

BRANCH CUTTINGS



Issue 75 – November 2024

This branch is affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society & National Trust of Australia (NSW)
We acknowledge and pay respects to the traditional owners and custodians on whose land we walk, work & live.

AGHS FORTHCOMING EVENTS

DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS PARTY

Date: Sunday, 1st December, 2024, 11:00 for 11:30am start

Venue: *Brownlow Hill* homestead, 216 Brownlow Hill Loop Road, Brownlow Hill, near Camden

Event: Join us for a relaxed end-of-year gathering in delightful surroundings. Wander around this wonderful historic garden, home to the Downes family since the 1860s and prior to that, to the Macleay family of *Elizabeth Bay House*. AGHS Sydney branch members Gina Plate, James Quoyle and Colleen Morris did a detailed recording of its rich garden in 2014. It is a rare, substantially intact colonial farming estate, with layout and some plantings pre-1860, other elements 1830s and 1840s. Its built elements (homestead, ornamental dam, outbuildings such as elaborate stables, aviary, sundial add much interest.



Then we'll have lunch together at leisure.

Cost: AGHS Members \$20, Non-members \$30, Students \$5 includes Christmas lunch and drinks.

Bookings: www.trybooking.com/CXGTU

FEBRUARY

Date: Tentatively Saturday, 15th February, 2025 TBC

Venue: Special Collections exhibition space, LG1, Fisher Library, University of Sydney

Event: **William Hardy Wilson exhibition** – guided tour/introduction with curator, Hector Abraham.

Bookings: details to be advised

BALLS HEAD HARBOUR HEADLAND – A GEM THAT CONTINUES TO INSPIRE

Part two of a two-part article by Christine Hay

How was Balls Head saved from the brink and later reafforested?

About the same time as Henry Lawson's impassioned plea to protect Ball's Head, a fresh appreciation of the working harbour and its modified waterfronts surfaced in artistic circles. Balls Head, a natural feature reminiscent of the 1788 waterway, was often used as a counterpoint in scenic views. A contrast to the bustling Sydney port. Roland Wakelin, New Zealander and artist, painted 'Down the Hill to Berrys Bay' in 1916. Its modern techniques caused a sensation. Lifelong friends with Wakelin, Lloyd Rees who would become one of Australia's most represented artists in public collections arrived in Sydney from Queensland in 1917. Rees soon began painting the harbour and Berrys Bay. The Northwood Group - Wakelin, Rees and other artists, drew inspiration from Sydney Harbour often meeting at Berrys Bay.¹

¹ Barry Pearce, *Roland Wakelin* (1887-1971), Volume 19 1990, online in 2012.

FROM THE BRINK, STEPS TO PROTECTION

A new chapter began in 1920 with the incursion of an oil storage terminal on Berrys Bay's western shores. Not surprisingly, Balls Head's bushland began to diminish. Local industry, communities and visitors, using its vegetation for construction and fuel, and picking its wildflowers.

From 1923-1924, the creation of a reserve at Balls Head 'for a recreation ground' became a heated local topic. The Bays Road Progress Association, established in 1911, turned its attention to securing the headland 'for the use of the public, as it commanded one of the finest views of the city and harbor [sic].' Choosing a collaborative path, North Sydney Council invited support for the reserve from harbourside municipalities, including Balmain, the Town Planning Association, Sydney Regional Planning Committee and the Harbour Foreshores Association.

An internal debate ensued at the council. The peninsula, already industrialised, with a deep-water frontage was valuable for shipping. Some argued that only 'a portion ... on the summit, from which a glorious view of the harbor [sic] is obtainable...should be preserved.' Others valued it as 'one of the most time-honoured spots for two-up schools in the district.' Berry Island became embroiled in the dispute.

The NSW Government had leased Berry Island to the council until 1931. A battle in the press 'Head or Island' centred on its exchange for the undeveloped land at Balls Head. Council and the Progress Association fought to retain both for 'public recreation.' The protection of Balls Head for its scenic views had widespread support. One article identified it as 'an isolated place central in the harbour with high panoramic views extending to Lane Cove, North shore, Balmain, Darling Harbour, the City and a vista down the harbour to Watson's Bay,' its views arguably 'not surpassed for extent and variety' anywhere else on the harbour.'

