

ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

Newsletter May 2026 No 2

Australian Garden History Society
www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au



Branch contact: actmrchair@gardenhistorysociety.org.au

BRANCH DIARY

10 JUNE
Winter lecture

28 JULY
Film day

20 AUGUST
Mulligans Flat Woodlands
Sanctuary

46TH AGHS
CONFERENCE
ORANGE, NSW
25 – 27 SEPTEMBER
2026

OPTIONAL DAY 28
SEPTEMBER

THEME: *FRUITS OF
ORANGE: EXPLORING
CENTRAL WESTERN
NSW*

47TH AGHS*
CONFERENCE
CANBERRA, ACT
15-17 OCTOBER 2027

OPTIONAL DAY 18
OCTOBER

BRANCH COMMITTEE

Robyn Oates, Chair &
NMC Representative

Helen Stevens, Secretary

Sue Cassidy, Treasurer

Louise Gaudry
Rosanna Horn
Mary Johnston

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

WINTER LECTURE: *MAJURA HOUSE AND THE FUTURE OF THE PAST*

SPEAKER: MARK BUTZ

WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE, 6 – 7.30PM

As we move closer to the centenary of our national parliament, let's look at the preceding hundred years, local European land use then, and how it has developed to what we know today.

Majura House is one of Canberra's oldest buildings and the land around it is perhaps the oldest continuously occupied farm in the ACT. Mark's presentation will focus on its history and values and it will consider the future of its heritage buildings and rural landscape as part of the city of Canberra



Majura House, situated at the foot of Mount Ainslie, dates from the mid 1800s. The house and property were part of the Duntroon Estate. Today we can see a way of life and land use from the 1820s onward. The Mayo family lived and worked there for generations and many Mayo family graves can be found in the graveyard at St John's Reid, the original Duntroon chapel.

Majura House and Property was an important part of our Australian pastoral identity.

Mark Butz is a well-known social historian. He has a background in environmental science and heritage research and documentation. His public report *Majura House Precinct ACT: Report on Heritage Values* (2023) emphasises local land use over the past 200 years, what it is now and what it may be in the future.

Refreshments will be provided after the lecture.

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

Cost \$22 AGHS & NT members, \$27 others (including refreshments)

Bookings <https://www.trybooking.com/DLYFZ>
Inquiries Mary Johnson actmrinfo@gardenhistorysociety.org.au

SAVE THE DATES

WINTER FILM DAY TUESDAY 28 JULY, 2PM

Our Winter Film Day returns, with a twist. Save the date to settle into your red velvet seat in the original theatre at the NFSA and enjoy a wonderful film, with a garden focus. The film title, choc-top ice creams and jaffas are still under discussion, but do put this one in your diary now.

Delight in some true old-style cinema, with its Art Deco light fittings and early twentieth century timbers.

Further information to be sent once it is available.

Venue The Theatrette, the National Film and Sound Archive,
1 McCoy Circuit, Acton

Bookings To open late June

MULLIGANS FLAT WOODLAND SANCTUARY THURSDAY 20 AUGUST, 10.45AM

Numbers strictly limited

Take a Senior Safari with AGHS as we visit a significant landscape in the ACT. Hop aboard one of the 12 seater Bettong Express safari buses for a special tour through the woodland ecosystem of Mulligans Flat.

Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary is Australia's largest single box-gum grassy-woodland area. There are 1200 hectares of fox-free bushland, which is habitat to animals that haven't existed in the wild on mainland Australia for over a century. We will hear about all of this and the ongoing conservation work.



Tours run in rain, hail or shine. Tours will only be cancelled if there is a total fire ban in place or extreme weather. Do note that because of the size of the safari buses numbers will be limited.

- Wear sturdy shoes & appropriate clothing (i.e. rain protection or warm clothing)
- Bring water
- Wildbark Café opens on Thursdays at 9.00am

Location 25 Rosenberg Street Throsby ACT

Duration 1 – 1.5 hours

Cost \$30.00 members; \$35.00 non-members
Bookings to open in July

RECENT EVENT

LENNOX GARDENS WALK WITH ROTARY GUIDES 28 MARCH

It was a crisp and pleasant early autumn morning when we met our guide, Michael Rabey from the Rotary Club of Canberra Burley Griffin. He began by outlining the history of Lennox Gardens and highlighting many of its interesting features.

