

# Australian Garden History Society

## West Australian Branch

## Spring Newsletter 2025

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



### *New Chair's Welcome*

It is a great honour to have been elected Chair of the West Australian Branch of the Australian Garden History Society, following the expired term of John Viska, whose many years of dedicated leadership and contribution we gratefully acknowledge.

I am privileged to work alongside an outstanding and experienced committee, united by a shared commitment to the study, preservation, and celebration of our garden heritage. In the year ahead, our focus will include strengthening advocacy for historic gardens and working on the development of a grants program to assist owners in undertaking restoration, re-creation, or conservation management planning for their significant garden.

I am also pleased to share that I will be presenting a two-part talk early next year on Historical Gardens in Darlington.

Finally, I extend a warm invitation to members who may wish to become more involved in the work of our Branch. We would welcome new perspectives and fresh energy to help us continue promoting awareness and conservation of Western Australia's unique and culturally significant gardens and landscapes.

*Ursula Sharman, Chair, AGHS WA Branch*

#### **West Australian Branch**

**Contact:** Lynette Petersen ([lpetersen@aapt.net.au](mailto:lpetersen@aapt.net.au))

#### **West Australian Branch Committee**

**Chair:** Ursula Sharman ([westaustraliangardenhistory@gmail.com](mailto:westaustraliangardenhistory@gmail.com))

**Secretary/Treasurer:** Lynette Petersen

**NMC:** Felicity Farrelly

**Newsletter:** Lyn Oliver

**Social Media Liaison:** Ursula Sharman

**General:** Sue Medalia

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 70 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](mailto:info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au)

## ***A Garden Full of Weeds*** Ursula Sharman (text and photos)

A few years ago, I invited a well-known garden consultant to visit my garden. After a slow wander around the beds, she turned to me with a thoughtful look and said, “You realise more than half of this is weeds?”

Weeds.

For those who don’t know, I live in the Perth Hills, in a hundred-year-old home surrounded by a garden of similar age and character - filled with old stone walls, gravel paths and trees that have quietly watched a century of seasons come and go. “A weed,” as the old adage goes, “is simply a plant in the wrong place.”

Apparently, I had a garden full of them.

When my husband and I first purchased the property, it was the garden that captured my heart. I remember thinking it would take my lifetime to grow trees and specimens of such maturity. There’s something deeply humbling about inheriting an established garden — the slow unveiling of what changes each with each season, and the element of surprise when something you didn’t plant emerges after the rain.

Perhaps I wore rose-tinted glasses, but I didn’t see the Cape Honeysuckle *Tecoma capensis* — which forms a natural fence and sound barrier around the property — as a weed. Nor did I consider the great Cape Lilac *Melia azedarach*, which welcomes half of Perth’s red-tailed black cockatoos each year, as an intruder.



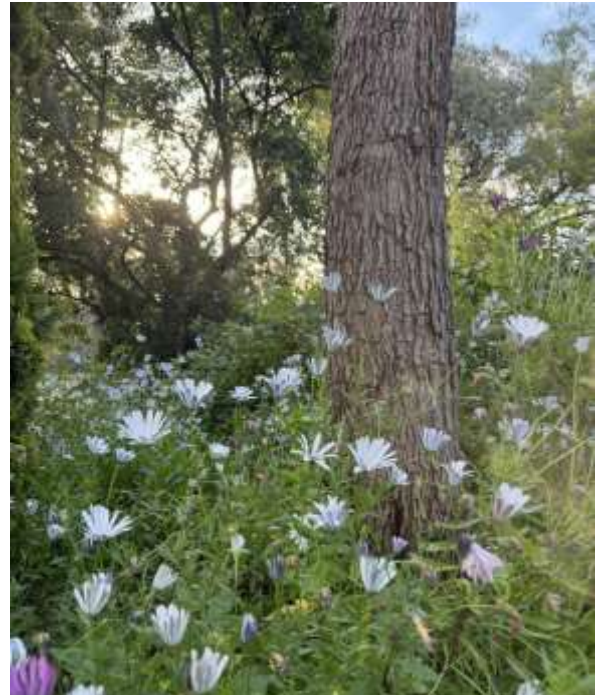
The Freesias *Freesia alba* that perfume the air each spring don’t offend me either (though they seem to offend the consultant). The Harlequin Flowers that appear like painted silk in early summer, the sprawling Nasturtiums whose nectar my daughter proudly showed me how to sip from the flower’s spur — all of these, to me, are part of the garden’s living story.

