

Australian Garden History Society

West Australian Branch

Spring Newsletter 2023

The Australian Garden History Society promotes awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes through engagement, research, advocacy and activities.



Historic Gardens of Perth Book Launch

Many thanks to the members who were able to attend the official launch of *Historic Gardens of Perth: European settlement to Modernism* and the City of Perth who sponsored the event. The success of the event was due to the excellent organisation by Laura Spanhi, Team Leader-Programs and Venues for the City of Perth, and took place in their library's auditorium. Over 80 people responded to the invitation with 65 attending. At the conclusion, attendees purchased books, sought authors' signatures and caught up with friends while enjoying the refreshments the city provided. To date 168 copies have been sold and the book, the first to deal with the garden history of WA, marks a milestone in the branch's history.

John Viska Chair AGHS WA Branch



John Viska with the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, Basil Zempilas who opened the event.

Photo: F Farrelly

West Australian Branch

Contact: Lynette Petersen (lpetersen@aapt.net.au)

West Australian Branch Committee

Chair: John Viska (johnviska@gmail.com)

Secretary: Lynette Petersen

Australian Garden History Society Inc. (Inc in NSW)
ABN 97 291 212 843
ARBN 654 108 915

Welcome to the West Australian Branch. Our Branch has approximately 60 members throughout the state. We conduct numerous events during the year, including lectures and garden visits. Members, guests and visitors are welcome to all events. We communicate with our members by newsletter, email and the AGHS website for all events.

<https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au>
info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au

Historic Gardens of Perth: European settlement to Modernism

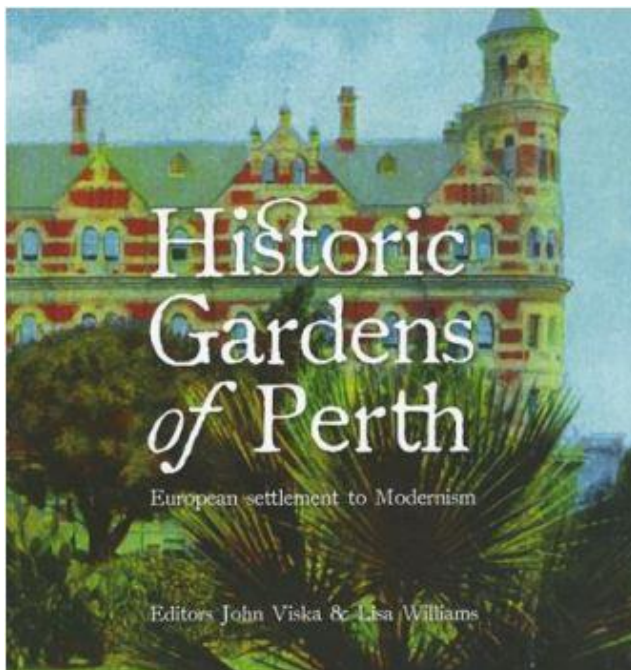
Book News

John Viska has been very busy promoting the new publication and has given three presentations to community groups.

The Maylands Historic and Peninsular Association's recent newsletter reviewed John's talk as follows:

"Our talk in August was given by John Viska, Chairman of the WA Branch of the Australian Garden History Society who was well-qualified and very knowledgeable about the many different gardens that have existed in and around Perth since Settlement. He entertained and informed the good-sized audience with his fascinating accounts - particularly when he went on to talk about some of the gardens that used to exist around Maylands.

We all enjoyed hearing his description of the huge garden (and swimming pool!) at Killowen House - now part of the St John of God Hospital on Thirlmere Road - and the grounds that extended from the Gables (adjoining the Albany Bell factory) all the way down to the river. What a shame to have lost those great gardens! Quite a few of the audience took advantage of being able to buy a signed copy of the new book "Historic Gardens of Perth". We purchased a copy for the MHPA Library - so pop in and look through it if you are interested in some of this history."

