

Inflorescence

May 2026

The Newsletter of the Southern Highlands Branch of AGHS

Events for 2026



Winter Solstice Talks

East Bowral Community Centre

Guest Speakers:
Alex Dowthwaite, King's
Foundation &
Hon Michael Pembroke

Sunday 21 June

Film afternoon at the Empire Theatre

The Rose Maker: 2020
French comedy

Wednesday 22 July

AGM & 40th Anniversary of Branch

Sunday 23 August

National Conference In Orange, NSW

Friday 25 Sept to
Monday 28 Sept

SELF DRIVE Golden Vale, Sutton Forest

Guided house tour & tour of
the garden with Head
Gardener
Afternoon Tea

Wednesday 14
October

End of year/ Christmas Party at Hopewood House, Bowral

Friday 20
November



Greetings from the Editor



Hello to all our members from your new editor. Although I am a 'newish' Highlands resident (coming up for 18 months) I feel like I know many of you already! This is partly because of my previous involvement with AGHS Vic Branch, but also through meeting many of you at the multitude of garden related activities that are available in the region. From garden volunteering, attending open gardens or club meetings and even dabbling in botanical art classes, life is full!

Thanks go to Meg Probyn for her previous work on the newsletter and her help during the handover.

Please remember that this is YOUR newsletter so if you have something of interest to our community you would like to share, just send me a message. Reviews of books or recent events are very welcome. Send them to the email address below with subject line 'Editor Inflorescence'

aghs.sh.info@gmail.com

Lynda Entwisle



Lynda enjoying Waratah festival in Robertson



Report from the Chair May 2026

Another busy quarter, our visit to Harper's Mansion, a beautiful afternoon with garden lovers wandering around with the experts, and of course seeing the extension of the camellia walk where we focused on the *Camellia japonica* 'Aspasia Macarthur' and her six sports. As usual, I came home laden with small pots!

April saw many of us participate, in one way or another, in the SHBG Plant Fair and what a success that was, well done Charlotte and team. Again, the pots find their way to Tavistock! Sadly, we had to cancel the planned bus trip to Kiama, given the small number of members who booked to go. This was disappointing as the day was so carefully planned by Sue and Olga, and I can attest to the many hours this took.



We are now planning for a busy period ahead, I know you all have the following dates in your diaries:

The 21st June is our popular Winter Solstice: our first speaker will be Alex Dowthwaite from The King's Foundation Australia, it will be very interesting to hear the short- and long-term plans for Hillview at Sutton Forest. Our second guest speaker is Michael Pembroke author of *Trees of History and Romance*, *Essays from a Mount Wilson Garden* and his more recent book, *Silk, Silver, Opium*. This book is the topic for our Winter Solstice, it explores the intricate history of China's trading relationship with the East. Having read this book I can only say, don't miss this year's event.

The 22nd of July sees our very popular film day at the Empire. This year we will see the French Film 'The Rose Grower'. You might have to get in early for this event as it will be open to the public as well as our members.

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Then our AGM takes place on Sunday, 23rd August, followed by celebrations for the AGHS 40th Anniversary in the Highlands. This will be a special day, the event starting with a talk by Tim Entwisle about his most recent book, *Three Worlds Oak: Memoir of a Genus*, followed by a presentation from Chris Webb and Ian Carroll about the garden at Oldbury in Berrima. Plus, of course, there will be birthday cake for one and all!

Marketing both locally and nationally is of vital importance as our numbers in some States continue to fall. I am glad to note that our numbers in the Highlands have increased a little. You will start to see our brochures pop up in garden outlets, the Information Centre and like places in the coming weeks.



Autumn colour in Eleanor's garden

You will all be enjoying the fabulous autumn colours this week; the drier summer and spring have created a positive wonderland of tones from yellow, through orange to bright red. These photos are from our garden. I have to stop John from raking up the leaves as I love to scuff through them. No wonder we have a tree theme this year!