A cheerful cascade of yellow nasturtiums make a statement with their rambling growth

Each autumn, the Naked ladies *Amaryllis belladonna* that appear just before Easter, quietly remind me that winter is on its way. The Agapanthus — planted long before the advent of sterile, non-seeding varieties — bloom all at once, a spectacular blue chorus that ends abruptly, leaving me the gentle task of gathering hundreds of seed heads to keep their numbers in check.

Then there's the African Veldt Daisy *Osteospermum ecklonis*, its nyctinastic behaviour of petals closing each evening as if tucking themselves into bed — a small reminder that perhaps flowers have feelings too. The Arum Lillies *Zantedeschia aethiopica*, flowering when there's little else happening at the end of winter, always make a lovely vase arrangement and bring the garden in when it is needed most. The Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster pannosus* that holds the top garden bed together against erosion survives entirely on neglect and no water.

To me, these are not weeds. They are survivors — remnants of garden fashions past, witnesses to changing times and tastes. They've adapted, endured drought and neglect, and quietly made themselves at home. They are part of the heritage of this place.



African veldt daisies display their nyctinastic behaviour

I don't disregard the real and complex ecological issues Australia faces with invasive plant species. I understand the damage they can cause when they spill beyond the garden fence into bushland that cannot compete. But I also recognise the nuance — that not every plant labelled a "weed" is without value or story.

Beauty, after all, lies in the eyes of the beholder.

I could, as advised, strip my garden bare and follow the current mantra - the minimalist designer look or the native only approach that's now so popular it even comes with grant funding. But to do so would be like tearing pages from a family album — erasing the evidence of all that came before.

Instead, I manage my so-called "weeds" with respect. I pick flowers before they go to seed, maintain a buffer between my garden and the bushland reserve, and remove unwanted seedlings or seed heads before they wander too far.

To remove them entirely would be, I think, to rip the soul out of the garden — to silence its history in the name of progress.

Because sometimes, a weed is not a weed at all. It's simply a survivor with a story.

## ***NMC Farewell to a Stalwart Executive***

*Felicity Farrelly, AGHS NMC member for WA & AGHS National Management Committee Secretary*

When Prue Slatyer took on the Chair of the AGHS late last year she indicated she would be an interim chair. Within the 12 month period we have seen this interim chair lead an NMC which has finally installed the new payment software for memberships, executed a strategic direction and addressed the financial stability of the society.

The installation of the TidyHQ system, which was finalised just recently, will mean that members can easily pay their membership online. Should anyone require help please contact the executive officer, Sarah at the national office. Instructions are available via this link: [here](#). The society has recently been audited and the results of this have highlighted the dependency on membership and Conference funding. Conferences highlight the value of the society and members continue to be the vital link between AGHS profitability and the role of advocacy in local issues. Not only has this been a year of clarity, there has also been the focus on a new strategic plan, led by one of our founders, Jane Lennon.

We have refocused on membership activities with a new Facebook and Instagram page to be implemented by retiring Vice Chair and past Executive Officer Lisa Nuttall and the Editor of our successful journal Francesca Beddie. The branches in NSW are confident of a well-attended conference with over 250 attendees expected in Orange in 2026. The number of members attending the Mt Gambier Conference has risen to 140 with an expectation of a significant profit to the national organisation. Prue Slatyer also recommended that the Society move to the Humanitix ticketing software, which is Australian and it donates all of its profits to charity. It has more options to give members an uncomplicated way to select options for Conference and other activities. The partnership subcommittee which I chaired has reviewed partnerships and Memorandums of Understanding and will place on the national website (within the next month) a new section to access ideas to set up MOUs and informal partnerships as a way to highlight the AGHS and potential profitability of partnerships with garden tour companies.

