

Inflorescence

February 2026

The Newsletter of the Southern Highlands Branch of AGHS



Events for 2026

Harper's Mansion BYO Picnic: talk with the gardeners	Tuesday 10 March 3 – 6 pm
SHBG Plant Fair & Garden Visits	Weekend 18-19 April
Coach Day Trip Illawarra Rhododendron & Rainforest gardens & Wollongong Botanic Gardens	Tuesday 5 May
Winter Solstice Talks East Bowral Community Centre	Sunday 21 June
Film afternoon at the Empire Theatre <i>The Rose Maker</i> : 2020 French comedy	Thursday 23 July
AGM & 40th Anniversary of Branch	Sunday 23 August
National Conference In Orange, NSW	Friday 25 Sept to Monday 28 Sept
Self-drive Visit to Golden Vale at Sutton Forest: Guided house and garden tours	Wednesday 14 October
End of year/ Christmas Party at Hopewood House, Bowral	Friday 20 November

Lynda Entwistle has kindly agreed to take over the production of our bi-monthly newsletter commencing with the April issue. Meg Probyn will continue to be our sage and wise voice.



Christmas Party 5 December 2025 at Quindalup: Annette O'Donnell (winner of the raffle), Eleanor Dartnall in the centre, and Deidre Hill (Photo: Olga Birrell)

Greetings from the Chair

It has been a busy two months since our last Branch newsletter. The intervening weeks gave your committee an opportunity to take a deep breath and review the structure of our committee and the tasks we variously carry out. In future, Pamela Jane will run our monthly meetings, Sue Trudeau will take on the full responsibility and oversight for our events, Olga Birrell continues to be our Secretary—she oversees the communication with our members, the correct recording of members (their membership, renewals and other data), the recording of our meetings and much more. Lynda Cowley continues to be our brilliant treasurer and our new member

As you know, I am now the Vice-Chair of the National Management Committee. My main role, for now, is the oversight of a National Marketing Strategy. This report was prepared with much input from Olga Birrell and (i) reviews the reason why we require a focus on marketing our Society and (ii) how we do this. The ongoing task is to understand what our marketing will look like, what materials will be available and where these can be distributed. The aim is to provide a marketing kit for each branch committee, enabling them to reach out in different ways in their communities.

This strategy was brought about to address our falling membership numbers nationally. I know I have touched on this topic in a prior newsletter but will again stress the need to increase our numbers in the Highlands—currently our membership stands at 126. The good news is that over recent weeks we have attracted four new members with a further four interested in learning more about our mission and our events. It is just a matter of reaching out to our friends and colleagues.

I mentioned in our last newsletter that the Southern Highlands would be hosting the next National conference in 2029—this

should have been 2028, the planning process will begin later this year and into next year.

Our last events for 2025 were memorable to say the least and I know this newsletter has more information on this topic. The year culminated at Deirdre Hill's arboretum in Sproules Lane—this was our Christmas function which saw our members appreciating not only the amazing beauty of Deirdre's garden but also the clever landscaped spaces that ensure every tree has its own space, including some very old trees—all in wonderful condition. It is a landscape I won't forget very easily. Thank you, Deirdre.

While there will also be a full report on our visit to *Byways* in Bowral, I will just state that this was an extraordinary garden, the house dating back to the late 1800s, the garden with many beautiful old trees, all underplanted with mass plantings of perennials or small shrubs. The total list of plants (kindly prepared by the owners Tony and Jackie Owen) covers three pages, so you can imagine what a joy this was for those that could attend.



The gazebo in the garden at Byways (photo: Meg Probyn)

Our next event is a picnic at *Harpers Mansion* in Berrima where we will be fortunate to walk around the garden with Les Musgrave and Peter Rezek. I look forward to seeing you all there.

Book News

Ruth Bailey has recently been assisting Keva North (Tim North's widow) to find homes for her extensive collection of gardening books. This is an ongoing task and one that will take some time. Keva has kindly donated the following books from her extensive library and these have been added to our branch library:

Lilies, Care and Cultivation – Jeferson-Brown

Hydrangeas Species and Cultivars – Mallett

Bulbs Volumes A-H and I-z – Bryan

Palms and Cycads of the World – Stewart

Conifers – Rushforth

Wisterias a Complete Guide – Valder

A Heritage of Roses – Le Rougetel

Rhododendrons a Complete Guide – Richards

The Orchid Man – Gilbert

English Roses – Austin

For those that are interested, we do have a small library of reference books at 284 Argyle Street, Moss Vale. Please feel free to visit and peruse. Please call me first on 0419 693 839 to check I am in the office.

