

# ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

Newsletter May 2025 No 2

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



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### BRANCH DIARY

3 JUNE

Talk: *Medieval Gardens – fit for use or delight* (by Zoom)

18 JUNE

Talk: *The Pepper Tree Grows in the Old School Yard*

14 AUGUST

AGM followed by a talk by Gweneth Leigh

18 SEPTEMBER

Talk: *The Archaeology of water*



Photo: *Mary in the Paradise Garden with Saints*, C1410-20

---

45<sup>TH</sup> AGHS ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE  
MT GAMBIER, SA  
30 OCTOBER – 2  
NOVEMBER 2025

THEME: BEYOND THE  
GARDEN FENCE

## MEDIEVAL GARDENS – FIT FOR USE OR DELIGHT

TUESDAY JUNE 3, 6 – 7.15PM

**Special online lecture by renowned UK Garden Historian,  
Caroline Holmes. Organised by the Victorian Branch**

### BRANCH COMMITTEE

**Robyn Oates**, Chair &  
NMC Representative

Secretary VACANT

**Sue Cassidy**, Treasurer

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

A medieval tapestry of plants, people and poetry, medieval illuminated manuscripts and illustrations give us delightful insights into what a medieval garden was and the small palette of plants they grew.

Identifying the plants and their symbolism in the Unicorn tapestries provides a wonderful narrative. We explore the garden's use and evolution in the period 410–1485: from monastic enclosure to royal hunting park and the desire for an earthly paradise both as a Christian and romantic metaphor. Simple, monastic, self-sufficient, medicinal and sacristan plots grew into elaborate settings for ecclesiastical palace and abbey gardens not forgetting the heavily defended castles with their survival crops, and manors with walled gardens relishing the wafting scents from plantings below status rooms.

The medieval garden inspired Arts and Crafts re-creations as well as the herb and scented gardens we enjoy today.

Time 6:00 pm start – log in from 5:45 pm

Cost \$12 AGHS members, \$15 non members

Bookings (A Zoom link will be provided with a reminder email before the session)

<https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1382544>

Inquiries Sue Foran 0400159079, Robyn Teed 0447256518

## TALK: A PEPPER TREE GROWS IN THE OLD SCHOOL YARD

WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE, 6PM

Do you have memories of sharing midday heat with the flies in a country school playground, when your playmates headed for the shade of the large old pepper tree that seemed to grow in every country schoolyard and on every farm?

Come and hear **Anna Howe** as she shares her research into these remarkable trees and the part they played in our heritage.

Venue Chambers Pavilion, Centre for Christianity and Culture, 15 Blackall St, Barton

Cost \$20 AGHS Members, \$25 non-members including refreshments

Bookings <https://www.trybooking.com/DBTWC>

## AGHS ACT MONARO RIVERINA BRANCH 2025 AGM

TO BE FOLLOWED BY A TALK BY OUR  
SPECIAL GUEST DR GWENETH LEIGH

THURSDAY 14 AUGUST, 5.30PM

**Dr Gweneth Leigh** is a writer, practitioner, curator and researcher of the built environment. A graduate of Harvard's Graduate School of Design, her work explores how the design of our open spaces impacts the health and habits of communities. She is a frequent contributor of landscape critique, with articles published in journals including *Landscape Architecture Australia* and the US professional journal *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. She has curated exhibitions such as BLOOM, which examined how the design of everyday



landscapes impact people's physical and mental health. Prior to commencing her PhD, she worked in both the public and private sectors. Her current research focuses on how our outdoor spaces can better meet the needs of one of Australia's more vulnerable populations: our older youth.

Venue	Chambers Pavilion, Centre for Christianity and Culture, 15 Blackall St, Barton
Cost	This is a free event and we hope as many members as possible will attend – please book to assist with catering – details below.
Bookings	<a href="https://www.trybooking.com/DBTYB">https://www.trybooking.com/DBTYB</a>

## SAVE THE DATE

### TALK: *THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WATER* SPEAKER: DR CHRIS CARTER

THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER, 6PM



#### The annual joint AGHS/Friends of the National Library

Archaeologist and well-known tour leader Dr Chris Carter will speak on *The Archaeology of Water*. Water is an element that is essential for human survival - without it, economies fail and people die, and when there's too much, the same can occur.

In his talk Chris will discuss the significance of water in relation to human development – its access, control, and delivery for power and for pleasure. We will travel from the driest deserts in the world - the Atacama Desert of Chile and the Arabian Peninsula - to the lush, terraced hillsides that produce prodigious quantities of grain in the Philippines, from the slopes of Andean Peru to Australia with its own surprisingly long history of water management. We will look briefly at how humans have gained access and control of water and how that has impacted on lifeways with both positive and negative results.