As I write this at 'The Barn' in Mt Gambier I am positive with the way this Association has taken on board actions which mean it will reduce costs and rekindle the focus on membership. It has been highlighted that many organisations and societies are falling in numbers but the positivity of members at the welcome evening at the Mt Gambier Town Hall tonight highlights our society's strong pull. We provide the thrill and adventure of garden and landscape exploration and reigniting old friends and making new connections.

It was pleasing to see the initiative of the AGHS National Oral History Collection Committee under the Chair, Patsy Vizents, release a short oral history collection at this conference. Very comprehensive in background information, short and readable topical histories especially the achievements of a couple of younger members it is a colourful addition to our AGHS welcome kit.

As I wrote the above before conference, just after our NMC meeting I can now inform you that the Conference was fantastic. A new NMC Executive has been elected, with Helen Oates, Chair, Eleanor Dartnall Vice Chair, Stephen Hathway continues as Treasurer and myself elected as Secretary. Caroline Grant was re-elected as one of the NMC members and Eleanor Dartnall was elected for the other NMC position.



## ***The Bloom Festival in the Great Southern District*** Sue Davis (text & photos)

Heavy rain drenched Kojonup for the October garden festival weekend. Of the four gardens open, two were outstanding, each entirely different.

Pine Avenue, the farmhouse garden of Cathy and Lefty Wright, will be familiar to some of our members. Developed over forty years, it began, carved out of a sheep paddock, by Lefty's mother. The garden has changed a great deal during that time and its metamorphosis continues.

Approached from Albany Highway north of Kojonup, the property immediately resonates with the interests of the occupants. The substantial drystone wall entrance leads to a driveway of *Pinus pinaster* which culminates in an elegant garden of approximately one hectare, set in an undulating rural landscape. Vistas from all points reveal the landscape of the 4000 hectare grazing and cropping property. Stone walls, handmade by Lefty from granite gathered from the property, define the garden entrance and give Edna Walling-like structure to the garden.

At the rear of the house, a circular lawn is edged by a tennis pavilion, a magnificent wisteria-covered pergola and garden beds of poppies, lavender, valerian, borage, euphorbia and clipped balls of westringia. Roses abound. Lamarque covers the tennis pavilion. Lorraine Lee and Crepuscule flower all summer. Rugosas proliferate and include Sarah Van Fleet, these being so prickly that the parrots avoid them.





The view from the front garden is a sweeping vision over the ha-ha to the homestead paddocks and distant farmland. Plantings of oaks, english elms, golden robinias, ornamental pears and plane trees scatter through the fields, leading the eye on a merry dance through the contrasting foliage colours. And sheep safely graze.

Trees are becoming an increasing feature both within the garden and across the farm. But over the years efforts to establish trees has been made difficult by the predation of parrots. Some deciduous trees are not as attractive to the birds. An ornamental flowering plum, (*Prunus ceracifera* 'Nigra'), planted in an avenue, gives a month of magnificent blossom. A number of varieties of ornamental pear trees seem to like the area and are excellent value in

spring and autumn. Both claret ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*) and golden ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) are a feature and chinese elms (*Ulmus parvifolia*) are hardy and attractive. An old variety of crab apple, (*Malus* 'Eleyi') first introduced as a sucker by Eric's mother does well.

Cathy has recently introduced compacted gravel pathways which deliver a soft neutral aspect giving the impression that the perennials, as they encroach the pathways, are growing wild. Original farm fencing made from the white ant resistant jam tree has been recycled as garden fencing beyond which is the wider landscape.



The other garden, La Hacienda, developed over forty five years was a riot of succulent and cactus plantings which left one dizzy with disbelief. Far too exotic to be absorbed in one visit, arrangements were made with the owner to revisit the garden privately. A newsletter report will follow.