Eleanor Dartnall

Visit to *Byways* Bowral

17 February 2026



Entry to Byways (photo: Lynda Entwisle)

Thirty lucky members of the Southern Highlands branch recently enjoyed an excellent morning out. We assembled punctually at the Bowral Pool carpark and were efficiently ferried up the Gib to the property now known as *Byways*.

This property dates back to the 1860s and is a classic example of an Old Bowral garden surrounding a Victorian era homestead, now owned and cared for by Jackie and Tony Owen. One of the earlier occupants of the house was Neville Henry Caley, a noted Australian artist specialising in native birds. He named the house *Bona Vista*—Latin for “beautiful view”—and used its elevated siting to enjoy fine panoramic views over Bowral and the Southern Highlands.

It is also thought that Edna Walling may have visited the property and elements of the garden design certainly show her influence: low stone walls, winding paths which invite you to explore, and a copse of birch trees underplanted with bulbs

and Japanese anemones which were just coming into bloom at the time of our visit. There were many other plants to discover as we meandered through the garden: gardenias, magnolias, camelias and lilacs (not in flower) and several roses which were having a second flush after a very good season—the climbing roses ‘Pierre de Ronsard’ and ‘Nahema’, for example. Jackie has worked hard over the 11 years she has been there and propagated all the hydrangeas which are flourishing around the garden borders. We all noted how well kept the garden looked. Tony claims his only role is to keep the grass mowed!



Gorgeous roses (photo: Lynda Entwisle)

The garden rambles over a ½ ha gentle slope and feels incredibly private thanks to the many mature trees which have flourished in the conducive conditions on the side of the Gib. There were maples, dogwoods, crab apples and a large red oak and let's not forget the tremendous cypress hedge which surrounds the property. Amongst all this there is room for some productive trees such as apples and citrus.

Jackie also has a small courtyard with some English box topiary skilfully shaped by her gardener, I believe, and his touch is also evident on the excellent *Teucrium* borders along the front entry path.

After all that fruitful wandering visitors found their way to the gazebo for refreshments supplied by the Committee. Morning tea was enjoyed at tables set up on the shady central lawn and after much happy banter we thanked Jackie and Tony for allowing us to visit their very special property.

Lynda Entwisle

Vale Bud Townsing

1945 - 2025



Bud Townsing left our world quietly at home on 21st November 2025. When diagnosed with cancer earlier in the year, Bud accepted his fate and took one day at a time so he could meet and enjoy many conversations with friends, and spend considerable time with his family. This quiet thoughtful man with a sharp inquisitive mind shared many memories with his friends and family and recorded an oral history of his life for AGHS-SHB. His diverse work experiences and retirement activities brought great wisdom and insight into our Committee meetings, where he was a member for 4 years. He will be remembered always by everyone who knew him in the Southern Highlands community, as well as further afield, for his passion for community and heritage preservation.

As the editor of the *Inflorescence* newsletter during his Committee tenure, Bud documented many historical events, gardens and heritage homes in the Southern Highlands and beyond within the wide geography of the AGHS-SHB. He always appreciated the articles written by many members of the society, but especially Merryleigh Brindley and Susan Hand.

As an active member of the Berrima Museum as well as the Berrima District Historical Society, Bud was able to create the wonderful exhibition *Gardens and Landscapes of the Southern Highlands, Then & Now* at the museum which showcased beautiful historic homes and gardens as well as commercial properties and natural bushland over the past 200 years.

Being an historian and photographer we were all exposed to his advocacy leadership as our communities were frequently challenged by many developers wanting to erase our history for modern developments. Bud believed a book with beautiful photographs spoke many words to the readers and was a

powerful advocacy tool. As a result, he created books describing the history of communities in the Southern Highlands. These included books on Bundanoon photographers in the 1890s, as well as the shops and people in the mid-20th century, past Bowral builders (Alf Stephens & Son), stories of prior leaders of the AGHS in the book called *Garden Cuttings Revisited* describing the contribution of Keva and Tim North to the beginning of the AGHS Journal publication. He also researched the impact of Isobel and Claude Crow from Berrima Nurseries in creating the landscape of the Southern Highlands. Stories were also written about the homes along Church and Edwards Streets and St Jude Street and part of Bowral Street, which helped retain the street development for private housing.