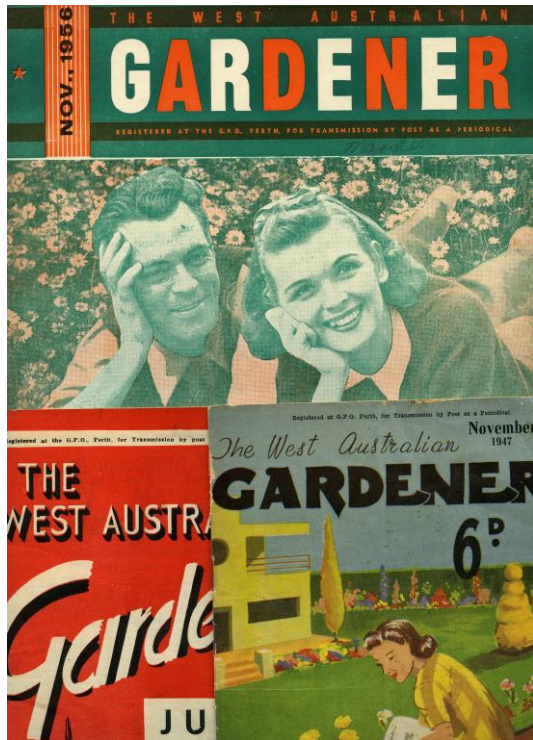


In June our book was entered in the Royal Western Australian Historical Society's Lee -Steere /Williams annual book prize on the recommendation of the Readings and Publications Committee. Even though we were not successful we made it to the short list! The convener stated:

"Though not a prize-winner, your book with its broad approach encompassing pleasure as well as productive gardens and excellent illustrations makes a splendid addition to the number of books on Perth's History.

West Australian Gardener Magazine Database Project Lyn Oliver

The *West Australian Gardener* was a magazine published by the Horticultural Council of Western Australia. It was launched in 1932 and was the first monthly gardening magazine produced in Western Australia. Prior to that, gardening information for local conditions was published in the newspapers and a regular weekly gardening column in the *Western Mail*.



Besides providing gardening advice it was also the official organ of the Horticultural Council of WA containing a directory of horticultural societies.

In the early 1990s, the national body of the Australian Garden History Society commissioned Richard Aitken to coedit *The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens*. The West Australian branch discussed the possibility of producing a database from the *West Australian Gardener* as a separate project for its members. It was deemed a worthwhile project as the magazine contained information appropriate to the garden history of Western Australia through its articles and advertisements.

This invaluable index to the articles in the *West Australian Gardener* has lain dormant until now as the results of this project have now been compiled into a document that is available on the AGHS website

To find out more about the project and how to use the database, please click below:

[Western Australia - Australian Garden History Society](#)

National Conference 2024 John Viska

Bunbury 18th, 19th, 20th of October 2024 with Monday 21st optional day.

Over the three days the morning sessions will be in the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre (BREC) with coach visits in the afternoons to venues and gardens in Australind, Dardanup, Ferguson Valley, Busselton and Yallingup. On the Monday Optional Day delegates will visit Wellington Dam, explore the Golden Valley Tree Park in Balingup and see historic Ferndale. Inquires in regard to the conference dates and location are being made from eastern state members who are already planning their trip to WA in 2024.

New Members

Welcome to new member Catherine Lang. We hope you enjoy being part of the society and look forward to meeting you at some of our events.

Projects

Pensioner Guard Cottage John Viska

1 Surrey Street, Bassendean

Members who attended the December Christmas function, will remember viewing the cottage and hearing Reece Harley from the Museum of Perth outline its intentions for creating an interpretive garden and how the WA branch could possibly assist. In discussions with Reece I mentioned the possibility of involving UWA Landscape Architectural students in the project. Eight third year students showed interest and on Saturday morning the 9th of September, five met on site to meet and hear Reece outline the aim of the project. Afterwards they inspected the site, recorded the surviving plants and photographed the study area. Historical photographs and documents relating to the cottage's history were seen inside the main house as well as my power point presentation titled Colonial Kitchen Gardens. Their designs will be submitted and assist in the implementation of the garden. As the property is listed on the State Register for Heritage Places the project will provide valuable experience for the students, who may in future work on heritage related projects. An archeological study is timetabled to take place before any garden work can begin so it may not be until next year that the garden takes shape.