*Eleanor
Dartnall*



Picnic at Harper's Mansion

March 2026

In March, on a lovely sunny Tuesday afternoon, the Southern Highlands branch of AGHS and guests came together in the gardens of Harper's Mansion at Berrima to launch the new camellia bed signage. This event was the culmination of many years of our branch's involvement in the rejuvenation of this garden: volunteers have helped propagate camellias for the garden, create new garden beds, and donations have supported the production of plant labels and the printing of a wonderful book by Chris Thompson (see below).

Immediate past Chair, Ruth Bailey and well-known local garden expert, Les Musgrave, unveiled the new sign about the camellia sports, after which guests were able to enjoy their picnic refreshments.

Many thanks go to Les Musgrave, current garden manager at Harper's, and Peter Rezak, heritage rose expert, for generously giving their time to make our visit informative as well as enjoyable.



Our Patron, Tim Entwisle in Camellia bed (photo: L. Entwisle)

Chris Thompson, the former volunteer garden manager at Harper's, has kindly supplied us with the notes below and if you are interested in her book, *A struggle for relevance: the garden at Harper's Mansion*, it is available for purchase in the Harper's Mansion shop during their opening hours.



Heritage Camellias at Harper's Mansion, Berrima

When Harper's Mansion was built in the late 1830s it was surrounded by bush, only the area close to the house was cleared to be used for raising animals and growing vegetables.

Today the property is owned by the NSW National Trust and only two of the original 100 acres remain. This area is now a mature and inspiring garden, complete with maze, that helps attract visitors of all ages and interests and contributes to the financial viability of the property. Michael Jackman, who designed and laid out the garden in 1998, did not try to create a garden such as might have existed in the mid-1800s: this would have been inappropriate to the property's history. Rather he created a garden to complement the house. He planted trees around the periphery leaving the centre quite open: wide grassed pathways separate large garden beds, some with perennials some with fruit trees, and the house always in view.

The trees remain but the selection of plants for the garden beds has changed. At some point in time volunteers, who have managed the property since 2006, decided the garden should feature heritage plants. Period furniture in the house, old-style plants in the garden. A collection of heritage roses came first then, in 2016, heritage camellias.

The acquisition of camellias was furthered by the local branch of the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) recognising the significance of plants in the abandoned Berrima Bridge Nursery, once owned by Claude and Isobel Crowe.

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During his time operating the nursery, from 1943 to his death in 1999, Claude had obtained some of his camellia stock from Camden Park where William Macarthur – the youngest son of John Macarthur and a keen nurseryman – had established a large camellia collection. Claude planted the camellias in his own nursery to provide some stock for his landscape business. He likely sourced camellias from other nurseries and breeders. Chris and Charlotte Webb appraised the plants that had survived and AGHS members selected and nurtured hundreds of camellia cuttings. Some plants were donated back to Camden Park, some were sold to AGHS members and in 2013 others, now two-years old, were purchased by Harper’s Mansion. Of these only fifteen plants survived but this was enough to start the collection. The trees along the northern boundary of the property were thinned, an irrigation system installed and the camellias planted underneath.

Initially the camellias were intended only as a backdrop but it was soon realised that camellia aficionados would want to get close up and personnel with these special plants. A path was cut to wind among them and Lyn Barrett, then Chair of the AGHS and Harper’s volunteer, inspired by the work of Dr Stephen Utick of Camellia Ark, suggested Harper’s would be great place to feature camellias known to be in NSW in the 1800s. In support of this the AGHS donated \$1000 for materials to formalise the path and provide signage. Dr Utick opened the collection in 2019. Among the varieties on show were Camellia japonica ‘Orandako’, ‘Prince Eugene Napoleon’, ‘Harriet Beecher Sheather’, ‘Chandleri’, ‘Queen of Denmark’, ‘Jouvan’ and ‘Odoratissima’.

Over the next few years other varieties were added, some purchased, some donated. Camellia Ark continued to provide plants and Dr Stephen Utick was able to take cuttings from some of the Harper’s plants to ensure they became more widely available.

By 2020 the garden show-cased twenty heritage camellias, still quite small but growing fast. In spring the Camellia Walk features hellebores (*Helleborus orientalis*), snowflakes (*Leucojum vernum*) and Spanish bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*), providing a succession of colour until the camellias come into flower.