Bud created four photo books while on the Committee to demonstrate how heritage homes and streets were integral to the history of our community especially in The Glebe of Bowral. Amongst many of his advocacy submissions to local authorities was a slide presentation to the Shoalhaven Shire Council which was a great support to the township of Berry as developers attempted to renovate the historic Berry Hotel. His last effort was to help create a submission on behalf of the AGHS-SHB to the NSW Government concerning the Berrima Gaol intrusion of a heritage property and memorial garden by a developer.

He was especially proud of his contribution to the team who created the Community Heritage Study where 410 heritage homes and 7 new heritage conservation areas were proposed for acceptance by the Wingecarribee Shire Council. Many heritage homes in our Southern Highlands community also have beautiful old gardens and trees so the efforts of the team who participated in this initiative would have a considerable impact on their retention.

Bud helped me considerably in my role as Chair of the AGHS-SHB. His guidance and quiet advice, born from much personal experience during his working life, always was much appreciated and helped me and the Committee make worthwhile decisions about the direction of the Branch's activities. During this time he encouraged me to learn how to self-publish books which led to the creation of the books about the Thrushwood Garden. His publishing legacy will endure as more books are on the horizon. *Vale Bud!*

Ruth Bailey

Heritage or Homes: Time to Watch and Act

The NSW Government in November 2025 legislated significant changes to the NSW planning framework, driven by the urgent desire to deliver more housing. The intention is to deliver more homes through a modern, faster, and fairer planning system for NSW.

NSW Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Paul Scully described the legislation as providing a planning system that supports the delivery of more homes, jobs and investment in

an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way. But there are concerns that the legislative changes could affect the conservation of historic gardens and cultural landscapes.

A key element of the new planning system is the creation of a new pathway, Targeted Development Assessment, to help deliver development more efficiently. The targeted assessment pathway will allow certain types of development that have undergone strategic planning or meet specific codes and controls to access a fast-track approval. The NSW Government's stated intention for the legislation is to deliver more homes through a modern, faster, and fairer planning system for NSW. However, the legislation applies to other developments across NSW, not just housing.

In a newsletter in October 2025, the Sydney Branch of Australian Garden History Society raised concerns about numerous historic gardens and landscapes that lack formal heritage listing status, and suggested that the significance of even formally listed heritage sites is uncertain.

The legislative changes were not open for public consultation or comments. Community groups such as AGHS were not able to submit comments. But there was significant debate during the legislation's pathway through both houses in Macquarie Street in September and October 2025. From Macquarie Street, Wollondilly MP Judy Hannan indicated that, while the legislation had the support of both the government and the opposition, a couple of independents did put some amendments seeking to maintain environmental protection.

Key amendments that are now part of the legislation, finalised in November 2025, include restrictions on targeted assessment development to exclude fossil fuel and other projects from fast-tracking, amendments to maintain environment protection and human health as objects of the legislation, inclusion of protections for bush fire prone land and a specified minimum, 28-day public consultation for targeted assessment development. A proposed amendment, to restrict targeted assessment development to residential development only, was unsuccessful.

Reforming the NSW Planning System, a 28 page summary, can be downloaded from

<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/planning-reforms> .That

That summary includes a roadmap for implementation of the planning reforms throughout 2026, and that website also provides the opportunity to subscribe for updates.

In terms of future action by community groups such as Australian Garden History Society, the targeted assessment pathway is the key point in the blueprint for planning. The targeted assessment pathway will allow certain types of development that have undergone strategic planning to access a fast-track approval. But before any development is declared targeted assessment development, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure will publicly exhibit an explanation of the intended effect for a minimum of 28 days and invite submissions.

We need to **watch**: we need to keep an eye on the exhibition of developments that are to be determined as targeted development.

We need to **act**: we need to prepare submissions where impacts on the environment or on heritage tell us that a proposed development is not fit for targeted development assessment.