Third year Landscape Architecture students at the Pensioner Guard Cottage Bassendean with John.
Photo: Reece Harley, Museum of Perth.

Wirra Willa John Viska

We are looking forward to the City of Armadale's next step in the restoration of the garden and the Chair will write an article for the AGHS Journal.

Hyde Park John Viska

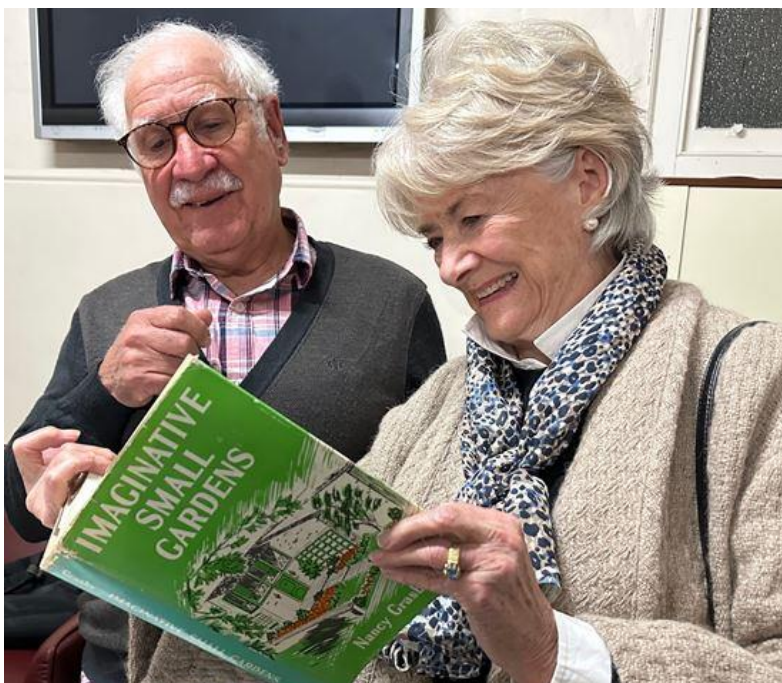
We are awaiting the new Conservation Plan which is to be commissioned in the 2023/24 financial year.

Nancy Grasby Talk Sue Davis

In June John Viska gave a presentation on Nancy Grasby to the Guildford Association.

For many years John has been collecting information on Nancy Grasby, a Guildford resident in the early 1900s. When invited to be a guest speaker at the Guildford Association, Nancy was therefore the ideal topic for his presentation.

Nancy was born Hannah Catton Grasby, daughter of William Catton Grasby and Hannah Grasby, in 1903 in Mitcham, then an outer suburb of Adelaide. Her father was Principal of Roseworthy Agricultural College and the owner of the South Australian publication *Garden and Field*. He visited WA in 1904 and through Charles Harper was engaged as a lecturer in agriculture at Guildford Grammar School. He was appointed Agricultural Editor of *The Western Mail* in 1905. So began the family association with Charles Harper, Woodbridge, Guildford, and for Nancy, an early introduction into what was to become a career in garden design.



John Viska and Sue Davis with a copy of Nancy Grasby's book *Imaginative Small Gardens*.

Wise's Post Office Directory lists the Grasbys at 2 Turton Street, Guildford in 1908. The house, at the end of a cul-de-sac, has terraced gardens sloping to the Helena River. The garden that Nancy would have known can be imagined from a description of number 2 Turton Street in the Guildford Garden Study produced by Lorraine Lingard and Kath Napier in the 1980s. A wisteria on wooden supports separated the front and back gardens and a bougainvillea hedge grew inside the front fence. Two camellias were in the front garden and hoop petticoat daffodils, a special interest of her father's, would

also have been seen. Crepe myrtle and an Irish Strawberry tree were located near the front gate. Jonquils, snowflakes and chasmanthe still appear every year.