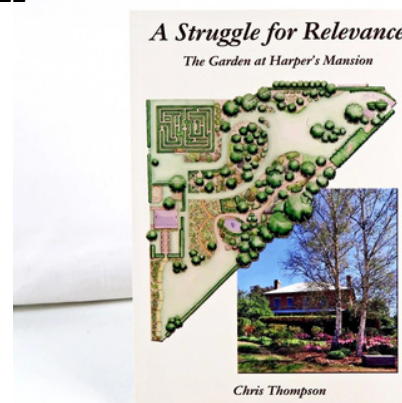


Les Musgrave and Ruth Bailey reveal new signage (photo): L. Entwisle

When Les Musgrave took over the management of the garden from Chris Thompson in 2022 he brought a fresh look to the camellia collection. His interest was piqued by the sports of Camellia japonica ‘Aspasia Macarthur’, a camellia bred by William Macarthur of Camden Park in the 1840s. What is a ‘sport’? You have all probably remarked on a camellia bush ‘sporting’ more than one flower colour or form of flower. The change is caused by a mutation. The joy of it is that a cutting of the ‘sport’ can be grown to produce a new plant, totally different to its ‘parent’. Some have a tendency to revert: some are stable. Six camellias which are sports of ‘Aspasia Macarthur’ are currently known; ‘Lady Loch’, ‘Jean Clere’, ‘Otahuhu Beauty’, ‘Strawberry Blonde’, ‘Margaret Davis’ and ‘Camden Park’. Les has sourced all but two of these – watch this space – and planted them in their own garden bed. The AGHS latest donation to Harper’s has provided signage for this bed – two signs awaiting their arrival.

Chris Thompson - March 2026

Volunteer Garden Manager Harper’s Mansion 2016 – 2022



Autumn Plant Fair Southern Highlands Botanic Garden

The 2026 Autumn Plant Fair at the SHB was an outstanding success. Good weather, terrific plant stalls and great organisation by the staff played their parts not to mention the outstanding efforts of volunteers, many of whom are AGHS members. Chris Webb gives an overview below.

It's amazing what happens when perfect Autumn weather, impeccable planning, fabulous diverse gardens and a marketing grant coalesce.

This year's event was obviously going to be a record breaker from the minute the gates opened on Saturday morning, queues at the entrance at 8.30am are definitely a sign we are in for a huge weekend!!

We sold 4,409 tickets with 2,087 online and 2,322 at the various gates, producing a total ticket income of \$117,680. All other aspects of the weekend were highly successful, along with other income from the BBQ/coffee stall, Plants, bulbs and seeds, Firewood raffle and donations, raising over \$100,000 over the whole weekend, we had a record-breaking result.

Our program of speakers, headlined by the ABC's Clarence Slockee, was very well attended as was the Jazz provided by the band 'Short and Horny' on Sunday. Stall holders provided excellent positive feedback on their experiences and looking forward to returning next year.

Of course, an event like this would not be possible without our absolutely incredible band of volunteers, 132 of them this year alone. My wonderfully dedicated Friends Events Committee members, together with our seconded garden supervisors, worked tirelessly across the gardens and the Plant Fair, supervising key areas and serving on the frontline throughout the event. Thank you all for your hard work, commitment, and enthusiasm.

Chris Webb
Chairman, Friends Events Committee



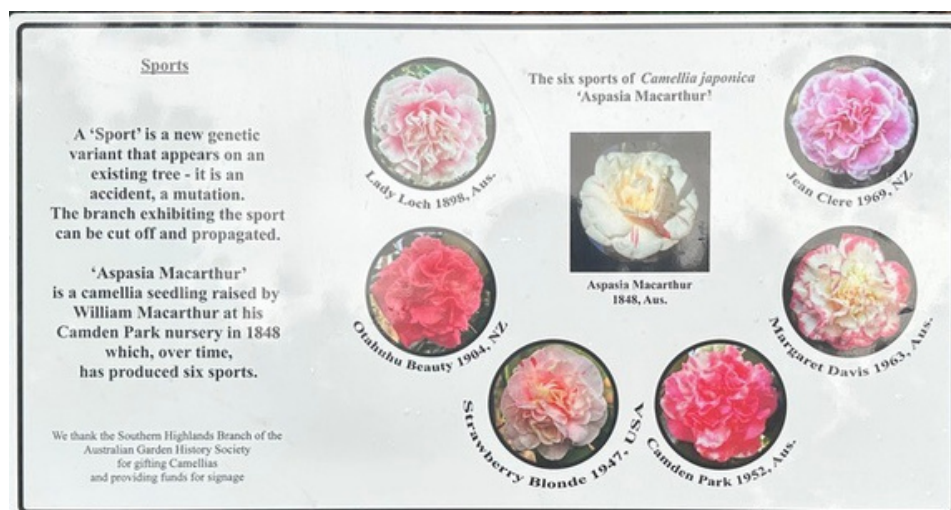
Clarence Slockee and our patron, Tim Entwisle