A 1924 description of the headland describes it as 'still covered with stunted trees, the remains of what was once an almost impenetrable forest.' Ironically, the views exposed by the stripped vegetation became a unifying argument to protect the place, and the saving grace for the headland.

When the Labor government was next elected into office the two reserves were gazetted 25 June, 1926 for public recreation. Premier Jack Lang later 'reiterated the need to protect public ownership of the Harbour's foreshore.' Public agitation and community advocacy had successfully championed 14 acres [5.67 ha] of Balls Head to become a reserve.² In the nick of time, Balls Head's remnant vegetation community and soil seed bank were provided some protection.



THE CONSERVATION NETWORK OF SYDNEY AND BALLS HEAD

In 1927, conservationist Annie Wyatt and her neighbours formed the Gordon or Ku-ring-gai Tree Lovers Civic League, prompted by their disgust at the wanton destruction of bushland and its use as rubbish dumps. Almost two decades on, in 1945, Wyatt spearheaded a movement, co-founding the National Trust in Australia and later receiving an OBE.

Wyatt's early campaigns helped shape her activism and legacy. As Honorary Secretary of the League, she developed widespread influence. A network formed of environmentally aware groups and individuals including the Australian Forest League NSW (1923) led in the 1930s by high profile naturalist David Stead; and the Naturalists Society of NSW founded by eminent entomologist Walter Wilson Froggatt.

Image left: Annie Forsyth Wyatt by Harold Cazneaux ca.1930, prior to 1931 Balls Head campaign. Source: Pittwater Online News Aug 25-Sept 1, 2018, Issue 375. Historic Photographs of Pittwater: Harold 'Caz' Cazneaux 1878 – 1953.

Leslie Walton, *The Art of Roland Wakelin*, Craftsman House, 1987, Syd, pp 13-15, 17, 23, 30-31 Plate 10 p 43, Plate 27 p 56; Renee Free, *Lloyd Rees (1895-1988)*, ADB, Volume 19 online in 2012.

The works of Wakelin and Rees are covered by copyright. Creative works of Balls Head can be viewed online by a search of the artist together with Berrys Bay or Ball Head.

² Hoskins, *A Short History of Balls Head and Berry Island Reserves 1906-1940*, 2016;

GML, *Waverton Peninsula Industrial Sites*, CMP, p 64.

State Heritage Inventory, *BP Site Waverton*, OEH, 2017.

Sun, 'Two-up' Reserve, Bay -road Wants Park Area at Balls Head, 10 September 1924, p 11; SMH, Ball's Head, Proposed Public Park, 26 September 1924, p 7; Sun, Head or Island? North Sydney Opinion Divided, 21 October 1924, p 11; SMH, 15 September, Balls Head from the Bridge, 1924, p 7; Newcastle Sun, Historic Ball's Head, Discoverer's Adventurous Life, Fine Reserve for Public, 7 November, 1924, p.6; Sun, Balls head Reserves, 21 Sept 1926, p 14; SMH, New Reserves. Balls's Head and Berry Island, Opened by Mr Lang, 25 Oct 1926, p 12 [Source: Trove].

Roslyn Burge, Historical Report, The Flagpole Balls Head Reserve Waverton, Correspondence – John Sulman to the Mayor of North Sydney, 27 July 1931, p 1, 7.

In 1929 Froggatt put forward suggestions to replant Balls Head Reserve. Behind the scenes, however, a new threat was looming. Although now a gazetted reserve, an allotment to the eastern shoreline of Balls Head was to be leased-out as a US oil depot. Community action erupted and a petition of 830 signatures was delivered to council, followed by a deputation in April 1930 to the NSW Treasurer protesting the proposal. These actions overturned the frightful scheme.

Balls head's bushland reserve was exposed when an access road, and pathways, funded for Depression unemployment works, were constructed between 1930 and 1931. These changes were 'to enable visitors to enjoy harbour-side scenery.'