Alan Olsen

Christmas Party at Quindalup

5 December 2025

Quindalup never fails to enchant us with its spacious lawns and amazing trees. Deidre Hill's garden reflects her passion for collecting plants; she has ten acres of parkland and woodland—featuring a wonderful collection of rare conifers, spruces, firs and shrubs. She has created a unique landscape which is a delight to visitors.

The committee members always worry if we organise outdoor parties—there's always a chance of stormy weather, no matter the season. However, the Christmas Party at 'Quindalup' went without a hitch as the weather was as perfect as it could be in December in the Southern Highlands. Deidre Hill's garden is always a treat to visit. It wasn't an easy event to organise as we needed shelters in case of unpleasant weather but we were able to borrow tents from the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens to supplement our own tent.



*The sky looked slightly threatening—but the evening remained fine
(photo Olga Birrell)*



Quindalup: Christmas party under the trees (Photo: Olga Birrell)



The Frosts enjoying the view



Chatting, drinking and eating!

It looks as though we never moved but everyone enjoyed a stroll round the garden before tucking into the lovely food and drink.

Meg Probyn

Visit to The Shrubbery, Exeter

7 November 2025



The Driveway planting

In just three years, a once-bare paddock has been transformed into *The Shrubbery*—a beautiful 2.4-hectare garden estate in Exeter. Designed and created by Jason Saville and Billy Nichols, it's a place where thoughtful design meets a genuine love of plants and landscape.

Set within the rolling Southern Highlands, *The Shrubbery* offers a rich horticultural experience—from its tranquil lake and young woodland areas to its intricate garden rooms, clipped hedges, and exuberant plantings that blend structure with softness.



A winding gravel path through richly layered plantings of the dry garden

Members were warmly welcomed by Jason and Billy, who shared the story of how their vision for The Shrubbery evolved from open paddock to paradise. We wandered through a series of beautifully composed garden rooms, each with its own distinct mood and planting style, and admired the harmony between formal design and abundant, textural planting.

The gardens were at their spring best, with fresh new growth, flowering shrubs, and contrasting foliage adding layers of colour and interest. Visitors were particularly taken by the

sweeping lawns, gravel paths, and cleverly positioned seating areas that invited quiet reflection.



The circular lawn with fountain



Borders and paths leading to the lake

After a leisurely stroll through the garden, guests enjoyed afternoon tea on the expansive rear verandah overlooking the water. The visit concluded with a happy flurry of plant buying in the on-site nursery, where all plants have been propagated on site by Billy and Jason from cuttings taken from their own garden stock—a testament to their skill and commitment to sustainable horticulture.

Olga Birrell

Thrushwood Books

Ruth Bailey delivered copies of the Thrushwood books to Mel Flyte, Collections Discovery Assistant at the Caroline Simpson Library. Much to the delight of the Librarian, the library now has both copies of the Thrushwood books.

Two copies of each were requested by the State Library of NSW to keep two in the Collections section and two in the Mitchell Library for personal viewing. On 12 January 2026, Leonie and James Furber delivered the books to Craig Beavis, Collection Acquisition Officer, State Library of NSW on 12 January 2026.



James and Leonie Furber with Craig Beavis

45th AGHS conference at Mount Gambier, South Australia

by Jennifer Woodwell

My husband Mark and I spent an interesting few days driving from Bowral to Mt Gambier, via Beechworth and Daylesford, to attend the AGHS Conference at Mt Gambier, and settled into The Barn very nicely. It was an excellent venue for the conference, and buses brought those who were staying in town out to The Barn every morning.

The gardens of The Barn were beautifully landscaped with acres of gorgeous roses in full bloom. The conference had a very busy program of talks and visits to interesting businesses and landmarks in the Mt Gambier area. All attendees agreed this was a very well-run, successful conference. Congratulations to the organisers.