Lennox Gardens is situated on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, behind the former Hotel Canberra, now the Hyatt Hotel. Established in the 1960s following the filling of the lake, the gardens occupy land that was once part of the original Royal Canberra Golf Course, now submerged beneath the water. The old Lennox Crossing once ran through this area. The gardens are named after David Lennox, a Scottish stonemason from Ayr who became a prominent early bridge builder in New South Wales and Victoria. In 1963, the gardens were officially named in his honour.

The area encompasses both the Canberra Nara Peace Park and the Canberra Beijing Gardens and features numerous memorials and monuments. Among them are the Kasuga stones gifted by Japan in April 1997, a substantial three-tonne Yukimi lantern, a monument commemorating Australians who served in the Spanish Civil War, a stone monument marking the centenary of Federation, and a memorial dedicated to the Jewish National Fund.

Our walk continued to the impressive Chinese welcome gate, where Michael explained that its materials were crafted in China and presented as a centennial gift from the Beijing Municipal Government to the people of Canberra, celebrating the sister-city relationship. The entrance is guarded by two traditional stone lions, or '*Shishi*', and nearby is a Chinese pavilion offering a place to sit, relax, and take in the surroundings.

Canberra Nara Peace Park was officially named in 2010 as a gift from Canberra's sister city, Nara. To mark the occasion, a major artwork was commissioned from Japanese sculptor Shinki Kato. The resulting pagoda, constructed from pre-rusted steel plates, stands eight metres tall and is a striking sculpture within the park.

We walked alongside a winding pebble-lined stream. Each October it is illuminated with thousands of glowing candles during the Canberra Nara Candle Festival, creating a beautiful sight to promote the values of peace and goodwill.

Further along, we encountered a tall white pole positioned on a grassy mound. Michael explained that during a visit to Poland to see the Warsaw Peace Bell, he and fellow Rotarians noticed a similar pole bearing the message "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in multiple languages. Inspired by this, they brought the idea back to Canberra to place a pole in our schools and parks. Rotary went on to dedicate its 100th peace pole in September 2021. In front of the mound is a low steel panel displaying plaques that honour Canberrans who have made significant contributions to peace.



Our walk concluded at the central feature of the park: the large cast bronze bell, suspended within a modern interpretation of a traditional pavilion. Originating from Japan in the aftermath of the atomic bombings, this peace bell was installed through a partnership between the World Peace Bell Association and the Rotary

Club of Canberra Burley Griffin. Officially launched on 23 February 2018, the bell serves as a powerful reminder of the universal desire for the end of all war.

Each of us was given the opportunity to ring the bell while reading a message of peace, bringing the walk to a meaningful close. It was a thoroughly interesting and informative morning.

Helen Stevens (copy & photo)

CANBERRA & REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL OPEN DAY 11 APRIL

These past weeks have been a busy time for the National Trust (ACT) members while they ran a rich program of historical events for the 2026 Heritage Festival. Our committee member, Mary Johnston is integral to the organisation of all these events and she still finds time to assist with our own events and run our bookings site!

The Open Day was a chance for our branch to be represented among the other local historical societies. It gave us the opportunity to showcase our association. Hearty thanks to members Louise Gaudry, Helen Wilson, Maura O'Connor and Robyn Oates who staffed the stall.

Gungahlin Homestead, the venue for the event, was a 19th century pastoral property dating from 1862 and built in two stages by William Davis (junior) and later by Edward Kendall Crace. More recently it was home to CSIRO wildlife research. It is one of the ACT's oldest heritage properties and is now owned by Canberra company Crace Holdings. It was possible to tour the building on the day. The plan is to develop a retirement precinct built on regenerative design principles.

A SUNDAY STROLL THROUGH THE ENGLISH GARDEN, YARRALUMLA 3 MAY



Autumn couldn't have given us a better afternoon for a stroll near the lake.

About one hundred years ago Charles Weston (Chief Afforestation Officer and Director of City Planting) supervised the planting of millions of trees in and around what was becoming Canberra. His legacy is huge. Today the English Garden is located adjacent to the Heritage Nursery in the park that carries Weston's name, and rolls down to the lake edge.

Our thanks to Dr Stephen Utick who gave members and guests a guided tour. Stephen is a Rotary District Environmental Envoy, with special knowledge and expertise in Weston Park. He is also one of the world's foremost experts on camellias.

Stephen began our tour at the '*Planting Memories*' memorial plaque which honours the local volunteers who died in World War One. In 2015 our Branch received an ANZAC Centenary Grant and commissioned this tree-shaped work that includes a moving poem (*The Forester*) by Canberra poet Geoff Page. The forester is Charles Weston, who continued his tree planting in the bare ground in the new national capital while so many of the young men who had been working for him left Australia to serve and die overseas. Trees in this section of the garden are also centenarians, having been planted over one hundred years ago.