Soon after, Wyatt wrote to council on behalf of a resident about 'preserving the remaining natural beauty of the Balls Head Reserve.' Prompted by the appeal, in conjunction with the Tree Lovers League, council initiated the Balls Head Beautification Scheme sub-committee. With a network of support, an Arbor Day tree planting program was planned. The Governor, Premier and heads of government departments and organisations including scientific, botanical and historical societies, the Australian Museum, scouts and schools were to attend the event.³

THE REAFFORESTATION OF BALLS HEAD

The inaugural tree-planting ceremony at the Flagstaff, the bluff's high point, was an extensive and highly organised affair. Six groups planted a total of 100 trees on Saturday 25 July 1931. Newspapers reported the attendance of over 2000 people. Descendants of Lieutenant Lidgbird Ball planted a tulip tree *Liriodendron spp*, and a Port Jackson fig *Ficus rubiginosa* at the function.

The Australian Forest League stated it was 'probably the most extensive & most successful tree planting function ever held in the metropolitan area.' Wyatt was directly acknowledged:

Balls Head Beautification Scheme. Mr Welch, Mr Berman "That the N.S.Council be congratulated upon the splendid success of the inaugural function and the bests thanks of the League be conveyed to the Hon. Sec Mrs Wyatt."

That same year '30 tree ferns and Christmas Trees' were planted and one year later 50 blackbutts, noted as original flora. They replaced failed plants 'since the extensive tree-planting operation of a year ago' of which many trees had done well. These campaigns, led by Froggatt, assisted in the reforestation of the headland.⁴



Image left: Aerial looking west over Balls Head Reserve ca 1931, though bare of forest is covered in low vegetation. The new loop road is seared into its crest, built ca 1931. In contrast to the BP industrial port, and other shorelines, where extensive landform modifications have occurred, Balls Head's natural headland remains relatively intact. Berry's convict-built store ca 1832 survives behind the large reservoir RHS. Demolished in 1933, a bund made of its blocks remains as part of an archaeological site. Source: GML, Waverton Peninsula Industrial Sites: BP, Caltex, Coal Loader CMP, 2000, p 79.

The opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 placed new pressures on north shore bushland reserves. Conservation efforts to protect Balls Head continued when in 1935, another 8 ¼ acres [3.54 ha] were added to the reserve. In the newly acquired area, the Annie Wyatt Lookout at the apex to the entry loop to the reserve was

³ Caroline Simpson, *Annie Forsyth Wyatt (1885-1961)*, ADB, Volume 16 2002, online 2006;

D.I. McDonald, *Walter Wilson Froggatt (1858-1937)* Volume 8, 1981, online 2006;

G.P. Walsh, *David George Stead (1877-1957)*, ADB, Volume 12, 1990, online 2006;

SMH, *Native Flora*, 31 December 1929, p 6; SMH, *Balls Head Park*, 10 January 1931, p 12;

R. Burge, *Historical Report, The Flagpole Balls Head Reserve Waverton*, p.9, Correspondence – letter to Town Clerk, 3/9/1930;

Peggy James, *Cosmopolitan Conservationists, Greening Modern Sydney*, Aus. Scholarly Pub., Nth Melb. 2013, pp 110, 112.

⁴ Burge, *Historical Report, The Flagpole Balls Head Reserve Waverton*, report to Council from Balls Head Beautification Scheme for the Inaugural Ceremony, Sat. 25 July 1931, p 1 (no date on report), p 2 (chronology);

Sun, Sunday 26 July 1931, p.5; SMH, Monday 27 July 1931, p 8;

The Australian Forest League Council, *Executive's Report*, 'item no. 2. Balls Head Beautification Scheme', 2 July, 26 August 1931 and 3 September 1931, p 23, SLNSW.