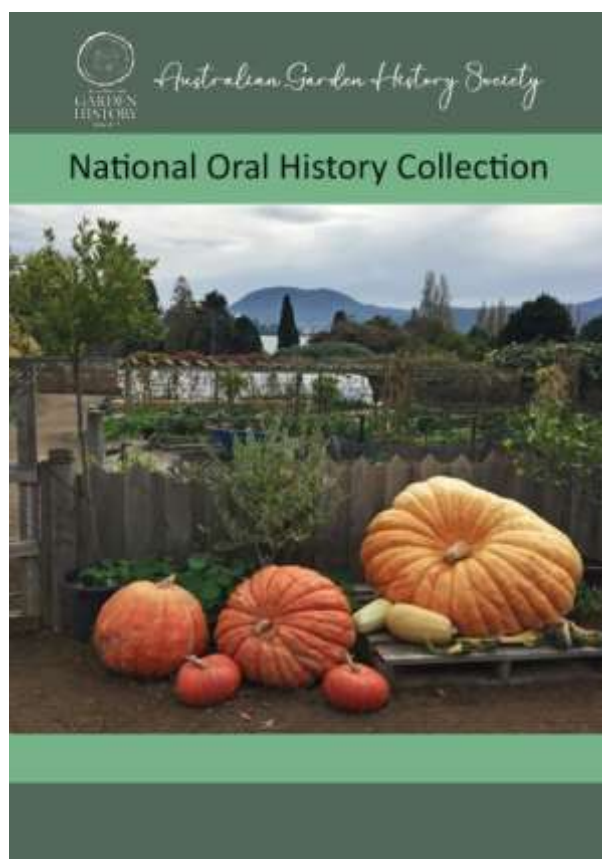
## **Oral History Booklet 2025** Patsy Vizents, Chair of the Oral History Committee

Were you at the Mittagong AGHS conference in 2018? Do you remember the sumptuous booklet produced by the Southern Highlands Branch containing oral history interview summaries? This year, the oral history committee decided they would like to produce another booklet, similar in style and design to the 2018 version. There are currently 68 oral history interviews on the AGHS website and it is predicted that a further four or even five will be uploaded this year, so we felt it was a pretty good way of promoting our increasing collection.

Selecting which interviews for inclusion in 2025 relied on ensuring as many branches were represented as possible but we only had six months to undertake the job, dictating the number of selected interview summaries to 13. Even so, we managed to get a broad range of interview topics and branch representation. After the work was done by the oral history committee and editing and design work finalised, branches were asked to support and contribute to the production of the booklet to enable it to be produced in time for the Mount Gambier conference in October, 2025. And remarkably it has been done. Branches responded positively to the request and thankfully, costs of printing, transportation and distribution were covered.

The booklet is provided to all delegates as part of the “show bag” at the Mount Gambier conference and there will be a few copies made available for branches. These can be distributed to speakers or garden owners or in any way the branch wants but the booklet will be uploaded to the website soon so all can see it. Only a few were produced so they are sought after objects. The cover is a pic of a variety of pumpkins grown at Tasmania’s Government House garden and the photograph was taken by Rhonda Hamilton of the Tasmanian Branch of AGHS in 2022. It reflects the theme of Mount Gambier’s conference, *Beyond the Garden Gate* and it is hoped that another booklet will be produced for the 2026 conference to be held in Orange, NSW. I can note that when the theme for this conference is finalised I will be keen to find a suitable photograph to reflect on the front cover. Please feel free to contact me with ideas regarding this next booklet. But in the meantime, as chair of the oral history committee, I would like to thank the West Australian branch for their unwavering support for the production of the 2025 booklet and enthusiastically encouraging the oral history program as a whole. The Oral History committee was thrilled to receive such valuable support.

Well done WA.



## Landscapes at Risk – AGHS Advocacy Issues

### **Galup, formerly Lake Monger** *John Viska*

Recently, a notice placed by The Town of Cambridge appeared on page 46 of the August 10, 2025, Post newspaper. The item RFQ 2025-21 was for the preparation of a Cultural Heritage Scoping Study and to provide other Cultural heritage work as Requested for Lake Monger.



Above: Galup, formerly Lake Monger, willows.

[lake monger willows - Search Images](#)

Members may not be aware that the existing willows along the water's edge, that consist of the weeping form *Salix babylonica* and the more upright cricket bat *Salix caerulea* are surviving elements of the original designed landscape instigated the City of Perth's Gardener Mr H.N. Braithwaite. He was inspired by seeing the willows planted around Lake Wendouree in Victoria when he attended a National City Gardeners' Conference in the 1930s.