Nancy attended Guildford primary school and then became a student at the newly established Perth College in Mt Lawley, attending from 1917 to 1921. She enrolled at UWA in 1922, completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1925.

The first reference to her working career is in 1930 when on the death of her father she took over his Mutual Farm Help column in the *Western Mail* newspaper. She was on the Education Broadcasting Committee of Western Australia and regularly presented a talk on 6WF radio on the topic of Women in Agriculture. For some years she was on the staff of the *Western Mail* and in 1934 opened a tearoom with former Perth College friend Molly Ick on the corner of St George's Terrace and Howard Street.

However Perth seems to have run out of inspiration for Nancy. 1934 also sees her leaving for overseas destinations. She is reported as sailing to England but while on a holiday in Hong Kong is appointed as a secretary to the British Trade Commission and over the next twelve months spends time in Peking and travels up the Yangtze Kiang River. She travels to the Japanese island of Koto Shose with a group of psychologists under the auspices of the Rockefeller Institute.

Perhaps her connection with the Rockefeller Institute led to further moves. 1937 finds her in America, apparently a student studying Landscape Architecture at Davis College of Agriculture in California. She travels through the western and southern states of America and in 1939 the West Australian reports that she is studying landscape gardening at Ambrose State College in Massachusetts. Now, she begins to draw on her background in the press and contributes articles to the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune. After living for twenty years in New York, the Hearthsides Press, New York, publishes her book *Imaginative Small Gardens*.

In 1965 she returned to Australia and took up residence at 4 William Street Kalamunda. She involved herself in local community activities and belonged to a gardening club. In 1970 she produced a landscape plan for Woodbridge, selecting native plants for one of the beds to acknowledge the Harper sisters who established their Wyemando nursery on the Woodbridge site, the first to specialise in growing native flora in the state.

John recalls meeting Nancy at the home of Mary Hargreaves in Kalamunda in the late 1980s. She gave John a Yates garden calendar dated 1939 and a copy of their booklet on *War Effort Gardens*. Some five years ago John found *The Curious Gardener* by Jason Hill published in 1932, in the Guildford Second Hand Bookshop. Inscribed inside was the name of the owner, Nancy Grasby.

Nancy died in 1991 in Como and is buried in the South Guildford Cemetery.

Annual General Meeting 2023 Felicity Farrelly

The 34th Annual General Meeting of the AGHS West Australian Branch was held at the Royal Western Australian Historical Society at Stirling House at 2pm on the 13th August 2023.

It was wonderful to catch up with old and a few new members at the AGM at Stirling House. Great venue and a lovely afternoon tea followed. Overall, 25 members and three guests attended and seven apologies were received.



Members and guests who attended the AGM.

Photo: L Tang

Chair, John Viska, welcomed all members to the afternoon AGM which was followed by the guest speaker, well known historian Gillian Lilleyman.

Thanks were extended by President John Viska to retiring committee member and AGHS representative Patsy Vizents for the consistent and detailed work she has put into keeping the branch fully informed of changes and progress of the National Management Committee of the AGHS. Patsy will continue to record past members' reminiscences of the AGHSWA. Patsy was not able to attend the meeting however the membership showed appreciation for her efforts. John also congratulated WA member Carolyn Grant, being elected an independent member to the AGHS National Management Committee.

John gave a detailed report of the many events held by the Association over the last 12 months and also reminded members that the dates for the 2024 Annual National Conference in Bunbury are Friday 18th, Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th with the optional day on Monday

21st October A post conference tour is being organised and the conference committee is in the throes of finalising accommodation options and speakers.



Lynette Petersen (Secretary), John Viska (Chair) & Sue Davis (Treasurer)

The meeting progressed through the nominations for committee with all committee returned. John explained he was given the opportunity to continue to be president to ensure the national conference in Bunbury has a continuity of a long-term experienced team leader. All the members were happy to re-elect John in the role in 23/24 and also returned were:

Secretary Lynette Petersen, Treasurer Sue Davis, Newsletter Editor Lyn Oliver and committee members Sue Medalia and Felicity Farrelly. There is the opportunity for new committee members who may wish to put their names forward. Please contact John if you are interested.