AGHS-SHB Advocacy Update May 2026

The AGHS-SHB has been actively involved with the preservation of rare and heritage camellias over the past few years.

We have provided support to Harper's Mansion by way of grants, and Chris Thompson and Les Musgrave have provided outstanding care of the many camellias now planted and thriving at the National Trust property.



Sign at Harper's Mansion

In addition, AGHS-SHB members have been actively involved, together with the WSC, ensuring the preservation of the seventeen rare and heritage camellias forming a hedge along Station Street (opposite the exit from Bowral Station). The WSC retained *Camellia* Ark Australia through the efforts of Dr. Stephen Utick and Bill Parker to identify the names of the individual camellias (many dating back to the mid 1800s) and prune back and clean out the terraced garden beds. When finished, Bill provided specific instructions for the care of the heritage as well as the newly planted camellias to the Wingecarribee Shire Council.

Also there are eight heritage camellias planted in Bendooley Place along the fence between the old town hall and the courthouse building. The initiative came from the Bowral Library leadership as well as AGHS-SHB members and WSC planted the camellias in December 2021.

While an agreement was reached with the WSC that both of these camellia sites would be weeded, watered and fertilised according to a schedule provided by Bill Parker, the workload of the horticultural team has been enormous so they have not been able to undertake these tasks in a timely fashion.

In December 2025 I observed that the heritage camellias at the Bowral Library and the gardens surrounding them were in a very sorry state. I alerted the WSC on 10 December of this issue and was advised that this would be focused on by the horticultural team. However, due to time constraints that did not occur and one of the camellias has now died and the others are needing considerable care to bring them back to health.



Camellia japonica 'Lavinia Maggi' in very poor condition on 10 December, 2025 and has since died. It will need to be replaced in kind.

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Consequently, I'm in the process of discussing with Stuart Neal, the WSC Coordinator of Open Spaces, People and Resources, the potential for a contract to be created that would allow members of the AGHS-SHB to provide general upkeep of all of these camellias and their surrounding gardens in addition to work provided by the WSC. I'm optimistic that we can work collaboratively with the WSC to retain the health and beauty of these 'living antiques' so that locals and visitors to the Southern Highland can enjoy beautiful flowers in the winter months. If you would like to participate in a monthly working group to care for these camellias please contact me on 0409 126 718.

Ruth Bailey

Chair - Advocacy Sub-Committee

Upcoming branch events

Winter Solstice Talks - Sunday June 21

TIMINGS 10.30 am - 2.30 pm

LOCATION East Bowral Community Centre

71 Boardman Rd, Bowral NSW 2576

Cost: Members \$65

Non-Members \$75

light luncheon included

For bookings click [HERE](#)



Michael Pembroke

Join us in the depths of winter for some warming talks by two exceptional guests. The first speaker is **Alex Dowthwaite** who is Design & Education Director of The King's Foundation Australia. Alexander currently drives community development, heritage regeneration, and education projects for the Foundation, including the regeneration of Hillview – the former Vice-Regal Summer Residence in Sutton Forest. A specialist in classical and traditional design, Alexander also serves as Chair of INTBAU Australia and has led development projects across the country, ranging from rural disaster recovery rebuilds to metropolitan social housing developments.