Consequently, sixty willows were planted at intervals of 60ft (20metres) apart from Bourke Street on the east to Gregory Street on the west. The cuttings, donated by the Ballarat Council came from Lake Wendouree in Victoria and were grown on in the City of Perth's Claisebrook Nursery. Prior to this beautification, a large willow planted around 1912 could be seen at the lake. It had been propagated from a cutting off a specimen planted along the Perth Esplanade waterfront in the early days of settlement, the original clonal material being from cuttings obtained from the willows growing on Napoleon's Tomb on the island of Saint Helena.



Since the early 1900s, the place has been important for recreational activities and is one of the few remaining designed landscapes from the 1930s that has not been significantly modified. The surviving mature plantings represent the landscape style, plant selection and layout of an earlier era.

Another feature of the willow planting is the formal regular spacing typical of the planting style of the period. Recent new plantings of different species, in informal groups, along the southern water's edge are not reflective of the original design and will hence change the look that has been a feature of the water's edge for ninety years.

The Galup (Lake Monger) Management Plan 2024-34 on the Town of Cambridge website states:

*“Long-term management focuses on retaining, conserving and enhancing the significant parkland. It includes managing trees to promote sound health, improve public safety and indigenous planting to improve a mixed age class of the urban forest.”*

In tree management, good conservation policy as advocated by AGHS, would be to maintain the genetic link to the original specimens by propagating from the original clonal material when the willows need to be replaced and continuing the original formal planting style.

The willows, as well as the avenue of Norfolk Island pines along Lake Monger Drive are a distinctive feature of the landscape and hopefully will be recognised in the scoping study.

### **Polyphagous Shothole Borer (PSHB)**

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website states the current situation is as follows:

The National Management Group - responsible for directing eradication programs for exotic pests and diseases met on 18 June 2025 and determined it was no longer technically feasible to eradicate Polyphagous shot hole borer from Western Australia. A national Transition to Management (T2M) plan is now being developed to transition from the eradication response to a management phase from 1 July 2025. The National Management Group's determination considered the latest scientific data and advice from plant biosecurity experts - highlighting the difficulty in early detection, control before reproduction and the lack of proven effective chemical treatments.

The department will lead the transition to management in WA to minimise the impact of shot-hole borer on Perth's tree canopy and help protect the State's horticultural industries. Over the next 18 months, the department will work with industry, community and local government partners to build capacity to manage the pest.

Work will be undertaken to build upon the WA Agriculture Research Collaboration research projects to explore improved surveillance and treatment options to support the long-term management of the pest.

[Polyphagous shot-hole borer | Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development](#)

**What was the AGHS Conference like?** *Felicity Farrelly, AGHS NMC member for WA & AGHS National Management Committee Secretary (text & photos)*

The Conference speaker program was excellent and the venue at 'The Barn' in Mount Gambier was a delight, surrounded by a flowering garden around the Conference and accommodation buildings with chooks and kitchen garden in the back paddock area.



Coastal Landscape at Port MacDonnell

Speakers on both days provided detail on the geology, topography and history of the area, which is so interesting especially on the opening evening at the town hall where the mayor welcomed us to step outside to walk down a large sinkhole, with a trailing garden leading into the dark abyss of the earth. This was the first sinkhole I saw however a taxi ride out to the seaside crayfishing harbour of Port MacDonnell gave me an early awareness of how the countryside is potted with sinkholes, the road divided at one point and the local driver said it was due to a

small sinkhole between the lanes known as the 'Devils Lair'. The coast here is wild and rocky and is the closest point of South Australia to the Antarctic. The limestone cliffs are quite treacherous with many shipwrecks and is quite different to the Perth basin, the limestone is more friable and flaky. Within this landscape has been a number of extreme volcanic explosions 4,000-4,300 years ago, which have dropped the water table and created large craters and lakes. This is Australia's most recent volcanic complex of basaltic rock built on the thick layer of limestone, resulting in the formation of the extensive cave systems and sinkholes around Mt Gambier and extending into the Coonawarra and Naracoote areas. The basalt has leached into the limestone resulting in a red ochre, used as a decorative building block in the historic buildings. We saw some large and beautiful lakes in our visit including the Blue Lake in the centre of town which has an aqua edge to it that I understand is highlighted during some summer evenings.