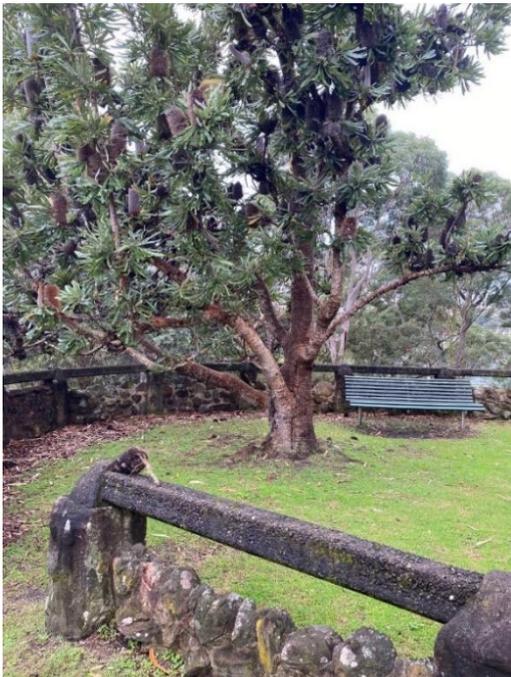
constructed using relief labour. Later in 1938, a lookout at Balls Head, overlooking Berrys Bay to the north-east, was named to honour Froggatt in recognition of his campaign to replant the reserve between 1931-1937. Depression era works at Balls Head Reserve continued, walks and steps were cut into its rock. Castellated stone balustrades lined tracks and open viewing areas. By 1943, because of regrowth and replanting, the promontory was effectively reafforested.

Lloyd Rees continued to paint the headland into the 1970s. In this decade, however, it became the source of new inspiration. Renowned Australian landscape architect Bruce Mackenzie drew on the bushy character of the headland in his important reconstructions of Yurulbin, another of the Green Necklace nominations, and Illoura (already listed on the SHR) as 'Alternative Parklands.' Former Prime Minister, Paul Keating would later refer to Balls Head when advocating for parklands at Ballast Point and the reconstruction of the headland now known as Barangaroo.

A new network of tracks was created in 1993 with interpretative signage. Today, the ecological environment at Balls Head continues to be cared for by North Sydney Council and the community. Seasonally, the pink trunks of smooth-barked apple, *Angophora costata* delight visitors when wandering its bush paths. Admiring panoramas of shimmering waters through their sculptural forms.⁵

The deep time history of Balls Head and the harbour offers many perspectives. About First Nations people, their connections to the waterway and the challenges of climate change. Berry and Wollstonecraft are remembered in location names. Berry's storehouse exists de-constructed as a bund waiting for resurrection into an imaginative landscape scheme. While colonisation has left its footprint on the headland and harbour, the voices and actions of early landscape conservationists continue to stir creative approaches to protecting landscapes. Thankfully Balls Head inspired them to *act*, to save this significant place which as Lawson's poetry echoes, is 'a glimpse of nature's mysteries.'

Postscript: Heritage NSW is currently progressing the nomination of Balls Head and Carradah Park Berrys Bay Precinct.



*Image left:
Annie Wyatt Lookout,
Balls Head Reserve.
Image right:
Depression era works
at Balls Head Reserve.
Photo by C.Hay 2024.*

Christine Hay is a Landscape Architect (RLA, AILA) and heritage practitioner (M. Herit. Cons. USYD). And author of the State Heritage Register nominations of Balls Head Reserve and Carradah Park Berrys Bay Precinct (as part of the AILA Landscape Heritage Project (Hay, Morris and Quoyle 2018).

Christine has guided several walks of the peninsula for the AGHS and is a past Chair of AGHS Sydney Branch.

⁵ Burge, Historical Report, *The Flagpole Balls Head Reserve Waverton*, p 2 (chronology).
<http://monumentaaustralia.org.au/themes/people/science/display/23725-w.-w.-froggatt>
North Sydney Council, Waverton Bushland Remnant, Balls Head Reserve, p 9-11.
C.Hay, *Balls Head Reserve*, AILA Nomination, 2018.

NEW MEMBERS

The Branch would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new local members: David Carment, Ambiga Devy, Anna Goodsall, Nancy Fox, Scott Hill, Fiona Hobill Cole, Belinda Moon

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Sydney Branch

Greetings to all from your new chair, me – and hoping the showers keep coming. It's been an erratic sprinter / spring / sprummer – but at least, not too scorching, which is good for gardens.

Some Sydney members enjoyed the terrific AGHS conference, in Bunbury, SW Western Australia and some, like me, enjoyed pre- or post-conference tours, from and to Perth. What a feast of speakers, gardens old (c.1830s+) and young, plants rich and rare. The WA branch did a cracking job, with many themes running throughout – such as First Nations and Country, colonists and their introductions, including from the Cape of Good Hope, environmental and climate challenges, biodiversity and geology. Some snippets from me are elsewhere in this newsletter.

