



# Australian Garden History Society ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

Newsletter April 2020 No 2

[www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au)

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## BRANCH DIARY

Our program of events is currently in abeyance because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With great regret we have had to cancel or defer our March/April/May events.

Other events planned for 2020 including our program of Winter Lectures are on hold.

We will let you know as soon as possible about developments.

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23–25 OCTOBER  
2020

AGHS National  
Conference – Sydney  
*Many Dreams One  
Landscape*

5–8 NOVEMBER  
2021

AGHS National  
Conference – Hobart

## FROM THE BRANCH CHAIR

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness said John Keats and lots of lovely rain to fill up tanks and dams say I about this Autumn. Unfortunately overlaying the picture of the warm hues of the exotic trees which comprise part of Canberra's urban forest is COVID-19. This is a very challenging time for us all as we withdraw from all those activities which bring life affirming enjoyment.

How disappointing it has been for the Branch to have had to postpone and in some cases cancel those events for which the committee had taken time and effort to arrange. As with any celebration we had been very much looking forward to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary garden party planned to be held in the English Garden at Yarralumla. Throughout that memorable 19/20 summer, the ACT government had been watering some areas within the garden so there was an oasis of soft shady green, ideal for a garden party. Although the guidelines for 'flattening the curve' were not as stringent as they rapidly became, the Branch Committee reluctantly made the decision to cancel the event as it was already apparent that many of our members had become reluctant to attend such gatherings. It is now clear this was a prudent decision.

Thankfully the joint sundial event, another special celebration for the Friends of the Botanic Gardens also, has only been postponed as Marg Folkard, one of the creators of the sundials is willing to speak again when circumstances allow. One positive outcome is that the staff of the ANU's Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics at Mt Stromlo is compiling information about the sundial to put on the Mt Stromlo website.

Having to put off the visit to The Lodge garden was another disappointment. We were very excited when we received approval for this visit, not least because the last time our Branch members visited The Lodge garden was in 1989, less than three years after our Branch was established.

I would like to thank Nancy Clarke the Branch Committee's indefatigable secretary for all her work over the last month. There was much to do with the cancellation or postponement of events plus Nancy has taken over editing the newsletter whilst Judy recovers from surgery, which she is doing very well I'm pleased to write.

As with all other organisations, the rest of the year's program is in abeyance so for now enjoy the Autumn fruitfulness, flowers and colour, sort out those photos, write that book and even take some virtual garden visits. I look forward to meeting up with you again in the future.

Sue Byrne  
Chair ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

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## BRANCH COMMITTEE

Sue Byrne, Chair  
Judy Pearce, Dep. Chair  
& Newsletter Editor  
Helen Elliot, Treasurer  
Anne Claoue-Long, State  
NMC Representative  
Nancy Clarke, Secretary

Bronwyn Blake (and Co-  
chair of the NMC)  
Sue Cassidy  
Greg Johnson  
Erica Ryan

## OUR BRANCH PROGRAM FOR 2020

As noted by our Chair, the events for May and June foreshadowed in our February newsletter have been cancelled or deferred, and other events 'in the pipeline' are on hold awaiting developments.

The events already announced were all collaborative ones with local like-minded organisations: *Beside the Queanbeyan River* on 2 May, a joint event with the National Trust ACT with assistance from Brigid Whitbread, the Local History Librarian, Queanbeyan-Palerang and our joint contribution to the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival; the *Gundaroo Film Morning* on 15 May, jointly with the Canberra First Garden Club; and the *Winter Talk with Sophie Thompson* on 10 June, jointly with the Friends of the National Library.

Having the opportunity to work with friends is a great pleasure, and we look forward to future collaborative events, as well as ones we conduct independently or as part of the AGHS national program.

## PAST EVENTS

### *A Late Summer Amble in STEP*

FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY, 4 PM

As much as rain would be most welcome in our region, it was pleasing that the weather was warm, hot even, and windless for the first event of the year – a ramble.

The Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) or Forest 20 at the National Arboretum Canberra was the site chosen for this event. The STEP forest differs from the other 'forests' in the arboretum in that it is more akin to a small regional botanical garden, growing species typical of the forests and woodlands of the Southern Tablelands region of NSW within which sits the ACT.

Max Bourke, a STEP volunteer and AGHS member gave the assembled throng an outline of the history, philosophy, geology and species selection before we set off on a ramble to observe the trees and understorey plantings.

Judy Smith, who is currently President of the STEP organisation, was also on hand to answer questions and to lead one group of members around the site.



There have been losses in the ten years since STEP was first planned, due to the climate or the topography but success as well, all of which adds to STEP being an excellent educational resource not only for local residents but for visitors to Canberra. More recently a Bush Tucker garden was established within Forest 20.