Blue Lake

Mt Gambier is as close to Melbourne as it is to Adelaide. I took a train from Southern Cross Station in Melbourne and then a bus connecting at Ballarat to Mt Gambier. The airfare to Adelaide was just a bit less than Melbourne and the option of an across country journey had an appeal for me, as well as only a cost of \$11 as a senior for the journey. As we neared the border of South Australia, which the bus passed with nary acknowledgement, on the north were the Grampians, sandstone mountains, renowned for their climbing and hiking trails. Mt Gambier was a welcome place of rolling green pasture and vineyards and the historic second

City of South Australia settled as Gambier Town in 1854. At one stage it was part of Victoria. It has the local indigenous name of Berrin.

'Beyond the Garden Fence' was an apt title for this Conference as 'it encourages us to look outward, to see gardens not only as designed spaces but as part of a broader cultural landscape. In Mount Gambier we considered how geology, indigenous caring of country, colonial settlement, forestry, grazing, cropping and gardens intersect to form a rich layered regional landscape' (P.Slatyer 2025). We were given these opportunities to understand the links in this landscape.

The first morning we were given a review of the culture, geology and a keynote address by Trevor Nottle who spoke on 'Reflections on the changing landscape of the AGHS'. Tim Entwisle, our patron spoke of his role and he also indicated in the conference booklet -'I won't return to the debate about our Society's scope and name- my views should be well known....' I was pleased to see that we have a patron who is able to step back but be willing to move forward when the group is ready.

The area is called the Limestone Coast by the locals. The visit is that we had to the Umpherston Sinkhole, the Blue Lake and the local Apple Farm highlighted the geological and landscape features. The Apple Farm was a particular delight as we enjoyed the cider whilst an early afternoon tea was served.



Umpherston Sinkhole

In the early morning of the second lecture day, we became aware of the indigenous calling of ocean and land. This is a landscape within its indigenous history has led to an understanding of resilience in the intransience of nature over thousands of years. The initial people have within their spoken history, the recall of the cataclysmic emergence of the craters and sinkholes. 'Uncle' Ken Jones gave us the stories and reminiscences of the Boandik people and their habitation of the southeast area of the state. His calls of wildlife and sheoaks whistling in the wind were a reminder of the close relationship of aboriginal memories and connections to the land.

Speakers that followed gave us an understanding of the gentle art of sustainable winemaking at a Coonawarra winery, the Bellwether Vineyard followed by a many questioned representative of Bio-Gro, a family run business which is centred on residential green bin and forestry wastage conversion. The end products are sold through Bunnings as sustainable garden products and other products are used in industrial uses such as playground surfaces from the plastics collected. Many members of the Conference were very interested in the tour to both the forestry waste recovery operation and then to the industrial conversion of these wastes in the tour on the Saturday.

In the evening, we had a delicious meal at the accommodation and conference venue, 'The Barn' Mt Gambier. It was an opportunity to relax and celebrate what had been a delightful



two days and some farewells were made until next time in Orange, NSW from the 25-27 September 2026. The organisers of the Mt Gambier Conference, led by Dot Evans were warmly thanked at the AGM that morning as were the retiring Executive with Chair Prue Slatyer handing over to Helen Oates.



St Mary's Wines and Spirits

Earlier in the program we listened to the emergence of a garden in the Penola District of South Australia. We heard of the ravages of storms and the re-emergence and fortitude to continue and change. The Sunday we drove to this magnificent garden, called St Mary's which also houses St Mary's cellar door. The hosts Glenys and Barry Mulligan, and their family have built up the vineyard around cattle and sheep since 1937. There is also a kitchen garden based on permaculture principles- of which yellow-golden lichen trees border, a dry sandstone walled driveway which leads in from the main road as we move through and these dry-stone walls provide appealing structural links throughout the garden. The Terra Rosa soils (red clay soil from the weathering of the ochre leached limestone) and the underlying limestone constitute the foundation of the wine-producing region, encompassing Coonawarra and Padthaway

(which were not included in our itinerary). There were beautiful roses in all colours, robust and perfumery, iris, bulbs and hardy perennials. Oh, there was a coffee cart of the old caravan design and so fitting in the St Mary's Vineyard. Great to see and the rain held so we enjoyed our coffee while sitting on one of the garden chairs and walls.