Day 1: Conference Convener Dot Evans opened the conference and welcomed everyone from far and wide. Then we were welcomed by **AGHS Patron Tim Entwisle** who is settling into life at Bowral, where he is getting used to the changes of season. He is impressed by the gardens around Bowral and the great birdlife. He has been appointed Patron of the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens, which are located near his new house. His wife, Lynda, is volunteering at the Gardens and meeting lots of garden lovers. (She is the newest member of the AGHS-SHB Committee.) Tim has launched a new book, *The Sceptical Botanist*, which is a collection of essays about plants—fact and fiction. Through

50 beautifully crafted essays, former director of pre-eminent botanic gardens and self-confessed plant punk, Tim shines a gentle light on everyday questions about plants and gardens, guiding the reader through fact and fiction. Can plants communicate?



Tim Entwisle (All the photos by J. Woodwell)

Keynote Speaker: Trevor Nuttall

Trevor, the author of 25 books, spoke of the AGHS remaining relevant and what we should be doing to make it so. There is a need to embrace technology and he gave the example of Sophie Thompson, who sits up until 1am to update her Instagram account. She stays relevant. As a result, Sophie has a much bigger reach, and we, AGHS, need to embrace innovation to stay in touch with the community.

Morning lectures

Ian Lewis, cave diver and hydrology geologist, was born in SA and was a cave explorer as a kid. The only two areas of limestone are here on the Limestone Coast and the Nullarbor Desert. Ian explained the geological origins of the region and gave us a history of what happened to create this unique Limestone Coast. He explained that there have been thirteen Ice Ages in the last million years. When each Ice Age finished, a ridge was built as the sand came back, so we have ended up with thirteen sand dune ridges. The last ridge would be about the time humans inhabited the Australian coast.

Government ministries of the 1850s were trying to understand the landscape and look for fossils. George Gawler drained the swamplands and found fossilised trees. Another interesting fact is that the Terra Rosa soils of the Coonawarra wine area has been blown across from Mount Lofty Range, as there is no iron found in the underlying limestone of the area.

The next speaker was **Richard Heathcoat** who spoke of “Perceptions of the landscape of the southeast by early European artists and visitors”. As an art lover, I found this presentation particularly interesting and I wish there was more room to document some more of the information Richard shared. He talked about the Limestone Coast from different viewpoints including: by satellite, from above, the

indigenous view, the naval view, colonial expeditions, and photography.

One turning point was when in 1857, the South Australian and Victorian governments were connected by a telegraph line, radically changing communication. In 1856, 15,000 gold-seeking Chinese landed in Robe to avoid the tax they would have to pay if they'd landed in Melbourne. So the Limestone Coast came alive. Richard described the various artists and photographers who have documented the Limestone Coast over the centuries and showed some beautiful examples.

Glenys and Barry Mulligan from **St Mary's wines** were the next speakers and they described the evolution of their garden from 1937 to 2025. They then spoke about the value of being advocates for the preservation of valuable landscapes. They questioned why the membership of AGHS was not attracting Greeks and Italians, who represent a large part of the wine-growing community in this area.

Afternoon visits: In the afternoon, we went for a bus tour around the area, which started at the **Umpherston Sinkhole**, and later to the Bio Gro Factory. The Umpherston sinkhole fascinated us—it was once a typical limestone cave formed by seawater waves corroding limestone rocks. The sinkhole was naturally created when the chamber's roof collapsed. It has been used as a beautiful public garden and meeting place from mid-last century.



Umpherston Sinkhole—can you see the tiny people?

Day 2: AGM Saturday 1st November 2025

The AGM, chaired by **Prue Slater**, was held first thing on Saturday morning. After the AGM, there were a few changes to the executive committee. It was noted that the Society needs a strategic plan with clear goals. Conference attendance is essential, as it is the second biggest income source for AGHS. Bunbury was very successful and we are looking forward to Orange in 2026, then Canberra in 2027, followed by the Southern Highlands in 2028..

Declining membership is concerning. However, it is noted that not all branches are declining. Southern Highlands and

Tasmania are flourishing. As a Southern Highlands member, I would comment that it is flourishing mainly because we are in a history-rich, beautiful area with many wonderful gardens. The branch activities are always centred around one of our many historical homes or gardens. And attendance is always good. New software is live for the membership website, which will be very welcome.