Bookings will open in August but in the meantime, save the date for this exciting talk.

## RECENT EVENTS

### VISIT TO NGA SCULPTURE GARDENS 27 FEBRUARY

This visit was a wonderful start to 2025 for the local AGHS.

The tour was led by Ben Taylor, who has the newly created position of Landscape Manager with the NGA. His enthusiasm for the garden, all past, present and possible futures kept the group engaged as we spent an hour walking through most of the existing garden

We started on the west side of the NGA, facing the High Court, and learned that when the building was designed it was expected to sit surrounded by 6 hectares of garden, only about 1/3 of which was developed before the money ran out. Two other alterations of the design of the area were made by the NCDC which affected subsequent usage and were:

a raised pedestrian plaza running between the Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery was cancelled, and

the main road was moved from along the lake shore to South of the buildings, King Edward Terrace.

These changes explain why the NGA building originally had the entry on the first floor, and the gardens developed on what is now the “back” of the building.

We moved around the building to where plantings commenced on the National Gallery Sculpture Garden in 1981. Harry Howard, Barbara Buchanan and Associates (from Sydney) and James Mollison, the Gallery's first Director, designed this garden to complement the building. The diagonal of the main pathway and the floor plan of the garden repeats the triangular architecture of the main building. The garden was planned to have 4 seasons, all to be native plants but only three were completed.

Immediately adjacent to the building is the winter garden, shielded from the west winds by tall plants and paved to reflect the winter sun. Surrounding this area were winter flowering shrubs.

Towards the lake came the Spring Garden, with a large lawn for gatherings, and a series of garden rooms, and finally the Summer Garden, deeply shaded, and with a reflection pond. All spaces were to be designed to complement sculptures.

Early in the construction it was found that trying to source the native plants was difficult, so Harry Howard decided to grow their own from seed in his nursery in Sydney. As all Canberra gardeners know – this was not a good idea. The winters following the establishment of the Gardens saw the loss of many of the plantings.

Over its 40+ years of existence the Gardens has come under the supervision and care of a number of different organisations placed as it is in a small Federal section of the ACT. Where possible the aims of the original designers were kept, but changing social attitudes and the redirection of the building called for some adjustments. The Gardens have been given Heritage Listing.

Now, after 40+ years the infrastructure needs a lot of work, and although the trees are looking good much of the understorey is old and woody and no longer fulfilling its purpose.

Requests have been made for permission to irrigate from the lake and a new system put in.

The day of our walk was the day the Mist sculpture, Fujiko Nakaya's *Foggy wake in a desert: An ecosphere*, was turned off for maintenance, probably for a few years, although Ben kindly turned it on for us. The pond is also listed to soon be drained, cleared of all the rushes that have self-sown there and relined.





We looked at the east of the Gallery, where the Autumn Garden was planned to be, and it is now a garden work area, with compost bin, mulch piles and the staff car park. Although no plans have been finalised there is the possibility that a garden strip (with sculptures) might join the Heritage Garden to the Australian Garden at the front of the building.

Finally, we went into the Fiona Hall Fern Garden, which has been closed to the public for the last two years on safety reasons. It looked very neglected. The paths discoloured with mould and the water display not working. The trees have grown in curving organic shapes that are, unfortunately unstable. In discussion with Fiona Hall, the Gallery will try to keep the fern trees as they are if possible, but some way will need to be found to stabilise them. The path will need to be taken up and re-laid.

Much work needs to be done but we can look forward to seeing an extended, revitalised garden around the Gallery.

**Kay Johnson**



**Photo: Members with Ben Taylor in the Fern Garden**

## VISIT TO DUNTROON HOUSE AND GARDENS, 15 MARCH

Our tour of Duntroon House and gardens was a glimpse into a part of Canberra's history. Duntroon House is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List and we joined three knowledgeable Duntroon guides for an expert tour. Ross Boyd, Tony Maple and Peter Rixon gave us a splendidly detailed story of the development of the gardens and some of the unique characters who lived and worked there. Along the way, they reminisced about their own times at RMC and entertained us with some great yarns. Their usual focus is on Duntroon House and we appreciated the 'extra mile' that they travelled in order to make our tour more specific to the gardens. Nevertheless, they also gave us a tour of the historic Campbell house, built in 1833 on the Limestone Plains and its reinvention as a central feature of the Royal Military College after 1911.

Duntroon was established by Robert Campbell in 1798, when he was initially granted 4000 acres which was later increased to 5000 acres. James Ainslie, overseer, explored Limestone Plains in 1825, guided by local Ngunnawal people. Duntroon House, built in 1833, is the oldest residence in the ACT, named after Campbell's Scottish homeland. By 1870, the area was largely treeless, with few trees confirmed by a 1919 botanical report.

