

Inflorescence

April 2017

Possumwood at Robertson

Sunday 2 April at 12 noon to 4.30pm



*Pamela Bennett, Howard Tanner and Myles Baldwin
(photo: T. Carroll)*

The Editor: The Robertson event proved to be very popular with 78 members and guests enjoying lunch at the Robertson Inn followed by our guest speakers (Howard Tanner and Myles Baldwin) and then a trip to the lovely garden "Possumwood". Howard kindly allowed me to use his notes so that members, who were not able to hear his talk would get the opportunity to read them.



My good friend and colleague Pamela Bennett has invited me to talk about my exhibition at the State Library entitled *Planting Dreams—Grand Garden Design*, which closes on April 17.

It may surprise you that an architect would give a talk about his interest in garden design but over time many architects have understood the important role of the landscape setting in the design of a building.

My mother was a keen gardener, and her great friend Beryl Guertner (1917-1981) was the founding editor of *Australian House and Garden* magazine, producing the first edition in December 1948—her emphasis on ‘the excitement of good design’ persuaded both her cousin Carl Pickering (now a famous designer based in Rome) and I to become architects.

At Sydney University I had the opportunity to survey the surviving Colonial gardens in the Sydney region, which sparked an interest in historic gardens. By the mid-1970s I was in a joint venture with architect Philip Cox, and one day he returned from Melbourne saying that Macmillan publishers wanted him to produce three new books on architecture and gardens. ‘I’m rather busy,’ he said, ‘you’ll do them.’

Thus the book *The Great Gardens of Australia* came into being and thus a chance to research and write a history of gardening in Australia, and to locate major gardens for inclusion.

Various people exclaimed ‘there aren’t any’, but Milton Park and Retford Park came into view, and James Fairfax put me in touch with Joan Law-Smith who had created her celebrated garden at Bolobek near Mount Macedon in Victoria.

For many, the book illuminated the story of gardening in Australia, and as a result in 1978 I was invited to curate a major touring exhibition exploring Australian garden history through early paintings and illustrations. My good friend Peter Watts saw the exhibition as an opportunity to promote garden history, and with Dame Elisabeth Murdoch we set up a meeting to found the AGHS in 1980.

Dame Elisabeth was a canny philanthropist; she understood the importance of ‘seed funding’ enabling a fledgling organisation to get on its feet. This ensured a thoughtfully economical and practical national body with a magazine and an annual conference, which could carefully grow into a worthy long-term institution.

The next twenty years of my life were focused on building a career as an architect and thus having a reasonable income to sustain family life. Some of you will know my work at the Sydney Town Hall and at Frensham School.

From my time as Chair of the NSW Heritage Council, I came to prefer the public life to the professional life, and put considerable effort into the Institute of Architects, the Art Gallery Society and the Historic Houses Trust, the latter giving me two wonderful opportunities to mount photographic exhibitions, which explored Sydney, its society, and its design aspirations in the early years of the 20th century.

During all this time I carried my interest in gardens and landscaping forward. In 2014 I reviewed Anne Latreille’s fine book *Garden Voices*, which outlined the careers of significant Australian garden designers. It convinced me that truly contemporary styles and ideas of garden design were emerging in Australia, and I began sussing out an opportunity to explore the topic.

In 2015 the State Library was seeking funding for a major exhibition on garden history to celebrate 200 years of Sydney’s Botanic Gardens and of gardening in Australia. Apart from a generous grant from the AGHS, funding was proving difficult. I told the Library’s Foundation that if I were allowed to mount a parallel Contemporary Gardens show I felt sure that I could help them find sponsors and a wider audience. So it came to pass. It was all a set of fluky coincidences. Such is life.

How to get started? It began with a series of interviews with garden consultants, initially Michael Bates, Myles Baldwin and Anton James—three people who I knew would be particularly savvy as to what was going on in their field. In all, twenty-nine interviews were conducted and from this emerged a series of exploratory trips

around NSW: to the Southern Highlands, to the country, the South Coast, the North Coast, New England.



Howard and Mary Tanner (all the following photos are by P. Bennett unless otherwise identified)

The first breakthrough occurred not far from here . . . at Ooralba, high above Kangaroo Valley. I came across its amazing maze of clipped *Elaeagnus* (silverberry or oleaster). I rang its designer Hugh Main. This is it! This is it! I yelled down the line. Its image became the lead picture of the exhibition.