We had hoped to organize a re-visit to the *Chinese Gardens of Friendship* in November but alas one of our expert guides, Oi Choong, is overseas. Perhaps an event for autumn 2025?

Your committee are busy planning for our Christmas party, to be held at lovely old *Brownlow Hill*, in SW Sydney near Cobbitty at Orangeville. A rich old garden and landscape with direct links to the Macleay family of *Elizabeth Bay House*, the Macleay Museum and River. And with the Downes family, who're long its custodians and gladly sharing it now, with us. AGHS did a detailed recording of this garden. Do let us know if you'd like a lift and we can make it happen.

The 'Green Necklace' is a mini theme for early 2025 events, with a talk and a walk first in store. These are green parkland 'chunks' of Sydney Harbour, some national parks or reserves, others ex-industrial sites, reclaimed and remade as public parks. All contribute to its sense of place and our sense of history, in this place – as things evolve, including our attitudes and priorities. Sydney branch has made submissions supporting 2 gaining state heritage listing, lately: *Berrys Bay Precinct (Carradah Park)*, *Waverton & Ballast Point Park*, Birchgrove. Both, ex oil tanks...

All bests,
Stuart Read

Ph: 0498 594 734 or email: stuart1962@bigpond.com

PAST AGHS EVENTS

AGM TALK -Elusive Traces of Migrant's Gardens by Professor Helen Armstrong

Professor Helen Armstrong described the fascinating stories of the creation of the gardens of some of Australia's migrants. Attendees heard about the very many different cultures of origin and the influences on the style of garden which they built.



AGHS NATIONAL CONFERENCE, November 2024

Hesperia: Looking West

Bunbury AGHS Conference, Bunbury, Western Australia

Four fascinating days, rich in ideas and scope, zooming from the globe down to the micro-level. AGHS conferences are amazing things, not least for the wide array of members – people – they attract – as speakers, artists and merchants, garden owners sharing their homes, and more.

This one was AGHS's fourth, out west: 1998 (Fremantle); 2005 (Perth); 2014 (Albany); 2024 (Bunbury). Its venue was Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre, a flash, large facility near the waterfront of Leschenault Inlet and Geographe Bay. Bunbury's young Mayor welcomed us, and a rich array of speakers unfolded over two mornings, with afternoon coach visits to gardens.

It was worth going west just to hear Troy Burnell, First Nations Wadandi and Nyoongar man give a warm & musical welcome to Country with his didgeridoo. And geologist Peter Lane, who was the clearest at explaining complex and ancient geology and continental drift and isolation, that I've ever heard. Marvellous, both.

Topics included Nyoongar land enterprise group who're actively promoting First Nations farming, businesses such as native tree nurseries, honey, quandongs, agri-tourism, food and medicine plants. Early naturalists such as Georgiana Molloy (at Augusta and the Vasse, near Busselton). Dutch and French explorers, as well as British. The Indian Ocean trade, and doomed 'Australind' settlement scheme.

The Cape (of Good Hope) plants introductions – for good and bad. Grape introduction (from the Cape, and Brazil, initially) and later waves such as Margaret River. Orchardist and Nurseryman Jacob Hawter and the horticulture industry. Louisa Clifton - an artist's eyes on the early settlement (we visited *Alverstoke*, an early Clifton family farm garden (& on the post-conference tour) *Fairlawn*, the Molloy's' second farm).

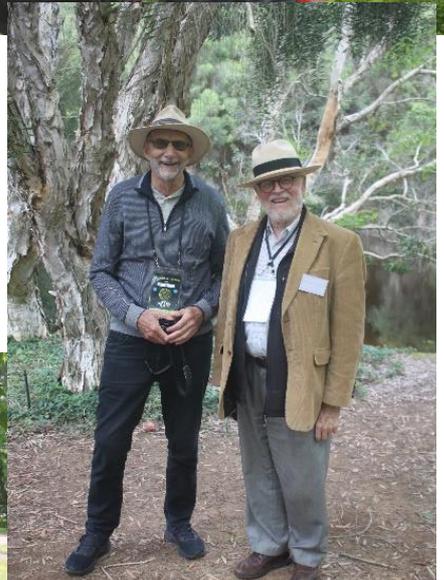
Landscape architect John Oldham's career and not least Wellington Dam precinct landscaping, the much depleted and endangered Tuart (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*) forests, Heritage Trades Skills and how they're being renewed and passed on through collaborations.