Stephen also guided us through the exotic plantings of camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons which were planted in the '50s and '60s, linking them to their Asian sources in history.

The scent of pine needles, the open grassed areas ideal for picnics and the lake views all combined for a peaceful ramble. The statuesque bunya pine, the various other pines and oaks and the extraordinary *Sequoia sempervirens* (Californian redwood) all took our breath away. As we move towards 2027 and the centenary of Parliament in Canberra, it is significant to gaze upon these trees and to take in what a hundred years of growth can look like.

This was a free event and we welcomed friends and visitors to join our members

Robyn Oates

Photo Mary Johnson

BRANCH NEWS

WELCOME TO A NEW MEMBER

The committee would like to welcome Ann Hunt (who has transferred from the SA Branch).

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS BRANCH

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

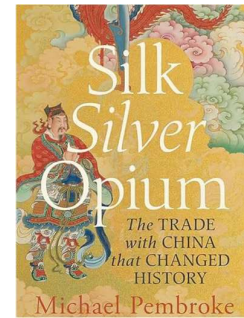
WINTER SOLSTICE
SUNDAY 21 JUNE, 10.30 am - 2.30 pm
East Bowral Community Centre

As part of their Winter Solstice gathering, they are delighted to welcome two distinguished speakers offering complementary perspectives on heritage, landscape and cultural history.

Alex Douthwaite from The King's Foundation will speak about the Hillview project and the practical work of conserving historic landscapes through stewardship and traditional skills.

Following lunch, Michael Pembroke will discuss his latest book, *Silk, Silver, Opium*, exploring the historic trade between China and the West and the profound cultural exchanges that shaped landscapes, design and society across the world.

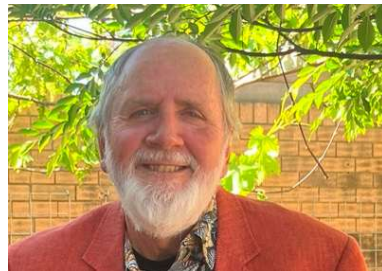
Together, these presentations offer a fascinating reflection on how places are shaped, influenced and ultimately preserved through time.



We have only received the "Save the Date" notice this week so if you require further information contact the Branch at aghs.sh.info@gmail.com.

NATIONAL NEWS

AGHS ORAL HISTORIES



The Society has built a significant national oral history collection of 80 recordings, with more in the pipeline. Interviewees share much more than recollections about the Society's beginnings, its conferences and publications. These include reflections on the influences of childhood or family that engendered an interest in gardens, recollections of their own

gardening practices, the impact of changing social and political environments, and the networking and informal mentoring that encouraged scholarship and research in the Society. The most recent members of our Branch who have been included in the collection are Greg Johnson and Juliet Ramsay. Visit the AGHS Website for more information <https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/>.

AN UPDATE FROM THE RECENT NATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7 APRIL

Two new platforms are now in use for registrations. Members will register for Conference attendance through Humanitix and TidyHQ is now used for membership renewals. Both platforms have eased previous difficulties with online registrations and subscriptions.

TidyHQ is continuing to provide administrative benefits to the AGHS office. There have been significantly less problems relating to membership renewals. If you have had problems, please notify our Chair actmrchair@gardenhistorysociety.org.au or the National Executive Officer info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au

National membership has increased slightly from 1,015 to 1,022.

1,000 tea towels carrying the AGHS logo will be available at the Orange Conference and afterwards for purchase.

The *Australian Garden History* Editor will soon set up a Facebook page, with a view to increasing national awareness of AGHS.

OF INTEREST

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

Monday 18 May, 7.30 – 9.00pm

Wesley Centre, 20 National Circuit, Forrest

Our AGHS member Jackie Warburton will be talking about restoring a Heritage Garden.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS
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://friendsanbg.org.au/>. This link also provides information on other talks, walks and activities in the Garden.

Visitors' Centre Exhibition

Wednesday 6 May – Sunday 31 May

Life Through Trees - Victorian artist Nic Everist is previewing some of her works from the 12-part series *Life Through Trees*.

2026 ACT REGION HERITAGE SYMPOSIUM

Saturday 15 August

Theme: *Everyday Heritage: Conviviality, Creativity, Care*

Call for Abstract: closes 30 June

NATIONAL TRUST: ACT BRANCH

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/act/>

NATIONAL ARBORETUM CANBERRA

www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au

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