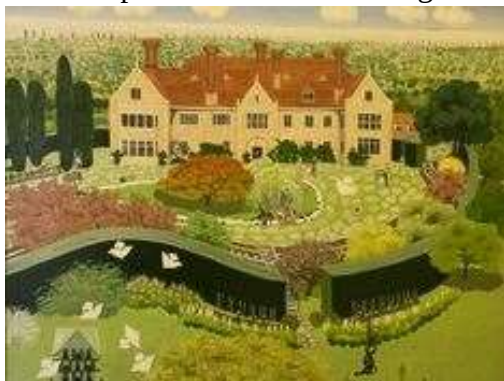
The move to a beautiful wide and wild treed estate and homestead followed. Yallum Park Homestead, Monbull, hosts Annie and Andy Clifford, is a fantastic colonial built between 1878-1880 by a well-known identity and politician, John Riddoch. Delicious sandwiches were provided as a lunchbox from 'The Barn' where we had the conferences- so we ate those in the grounds of Yallum Park. Following our afternoon lunch and walk around Yallum Park we descended upon the sterile, and highly functional glassed aerated buildings of the hydroponic Holla- Fresh herb farm on the outskirts of Tantanoola. This started as a small hydroponic farm and now is a preferred supplier to the large supermarket chain Woolworths in South Australia and Victoria. Under the leadership of Ian and Sue Lines, they have large enclosed green houses and a paddock of glasshouses where they grow herbs such as mint, spring onions, coriander, basil - in many varieties. Diligence and innovativeness and hard work have meant they have maintained a reliable service with preferred contract status and their packing



Holla Fresh Glass house herbs growing

employees are also considered with part of the glass house being given to them to grow plants from their countries, many being from Cambodia and Thailand.

The Special Optional Monday, a trip led by Richard Heathcote, Di Wilkins and Jeff Jenkinson, returned us to the prehistory of the area, bussing to the Naracoorte Caves and its megafauna presence. These caves have provided a revision of the fossil record and are an area of palaeontology research. The weather was inclement and as we lunched at the Gum Park House and Vineyards with its black face shorthorn sheep; we were give the history by third generation Dee Nolan and the concerns of the local community with the ever-present threat of precious mineral mining destroying the highly productive landscape. A late arrival at another farm, with its online shop and our optional day was over.



Carrick Hill tapestry

During this Conference the CEO of Carrick Hill, Sue McCormack, spoke of the National Trust property just outside Adelaide which houses 'The Australian Museum of Gardening and The Blade Exhibition'. I travelled to this in the day following the end of the conference and was impressed by a history of a family which had bequeathed their home and collection of art, roses and tools to the National Trust of South Australia. They have a volunteer

group who support the rose gardens and these women were delightful to talk to. This Conference certainly pushed us to 'look over the garden fence'. A great venture into the South Australian landscape of the southeastern region.

### **Optional Member Name Badges – Now Available**

We are pleased to offer members the option of ordering a personalised AGHS Name Badge for just \$15.00. Each badge features a strong magnetic backing, ensuring a secure hold without pin holes or damage to clothing.

To order, please email Ursula:

[westaustraliangardenhistory@gmail.com](mailto:westaustraliangardenhistory@gmail.com)

Orders placed before Friday 21st November will be ready for collection at the Christmas Party.



For those unable to attend the Christmas Party, a postal delivery option is also available. It's a lovely way to be easily recognised and feel part of our garden history community.

## Recent Branch Events

### A Day in the Country - Goomalling Visit *Ursula Sharman (text and photos)*



Beautiful Golden Fields of canola surround the historic Slater Homestead

It was a picture-perfect spring day for our country visit to Goomalling on Thursday, 11th of September. Around twenty members made the two-hour journey from Perth, travelling through the wide, golden landscapes of the Wheatbelt. Vast fields of canola stretched to the horizon like bright yellow quilts — so vivid they were said to be visible from satellite imagery in space.