There were several wondrous gardens on the South Coast, and the grand sub-tropical garden Sea Peace near Byron Bay amazed, with its orchids and stag-horns dripping off the trees. Inland at Tenterfield Carolyn Robertson showed how to merge a very sophisticated planting scheme with a rugged mountain backdrop.



Lyn Morehen and Howard Tanner

I would have loved to include the Australian Garden by McGregor Coxall at the National Gallery in Canberra, but was firmly told by the State Library to hold my focus to the work of NSW designers within the state of NSW!

In all I inspected forty-two gardens. My brief was to explore innovation in garden design, and thus from the start I wasn't after Edna Walling look-alikes!

The Library commissioned four top photographers to capture the essence of the twenty-one most outstanding gardens—some displayed as huge back-lit images—and asked Michael Power to make a short video which could convey movement through these special landscapes.

After all, a grand landscape design is, at best, like a huge three-dimensional artwork.

What were the new influences?

- the use of a largely Australian palette of plants;
- clipped forms and rockwork derived from Japanese gardens, especially 'cloud-pruning';
- the use of sweeps of grasses and field flowers;
- 'architectural foliage' with an emphasis on colour and texture;
- dry gardening, cognisant of drought, sometimes inspired by Mediterranean and Californian models;
- an increased emphasis on outdoor living—with fire pits, lap pools, patios amongst distinctive planting.

The new innovative gardens shown in the exhibition reveal a coming of age of landscape design in Australia—it's now 50 years since the landscape design profession was established here—and also an increasing confidence in ourselves and the creation of distinctively Australian gardens

Howard Tanner



Myles Baldwin, designer of Possumwood



Japanese buxus balls at Possumwood (photo: J. Carroll)

Myles Baldwin gave a witty introduction to the Possumwood garden explaining how the client and he had developed the brief between them. The house is situated on a rectangular block; and the area of garden looked to Myles at first sight like a horse paddock.

The client was determined he didn't want a symmetrical garden—he wanted perennials and, more problematic, roses. (Robertson has an annual rainfall of 1.7m, not at all conducive to the happiness of roses.) Then he decided that he wanted a water feature, but not a structured pond but what would appear like a natural lake coming out from the native rainforest.

The garden, set between the trees of the forest on the eastern border and a windbreak of Leyland cypress on the west, is now a peaceful refuge with meandering narrow pathways of crushed granite between beautiful borders—including a huge array of salvias and grasses.

A small lake (the client also expressed a desire for water-lilies) provides a lovely silent focal point, contrasting with the sound from the other water feature—an elegant cast iron fountain—sited on the southern end of the lake.



*The Victorian fountain—behind is the hedged
*Cupressocyparis leylandia**



*Susan Hand, Merryleigh Brindley & Jenny Carroll
strolling round the lake*



*Graeme Harris, David Kelly, Fay Adair & Nola Harris
along the narrow curving pathway*



*Salvia 'Waverly' at the left in front of a pruned Echinacea.
At the right is Miscanthus siensis 'Sarabande'*



*Mary Williamson standing in front of one of the many dry-
stone walls—made from locally quarried stone*



Another view of the lake

Garden visits are always popular with our members and the committee is grateful to Pamela Bennett for organising this event. We are particularly grateful to Howard Tanner and Myles Baldwin for fitting us into their busy schedules.

If there is another garden that you would particularly like to visit, or have access to through friends, please let us know. There are gardens owned by some of our members that would be a treat to visit. If you would like to 'volunteer' your own garden, please contact any member of the committee—we might be tapping on your shoulder!

Farewell to National Executive Officer



*Richard Heathcote & Phoebe LaGerche-Wijsman
(photo: M. Probyn)*

Richard Heathcote (Chair of the National Management Committee) broke the news last month that Phoebe, our National Executive Officer, had tendered her resignation after five years with AGHS. She is moving to a position with another organisation in Melbourne involved with architects and professional practice. She will finish at AGHS on April 13th. A hard act to follow, but recruitment to fill the position has commenced. We will miss her and wish her all the best for the next stage in her career.

New AGHS Website is up and running

Do take time to look at the new national website:

www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au

It is much more user-friendly and has a great deal of information about all the branch activities. Note you may attend other branch activities if you contact them.

Southern Highlands Branch Committees

We have two AGHS committees busily engaged in the Southern Highlands: the Branch Committee and the 2018 Conference Committee. The latter has many of the former members on board but we would be very happy to hear from anyone who would like to join either of these two committees.