The Financial Report was delivered by the Treasurer, Sue Davis, and accepted by members.

John happily reported on the publication of the AGHWSA publication *Historic Gardens of Perth: European settlement to Modernism* and invited members to attend the book launch to be hosted by the City of Perth on Monday 11 September at 2pm at the City of Perth Library. The book is available online on the AGHS website. Price with postage is \$60.

[Historic Gardens of Perth - Australian Garden History Society](#)



Historian and author Gillian Lilleyman was the guest speaker at the AGM.

Gillian Lilleyman, the guest speaker, then spoke to the AGM of not only the stories behind the establishment of Caves Road from Busselton to Augusta but also the ‘shenanigans’ and likewise wisdom of the politicians and local landowners of the time. The research has resulted in a wonderful read titled ‘Purpose Built: The Making of Caves Road’. Gillian was thanked for her talk and the AGM finished with an afternoon tea.

WA Branch Event Diary

Day in the Country: Spring into York!

Sunday 15th October, Peace Park, Joaquina Street, York

Spring into York! is a weekend of displays, tours, talks and everything gardens and gardening at various venues throughout York. On Sunday 15th October AGHSWA members and friends are invited to meet at 10am at Peace Park for BYO morning tea and then visit some of the York Garden Club open gardens (gold coin donation requested at gate). The program is attached. Please RSVP to Lynette Petersen at lpetersen@aapt.net.au so we have an idea of numbers attending. Thank you!

[Events » York Visitors Centre](#)

Wirra Willa, Armadale

There may be a visit to Wirra Willa in November.

Further information will be provided as plans are developed.

Christmas Function 2023

Sunday 3rd December

Buckingham House, Wanneroo

10 Neville Dr, Wanneroo WA 6065

Further information will be provided.

2pm. BYO shared afternoon tea and Annual Chairman’s Quiz

https://www.wanneroo.wa.gov.au/info/20058/museums_culture_and_arts/130/buckingham_house

WA Events of Interest

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009 / 6488 3707 / lwag@uwa.edu.au

Season 3 of the 2023 Program runs from 9th September to 9th December has three free events that may be of interest to members. Click on the link for tickets.

Legacies of Botanical Art: Dorothy Erickson, Friday 29th September

[Legacies of Botanical Art: Dorothy Erickson Registration, Fri 29/09/2023 at 1:00 pm | Eventbrite](#)

Collections and Knowledge: a symposium, Saturday 18th November

[Collections and Knowledge: a symposium Registration, Sat 18/11/2023 at 2:00 pm | Eventbrite](#)

In Conversation: Bernice Barry with Kingsley Dixon about Georgiana Molloy, Thursday 30th November

[In Conversation: Bernice Barry with Kingsley Dixon about Georgiana Molloy Registration, Thu 30/11/2023 at 6:00 pm | Eventbrite](#)

Holmes à Court Gallery Exhibition: FLORA: The Art and Science of the Plant
Gallery no 10, 10 Douglas St, West Perth / 6217 2641 / laetitia.wilson@heytesbury.com.au
Exhibition presented by the Holmes à Court Gallery in association with the Botanical Art Society of Australia.

Within this exhibition, scientifically accurate botanical illustrations of natural forms are created with close attention to microscopic detail. Using the tiniest of brushes and sharpest of pencils, the exquisite detail provides a richness inviting the appreciation of the uniqueness of nature. Also includes artworks from the **Japanese Association of Botanical Illustration** exhibiting as a group for the first time in Australia. The exhibition includes rarely seen historical botanical artworks from the Janet Holmes à Court Collection.

[Flora : The Art And Science Of The Plant \(holmesacourtgallery.com.au\)](http://holmesacourtgallery.com.au)

AGHS National Events

2023 Annual National Conference, 29th September to 1st October 2023
[2023 Annual National Conference - Australian Garden History Society](#)

2024 Annual National Conference, Friday 18th / Saturday 19th / Sunday 20th October. The optional tour day is on Monday 21st October 2024. Venue: Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre (BREC), Western Australia.