journal of the Australian Garden History Society***, the ***Australian Garden Journal***, ***Australian Garden History*** and ***Garden Cuttings*** are now freely available on the BHL website, available to scholars and other interested people across the world. They are valuable in many ways, as records not just of the development of the Society, but as accounts of Australian gardens and gardeners, as well as of Australia's developing interest in our cultural landscape.

For more information on the history of the journals and how to access them, see the AGHS website > Journal>History of the Journal  
<https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/History-of-the-Australian-Garden-History-Society-Journals-2025.pdf>

**Nancy Clarke**

## OF INTEREST

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS  
[www.anbg.gov.au](http://www.anbg.gov.au)

Friends Thursday Talks – held at 12.30 pm every Thursday from February to November. Bookings can be made 30 days in advance. For program details and for bookings go to <https://www.friendsanbg.org.au/calendar>. Information is already up for talks from February 2026. The calendar also provides information on other talks, walks and activities in the Garden.

**Friday 21 November – Sunday 14 December** - Friends Photographic Group Exhibition at the Visitor Centre.

OPEN GARDENS CANBERRA AUTUMN PROGRAM

The Autumn program is not yet available but will be able to be found in due course at <https://opengardenscanberra.org.au/>

NATIONAL TRUST: ACT BRANCH  
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/act/>

NATIONAL ARBORETUM CANBERRA  
[www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au](http://www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au)

For details on walks, workshops and other events visit the Arboretum website.

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF CANBERRA  
<http://www.hsoc.org.au>