The usual high standard of fare for afternoon tea was served in 'The Clearing', an open space constructed as a meeting place for school groups or visitors to gather or picnic.

There is a lot of information about the site and the species of trees and other plants available on the website. The volunteers also produce a regular newsletter detailing many aspects of the work carried out by this very energetic and dedicated group. Many of those at the event purchased the STEP publication *A Year of Flowers at Forest 20*. This delightful booklet includes descriptions and photos of the plants in flower at STEP each month and is both a very useful catalogue and an inspiration for our own gardens.

More information on STEP: <https://www.step.asn.au/> and <https://www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au>

*Thank you to Judy Smith and Max and Margie Bourke for a most informative and pleasant ramble amongst the ecosystems of the Southern Tablelands.*

**Sue Byrne**

## BRANCH NEWS

### AGHS 40<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

Although we were not able to hold our planned garden party to celebrate the AGHS 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, our other Birthday events are still in process: the series of oral histories of several significant Branch members is well under way, and the digitisation for Trove of a number of early Australian gardening books held in the National Library of Australia has been completed, and we are awaiting an opportunity to celebrate this important project.

We were delighted that two of our local newspapers recently included information about the Society and its birthday. Susan Parson's article *Kitchen garden: rich history of home-grown produce* in *The Canberra Times* on 24 March <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6691618/rich-history-of-homegrown-produce/> includes a wonderful retrospect on Canberra's long and interesting history of growing your own fruit and veg, and in the April 2 issue of *The Canberra Weekly* gardening columnist Tracey Bool includes a summary of the mission and activities of the Society.

### A POST-BUSHFIRE NOTE

Committee member Erica Ryan has told us that the National Library of Australia is actively seeking ephemera and other materials related to the recent bushfire emergency and that a related oral history project is planned. Other institutions such as the ACT Heritage Library and State Libraries as well as the National Museum of Australia are also collecting. The NSLA website <https://www.nsla.org.au/> has links to the National and State libraries, and for the Museum see <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/blog/australian-bushfires-response>.

As we know, the damage and destruction to the parks, gardens and landscapes in our region has been huge. Among those we know of that were affected by fire (some of them were also damaged soon after by flood) are the Pialligo Redwoods, the arboretum managed by Brian Myers at Wandello Woods near Cobargo, and the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens at Bateman's Bay.

Members may wish to contact a relevant organisation if you have material to contribute to creating a record of these momentous events for the future.

### LANDSCAPES AT RISK- LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN WEST BASIN UPDATE

The ACT and Commonwealth Governments have recently signed an agreement for approximately 2.8 hectares of Commonwealth owned lake bed in the West Basin of Lake Burley Griffin to become ACT Government land. The City Renewal Authority and its predecessors have been working for several years on the planning of the Acton Waterfront and this agreement will allow the Authority to advance its project to the next stage.

The City Renewal Authority initially plans to extend the 55-metre-wide public boardwalk from Henry Rolland Park a further 500 metres. Later plans include residential and commercial development.

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This issue of Lake Burley Griffin and its lakeshore landscape is highlighted on the AGHS *Landscapes at Risk* list\* exactly because the proposed reclamation of the lake bed to facilitate development of urban expansion does not consider the heritage values of West Basin.

The lack of political will to progress the heritage listing of the lake and surrounds is a concern. The nomination to the Commonwealth Government, documenting the important heritage values of the lake, its parklands, views and vistas – arguably Australia’s most important designed cultural landscape – has been sidelined for years and still eludes either Commonwealth or ACT Government support for assessment. Without adequate official exploration and recognition of the Lake’s heritage values, piecemeal development risks irretrievable damage to the significance of this important landscape in Canberra.

For further information you may like to re-read the article in the January 2019 issue of *Australian Garden History* vol 30, no 3 (*Public parklands traded for apartments*). A longer article by Juliet Ramsay *Extreme challenges facing the conservation of Lake Burley Griffin and lakeshore landscape – a community parkland space* is available by following this link <https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Australia-ICOMOS-Cultural-Landscape-Symposium-Diversity-and-the-Implications-for-Management-Proceedings.pdf> (article on page 87).

\*<https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/19-8-Landscapes-at-Risk-List-NMC-update-1.pdf>

**Anne Claoue-Long**

## CANBERRA’S TREES FOREST BATHING & SOME ADVOCACY

David Attenborough recently told the *Big Issue* magazine that

*In times of crisis, the natural world is a source of both joy and solace. The natural world produces the comfort that can come from nothing else.*

Forest bathing or nature therapy has been receiving increasing attention in recent times. The Duchess of Cambridge is a fan of it as demonstrated in the garden she helped to design at the 2019 Chelsea Flower Show. Maybe now is the time to test Forest Bathing out. And Canberra is a perfect place to do this.