Visits are always highlights, and didn't disappoint – as well as those noted above, *Leschenault homestead*, Victoria (1840s), *St. Mark's Church*, Picton (1842), *Dardanup Park* (1840s+), *Tranquil Gardens*, Crooked Brook (2000, 3.2ha + lake, and quite inspiring), *Wonnerup House* (1859) where yours truly lunched under a large dragon's blood tree, away from showers and lovely *Caves House* at Yallingup (1938) and *Fire & Beauty*, at Smiths Beach, Margaret River, a bold 1987+ garden of succulents, fire-retardant species in coastal scrub with wide sea views. Not to mention the aforesaid *Wellington Dam* and surrounds, *Gnomesville*, near Wellington Mill (home to hundreds of little fellows in red hats), *Golden Valley Tree Park* (60ha, c1890+ arboretum) and *Ferndale* (1859), both at Balingup. All impressive, instructive and intriguing, in differing ways. Big thanks to all who slaved over organisation of a most enjoyable, stimulating, several days.

Stuart Read



Images above: Stuart Read
Top: *Fire and Beauty*, Smiths Beach;
Bottom left: Lunch at *Wonnerup*;
Right: John Viska and gape arbors in early Perth gardens.



Images: Anne Smith

OF INTEREST

The branch made a donation of \$1,000 to **Eryldene** for repairs to some of the garden seats.

VALE Ian Stephenson

Ian Stephenson was a stalwart curator, property manager and force in the National Trust of Australia (NSW). See the link below for details of his achievements.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/national-trust-curator-with-vision-preserved-cultural-treasures-20241108-p5kp2t.html>

ADVOCACY

See the advocacy pages on the AGHS Website.

https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/garden-history-now/#filter=iso_4

As a reminder, any advocacy requests to the Sydney Branch should be accompanied by an outline of succinct points about the required support.

The branch has recently sent in submissions in support of state heritage register listing proposals for post-industrial harbour-side parks **Berrys Bay Precinct** (Carradah Park), Waverton; and **Ballast Point Park**, Birchgrove. And others for the early farm and garden (a curtilage extension of already-listed) **Lansdowne**, on the eastern side of Goulburn and a fleshing out of the content of the listing for (already-listed) **Wyoming** (marine villa and terraced garden) at Birchgrove.

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

James Broadbent 2025 UK Tour

The English Regency with Dr James Broadbent AM

Houses, Gardens and Decorative Arts of the Early 19th Century, 31 May – 15 June 2025

See the link below for details.

[English Regency Tour - 2025 - Itinerary and Booking Form](#)

Botanic Gardens of Sydney

<https://www.rbg Syd.nsw.gov.au/what-s-on>

Guided walks led by volunteer guides 10:30am-12:00pm daily.

Growing Friends Plant Sales: Sydney: Monday - Friday 11am-2pm, Weekends 10am-2pm.

Mount Tomah: Daily 9am-5:30pm, **Mount Annan:** 9:30am-4:00pm

National Trust

See National Trust website for details of properties including the ones below:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/whats-on-nsw/>

Experiment Farm Cottage 9 Ruse Street, Harris Park -open first and third Friday and Saturday of each month, 10.30am- 3.30pm. Entry Fees: National Trust members -FREE, Adults -\$12, Concession/child >5yrs- \$10, Family- \$34
Experiment Farm Cottage is part of an historical Parramatta precinct which includes Hambleton Cottage (1824), Elizabeth Farm (1793) and the Queen's Wharf, all within easy walking distance of each other.

Everglades House & Garden, 37 Everglades Avenue, Leura –open Wednesday to Monday, 10am – 4pm.

Entry Fees: National Trust members – FREE, Adults - \$17, Concession - \$15, Family- \$49

Newsletter collated and edited by Anne Smith. Contact Anne on smith777@bigpond.net.au