Our Branch is considered to be one of the more active in Australia but to organise activities and the national conference is quite an undertaking. Both the committee chairs (Jenny and Meg) believe that it has to be fun or it's not worth doing. Many of us are busier now than ever and unless it's enjoyable no one would turn up to the meetings.

The 2018 Conference committee: Meg Probyn (convenor), Pamela Bennett, John Biffin, Narelle Bowern, Merryleigh Brindley, Ray Bradley, Jenny Carroll, Laurel Cheatham, Jane Clifford, Annabel Murray

Our motto: **Situations are seldom entirely hopeless.** A prize to the first member who emails Meg with the name of the author who wrote that sentence at the end of his book. (megprobyn@bigpond.com)

Tour of Victoria

1-9 May 2017:

This event is fully booked.

Future Events for your Diary Saturday 8 July

Afternoon Seminar at Bradman Museum with Richard Heathcote and Stuart Read. (Details and booking form in next Inflorescence May/June)

Sunday 20 August

AGM and lecture.

Friday 27 – Sunday 29 October: National Conference in Melbourne

To be held in the State Library of Victoria
Lectures Friday and Saturday morning, followed by garden visits Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday.
Optional Day: Mon 30 Oct.: gardens in Yarra Valley
Post-conference NZ Tour 31 October -13 November:
South Island of NZ (see p. 5 for draft itinerary).

Saturday November (date to be confirmed)

Kangaloon Gardens Day

Friday 1 December

Christmas Party

Another reminder!

Southern Highlands Autumn Gardens Weekend 22-23 April 2017

Three town gardens and three country gardens will be open from 10am to 4pm. The Plant Fair will also take place at the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens (corner of Kangaloon and Old South Roads).

Town gardens: *Carisbrooke* and *Retford Park* in Bowral, and *Yarrowin* in Burradoo.

Country gardens: *Wildewood* and *Dragon Farm* in Wildes Meadow; and *5th Chapter Estate* in Avoca.

It's a weekend not to be missed—gorgeous gardens and a wonderful Plant Fair with superb plants.

AGHS Southern Highlands Branch Committee

PO Box 2327, Bowral 2576 (aghs.sh.info@gmail.com)

Jennifer Carroll	Chair	(0419 275 402)
Pamela Bennett	Events	
John Biffin	Treasurer	
Narelle Bowern	Secretary	
Ray Bradley	Tours	
Jane Clifford	Events	
Jo de Beaujeu	Events	(4862 3532)
Meg Probyn	Vice-Chair, Editor, NSW NMC rep.	(4871 3134)

Proposed AGHS Garden Tour to New Zealand 1-14 November 2017 (Post-conference in Melbourne)

The following is the draft itinerary (N.B. It may be subject to minor changes):

Tuesday 31 st Oct:	DAY 1: Fly from MELBOURNE to CHRISTCHURCH Botanic Gardens
Wed 1 st Nov:	DAY 2: CHRISTCHURCH – AKAROA Gardens: Broadfields, Frensham, French Farm
Thurs 2 nd Nov:	DAY 3: AKAROA Gardens: Potters Croft, The Giants House, Fishermans Bay (Harbour Cruise)
Friday 3 rd Nov:	DAY 4: AKAROA – METHVEN Gardens: Ohinetahi, Terrace Station
Saturday 4 th Nov:	DAY 5: METHVEN - HORORATA Gardens: Quartz Hill, Middle Rock, The Point
Sunday 5 th Nov:	DAY 6: METHVEN –MT SOMERS - ASHBURTON Gardens: Surrey Hills, Trotts garden
Monday 6 th Nov:	DAY 7: ASHBURTON – DUNEDIN Gardens: Longbeach, Akaunui
Tues 7 th Nov:	DAY 8: DUNEDIN Gardens: Dunedin Botanic Gardens, Wylde Willow
Wed 8 th Nov:	DAY 9: DUNEDIN Gardens: Glenfalloch, Larnachs Castle
Thurs 9 th Nov:	DAY 10: DUNEDIN TO LAKE WANAKA Gardens: Clachburn
Friday 10 th Nov:	DAY 11: WANAKA / TARRAS / WANAKA Gardens: the Stables, Harrison gardens and House, Lindis Peaks
Saturday 11th Nov:	DAY 12; WANAKA – QUEENSTOWN Gardens: Alpha Burn Station (Glendhu Bay)
Sunday 12 th Nov:	DAY 13: QUEENSTOWN Gardens: Chanticleer or Irelands, Blairs
Monday 13 th Nov:	DAY 14: QUEENSTOWN - Return TO AUSTRALIA