Canberra is especially lucky in its urban forest of tree cover, an intrinsic part of Griffin’s designed landscape of the “ideal city”, the City Beautiful, Garden City and Bush Capital. A deliberate program of planting transformed a treeless wind-swept dusty plain to a planned environment full of parks, reserves, wooded hills and tree-lined streets. The city landscape was laid out as a grand tapestry with different details of colour, texture and form. Then the early private gardens were offered free plants to start them on their way and add to the mix. Trees are a highly visible and vital part of the Canberra landscape and have many values and roles.

The influence of the Yarralumla Nursery (led by Charles Weston, Lindsay Pryor and others) is well known: Weston oversaw the planting of one million trees in ten years. The role of home gardeners was just as important as government plantings. All these diverse contributions were highlighted in our Branch’s video *A Gardener’s City, Canberra’s Garden Heritage* made in 2006. In our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year it is good to remind ourselves of this story. Those of you who have a copy of the DVD might like to revisit it as well as your shelves of gardening books.

The local AGHS Branch Committee supports retention and care for the Canberra urban forest and has just made a submission to the NCA on their Draft Tree Management Policy for the Central National Area. This aims to increase and maintain tree canopy of resilient species to manage, preserve and conserve the landscape for the future in the face of increased heat and drought from climate change. One important policy matter is that the NCA states: “Individual trees will be valued and included within the organizational financial statements “.

This is important, as it recognises that trees are an economic asset, it puts a price on trees and acknowledges that there is a cost and loss in cutting them down. As with other assets, once they appear on a balance sheet, they are more likely to be cared for, and if lost, replaced to re-balance the books.

The Canberra urban forest of street trees, parks, reserves and remnant bushlands provides many benefits. The tree canopy has implications for:

- **Environmental and ecological benefits** through temperature moderation, improvement in air quality, carbon dioxide storage, control of winds, stormwater and water catchment
- **Aesthetic and visual benefits** in the tapestry of green, that is evident from any of Canberra's hill lookouts
- **Economic benefits** from natural shade cooling in summer, reducing cold winds in winter and reducing air pollutants in the urban environment
- **Social and psychological benefits** from the healing power of a green environment.

Which brings us back to forest bathing. While under restricted ability to follow our usual lives, it could help our wellbeing to really notice and engage with the natural world around us. Enjoy our green spaces, both private and public by slowing right down and connecting with all senses.

On March 30 the Canberra Times an article titled *Coronavirus: Canberra nurseries see surge due to self-isolation* noted that there had been a run on garden centre plants and supplies just as in the supermarkets. (At the end of this crisis Canberra may have some of the best-tended gardens and fattest possums!) The previous day the newspaper had published *Gardening for the soul: looking up, and looking down* by Jackie French who advocated getting in closer touch with nature to boost feelings of happiness.

So, enjoy your gardens, or if you have downsized, enjoy your balcony and houseplants.



We can all enjoy our street trees and the urban forest for different forms, leaves and bark. Really look at the street trees as you take your "essential exercise" locally and identify how different streets have different character because of their trees – deciduous, coniferous and Australia natives. Some people say talking to plants helps them to grow, so remember to talk to the street trees to encourage them after the drought years. After all, at the moment no one is likely to be close enough to hear you and give you strange looks.

Stay safe, stay healthy and keep on enjoying gardens and our amazing urban forest in the Garden City and Bush Capital.

**Anne Claoue-Long**

**A footnote:** You may like to read the very recently published and timely memoir/reflection by Julia Baird: *Phosphorescence: On awe, wonder & the things that sustain you when the world goes dark*. Central to Baird's ideas is the power of the natural world. A book of hope in this difficult time.

## NEWS FROM OUR NATIONAL OFFICE

### 41<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2020



To be held at Luna Park, Milsons Point. Bookings will open May 1 2020. Conference brochures will be sent to you with your April 2020 AGH Journal. The Optional Day on Monday 26 October will explore the rural area of Camden. Bookings will open May 1. The AGHS website will be updated soon with more details.

The conference committee are busy organising a fabulous event which will showcase Sydney including extra events on Thursday 22nd October, a boat trip on the James Craig around the Harbour (TBC)

Stuart Read will lead Pre and Post Tours to The Blue Mountains - (October 19 - 21 and October 27 - 29).

## OF INTEREST

Canberra's national institutions are all currently closed, and public programs cancelled for the time being. However, it is worth checking to see just what they are providing and planning to deliver online or through other remote mediums.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA  
<https://nga.gov.au/>

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

NATIONAL ARBORETUM CANBERRA  
[www.arboretumcanberra.org.au](http://www.arboretumcanberra.org.au)

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