Charles Weston initiated tree planting in Canberra from 1911 to 1926, planting tens of thousands of trees. Duntroon House gardens contributed seeds for successful propagation of *Cedrus atlantica*, with 17,000 germinated in Canberra. A cork oak planted in 1861 provided propagating material for many cork oaks in Canberra, including a 1917 plantation.

Fred's Tree<sup>(i)</sup> an English oak planted in 1861, was believed to be the oldest cultivated tree until its demise in 1994. Fred's tree is well known to all RMC graduates. Major-General Bridges oak honours the founder of the Royal Military College, planted on the day of his burial in 1915. Bunya

pine and Himalayan cedar were planted during significant events, including the Duke of York's visit in 1927.

Marianne Campbell<sup>(ii)</sup>, trained botanical artist, significantly influenced the layout of Duntroon gardens in the 1860s. She collaborated with architect Alberto Soares on major renovations, including the conservatory built in 1876. The gardens were initially focused on practical needs, evolving into ornamental grounds under her guidance

A maze is part of the garden. While the garden dates back to 1854, the maze was added in 1871. It is said to have been copied from the maze at Hampton Court in England. You can read more about this in the AGHS Journal, Vol. 12, No. 3, *Mazes and Grottos* by Barry Long (November/December 2000), pp. 4-9 and also *Maze of History at Duntroon* by Richard Ratcliffe, AGHS Journal March/April 1997.

Our thanks to our guides Ross, Tony and Peter

**Robyn Oates**

#### Notes

- (i) Frederick Lewis served as head gardener for 20 years and he was known for propagating native and exotic flora. He was the only Duntroon employee to have a stone house built specially for his use and it still stands in the grounds.
- (ii) (ii) Marianne's gardens became unkempt between 1906 and 1910 but were restored by the Army in 1911. What we see today is a mix of historical and new plantings with an emphasis on practicality, both then and now.

(This information is taken from Peter Rixon's *Duntroon Garden Notes* 2025)



*Photo: Nancy Clarke and Anne Claoué-Long in the Maze*

## BRANCH NEWS

### CONSULTATION REPORT: REPLACEMENT OF ROSES AT THE NATIONAL ROSE GARDEN

Public consultation was undertaken earlier this year by the NCA. Anne Claoué-Long prepared our Branch response, which is quoted at length in the final Consultation Report.

You can find the Report at <https://www.nca.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-04/National%20Rose%20Garden%20-%20Rose%20Cultivar%20Selection%20-%20Consultation%20Report.pdf>

Heartfelt thanks to Anne, who is a splendid advocate for our Branch and its AGHS values.

## SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS BRANCH

Members of our Branch are always welcome to attend events in the Southern Highland and you may have met some of their members who travel down regularly to our events. The next event is:

**Sunday 22 June** – Winter Solstice Talks when Stuart Read will talk on *The History of garden design using native plants* and Ruth Bailey on *The Evolution of a Plant Collectors' Garden*

For further information check the AGHS website or email the Branch at [aghs.sh.info@gmail.com](mailto:aghs.sh.info@gmail.com)

## NATIONAL NEWS

### 2025 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

This year we will meet in Mt Gambier, South Australia, home to limestone caves, volcanic craters – and top- rated vineyards.

***Beyond the Garden Fence:  
Looking at gardens and the wider cultural landscape***

45th AGHS Conference, 31 October - 2 November 2025

Optional Day: 3 November

Pre Conference tour: 28 and 29 October

Further details <https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/events/2025-annual-national-conference/>

### ADVERTISE IN OUR QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Our Journal has a keen nation-wide readership. Do you know a business that would benefit?

Let them know about the advertising opportunities available. Choose from full page, half page, quarter page and classified options. Prices are listed on the inside back page of the Journal.

For more information contact the Editor  
[editor@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:editor@gardenhistorysociety.org.au)

## 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>. This calendar also provides information on other talks, walks and activities in the Garden.

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

**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.

**CANBERRA MUSEUM AND GALLERY**  
[HTTP://WWW.CMAG.COM.AU/](http://www.cmag.com.au/)

**NATIONAL TRUST: ACT BRANCH**

**Sunday 15 June, 9.30am**  
**Acton Peninsula Heritage Walk (Repeat)**

This very popular Heritage Festival event led by Rob Quodling is back by popular demand.

From 1911 until the 1940s, the detailed planning and construction of the national capital was orchestrated from Acton. Explore the sites of early buildings and find out about the public servants and tradies who lived and worked here a century ago.

\$15 adults, children free

Bookings <https://www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1392856>