The finance report from **Treasurer Steven Hathaway** will be posted on the website. The declining membership numbers are reflected in the Society's income, which has declined from \$130,000 to \$100,000 to \$80,000 in the last three years. This is very concerning. Issues can be summarised as:

- The AGHS software was fatigued, and accurate membership was difficult to extract. There are strategic plan talks of increasing membership to 2000;
- Cost of doing business: inflation has gone up 3.1% so costs for buses, venues for conferences, etc. have increased;
- The conferences bring in the dollars, but finding venues, etc., involves lots of effort. AGHS is a “not-for-profit”, so please ask yourselves what you can do for AGHS.

Steven thanked members for their generous donations this year, and thanked the branch treasurers for all their work over the year. Eleanor Dartnell and Caroline Grant were elected to the National Management Committee (NMC).

Guest speaker: Uncle Ken Jones from the fisheries spoke about keeping the country as it should be and talked about his company, www.bushadventures.com.au, which runs tours of the enchanted forest, which include ancient campsites in the drowned forest.

Guest speaker: Sue Bell, Supreme Oenologist (Fermentologist) runs Bellwether Vineyard and explained some winemaking terms to us, such as ‘Terroir’, which is a term that encapsulates why wine tastes and smells like it does. Mount Gambier is big wine region—the local limestone base being very suitable. In this interesting geological area, there are dormant volcanoes and sinkholes. Robe is very close to the continental shelf, and this has a very cooling influence on the limestone coast, resulting in the coolest water in Australia. Coonawarra is a perfect cool climate, especially for Cabernet.

Guest speaker: Jason Chagall from Bio Gro gave a fascinating talk about the recycling and utilisation of forestry and other “Waste”. He explained that Bio Gro has diverted waste from landfill for 50 years. The process started with one backhoe. One man started earth moving all around radiata pine, and he was paid to take away the waste. Now this business follows this process: recover, refine, reapply and is currently producing 6 to 7 million bags a year of garden mulch. The principle is that waste is not waste if we use it wisely—in a circular economy, waste does not exist 50 years on from the idea of one man who started the business.

Susan McCormick, director of Carrick Hill, built in 1930s by James Irwin. She explained that they would like to establish

the Australian Museum of Gardening at Carrick Hill, displaying historical garden tools and equipment.

Day 2 afternoon

Bus tour included: **Caroline Hills** garden and vineyard and **Bio Gro** composting facility at Wandilo. (See photo below.)



Sue Tuisk leading the conference members

Conference Dinner at The Barn: **Francesca Beddie**, editor of the Australian Garden History Journal, was the after-dinner speaker. Her topic was *Diplomatic divertimenti*, a reflection on where plants fit into a career bound together by a belief in the power of words—a fascinating insight into Francesca's career.

Day 3: all day bus tour—An early start saw us visit many interesting places, including: *Nangwarry Forestry Museum*—jam-packed full of history and vehicles—big boys' toys! Then *Penola Petticoat Lane* cottages—a street of perfectly preserved historic cottages. After lunch provided by the CWA, we visited *St Mary's vineyard and Garden*, *Yallum Park Homestead and Garden*. Followed by the huge and impressive *Holla Fresh* herb farm at Tantanoola. This facility grows herbs *en masse* for the supermarkets in huge indoor irrigated gardens.



Holla Fresh Herb Farm

What a great conference! Many thanks and congratulations to the organising committee in Mt Gambier.

Dates for the Orange 46th Annual AGHS Conference, 2026

- 22 September (Tuesday)—Start of three-day Pre-Conference tour;
- 25 - 27 Friday to Sunday: Conference;
- 28 September (Monday) Optional day;
- 29 September to 1 October —post conference tour.

We look forward to seeing you all in Orange!

Jenny Woodwell



Beautiful roses from the gardens at The Barn

AGHS-SHB Committee

Chair & Vice-Chair NMC	Eleanor Dartnall
Vice-Chair/ Branch Rep NMC.	Pamela Jane
Secretary	Olga Birrell
Treasurer	Lynda Cowley
Events Coordinator	Sue Trudeau
Editor <i>Inflorance</i>	Meg Probyn
General Member	Lynda Entwisle
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WSC Heritage Rep	Laurel Cheetham
Oral History	Heather McIntyre
Publishing	Ruth Bailey
Events	Sue Trudeau
Advocacy & Nearmap	Ruth Bailey
Tree Register	Pamela Jane
The King's Foundation (Hillview)	Eleanor Dartnall/ Ruth Bailey