The second speaker, the **Hon Michael Pembroke** is an Australian writer, historian, and former judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. His talk will be based on his most recent book *Silk Silver Opium*. It is the epic story of the China trade with the West, starting approximately 2,000 years ago when silk first made its way to Rome and affluent Roman citizens went wild over this never-before-seen fabric. After 1500, when European sailing ships began to arrive in Canton and returned to Lisbon, Cadiz, Amsterdam and London laden with goods, never-before-seen products such as tea and porcelain became a phenomenon. As the trade expanded, the eighteenth century became a period of Chinoiserie mania in Europe, affecting fashions, furniture, landscape design and botany. Plant hunters especially from England sought out the nurseries of Canton and brought back unknown exotic plants and flowers that have become commonplace today.

Film afternoon at Empire Theatre

Wednesday July 22



EVERY GARDEN BLOOMS IN ITS OWN SEASON

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MELAN OMERTA FATSAM BOUTAHMED OLIVIA COTE MARIE PETROT VINCENT DIECIENNE

THE ROSE MAKER

A FILM BY PIERRE PINAUD

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at the box-office or online
empirecinema.com.au



[book here](#)

AGM and 40 Year celebration

Sunday August 23

40th

TIMINGS 10.30 am - 2.30 pm

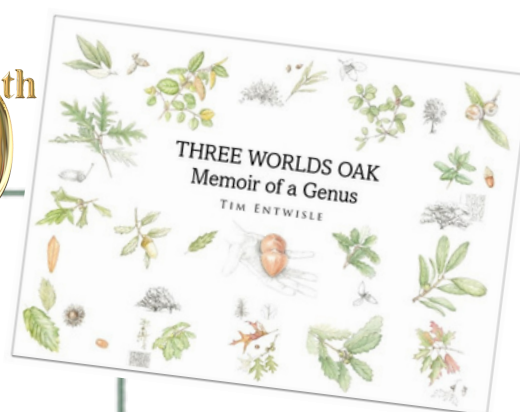
LOCATION East Bowral Community Centre

71 Boardman Rd, Bowral NSW 2576

Cost: Members \$75

Non-Members \$85

Includes luncheon and celebratory cake



Come and celebrate 40 years of SHB with friends! After the AGM our patron, Tim Entwisle, will give us a presentation on his soon to be released book *Three Worlds Oak* and then we shall enjoy lunch and a slice of our 40th birthday cake.

Booking link will be available in June. Watch out for our emails.

Also of interest

Vic Branch - Online Lecture

"Plant Hunters" by Dr David Marsh, UK

About Dr David Marsh

David is an honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Buckingham and a trustee of The Gardens Trust UK, the national campaigning body for the protection and support of historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes. He chairs their education and training committee and writes a weekly blog for them which you can find at thegardenstrust.blog.



Date: Tuesday 30 June 2026
Time: 6pm, connect from 5.45pm
Location: Online via ZOOM
A Zoom link will be provided with reminder email 24 hr before each session.
Cost session: \$15 members, \$20 non-members
Bookings: See TryBooking or [CLICK HERE](#)

Annual Conference - Orange

25 September - 28 September



Fruits of Orange, Exploring Central Western NSW

The registration brochure for the 46th annual conference in Orange from 24–27 September 2026 (optional day, 28 September and pre- and post-tours from Orange to the Blue Mountains) is now available. Here you can read about the lecture program, the garden visits we have planned, the entertainment and extra tours. It promises to be a few days full of stimulating discussion, inspiring gardens and much conviviality.

[Brochure link](#)

Book online at <https://events.humanitix.com/46th-aghs-conference-orange>

AGHS brochure

Recently the local branch produced a brochure about AGHS for distribution in the community to assist in promoting the benefits of membership. If you would like some copies to distribute, please let us know.

aghs.sh.info@gmail.com



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 Inflorescence	Lynda Entwisle
General Member	Meg Probyn

Sub-Committees (chairpersons)

WSC Heritage Rep.	Laurel Cheetham
Oral History	Heather McIntyre
Publishing	Ruth Bailey
Events	Sue Trudeau
Advocacy & Nemap	Ruth Bailey
Tree Register	Pamela Jane
The King's Foundation <i>Hillview</i>	Eleanor Dartnall/Ruth Bailey