We gathered in the town centre of Goomalling, parking opposite the Post Office on Throssell Street,

before setting off in convoy to the historic Slater Homestead, which stands just off the roadside, making a distinctive visual impact on the open Wheatbelt vista in which it is situated.

We were warmly welcomed by our host, Liddy, Executive Assistant from the Shire of Goomalling, who guided us through the layered history of this remarkable homestead. Built in 1856 by George Slater, the first pastoral settler in the district, the homestead was the earliest development in the region. The simple stone and mud-brick buildings - including the homestead, barn and schoolhouse - speak of both the promise and the hardships of early settlement life.

The northern frontage of the homestead is graced by several magnificent Peppercorn trees, believed to be around 150 years old, standing as living examples of the earliest plantings on the property. Gravel pathways meander through the garden landscape, passing mixed native plantings, a rock garden, and pieces of antique machinery, each weathered beautifully by time. A well-kept rosemary hedge — a more recent addition — now frames the front of the



AGHS WA Branch Day in the Country group photo

homestead, accompanied by cherry blossoms and a neatly maintained lawn situated opposite the original stone barn. Historically, the southern side of the homestead supported a vineyard, orchard and vegetable garden, positioned toward the lower end of the property where natural water catchment supported productive cultivation.

The story of Slater Homestead continued to unfold as we learnt that in 1907 an additional stone room was constructed for George and Mary Slater to celebrate their golden wedding



anniversary. This room now serves as the tearoom - from where we enjoyed a delicious three-course lunch served on the veranda, looking out across the still and open golden landscape.

Following George's passing in 1917, the homestead was inherited by their youngest son, Thomas. After his death in 1930, the property changed hands several times, and much of the surrounding land was gradually sold. By the time the Shire acquired the remaining 160 acres in 2000, the buildings had been left derelict for nearly three decades. In 2002, restoration work began, supported by Lotterywest funding, to conserve and revive this significant site. Slater Homestead was formally entered into the State Register of Heritage Places in 2004 and today stands as an evocative window into early Wheatbelt history - a place that feels both humble and extraordinary.



Goomalling Historical Society 1940s kitchen

After lunch, our afternoon continued with a visit to the Goomalling Historical Society Museum, kindly facilitated by Peta and Harold, whose local knowledge and enthusiasm greatly enriched our visit. The museum's collection, carefully gathered and maintained by volunteers, offered another dimension to the region's past.

The early 20th-century schoolroom provided a fascinating insight into the region's educational history, complete with original desks, slates and a side room filled with textbooks and teaching materials from a bygone era. The machinery shed offered an equally captivating display, housing agricultural equipment that spoke to the working life of the Wheatbelt.

Another highlight was the telecommunications room, which also preserves the original Shire records. Finally, the old cottage, with its wonderfully preserved 1940s kitchen, and the impressive Roads Board Room - featuring the original conference table, chairs and timber-framed photographs of Road Board members past - provided a memorable step back in time.

By mid-afternoon we began our journey home, carrying with us not only the warmth of country hospitality, but also a renewed appreciation for the role of homesteads, gardens, landscapes and collective heritage in shaping Western Australia's rural identity.

### **Annual General Meeting**

**Guest speaker Elizabeth King on Wirra Willa Armadale**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> August** at the new premises of the Royal WA Historical Society, 109 Stirling Highway, Nedlands

Our first event in 2025 was to revisit Wirra Willa Wednesday 27th March to gauge the progress made since last year. For the AGM, Elizabeth King, a former TAFE lecturer, who specialised in plant identification, cultural practices and design as well as a former gardening volunteer at Araluen, presented a very interesting illustrated talk on the progress of Wirra Willa's Garden in Armadale.

### **Historical Gardens Visit, Guildford Open Garden Festival**

To be featured in the next newsletter.

## ***WA Branch Event Diary***

### **Christmas Party**

Woodloes Homestead, 39 Woodloes Street, Cannington.

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2pm to 4pm.

\$10 Tickets available via Trybooking at:

<https://www.trybooking.com/DHEID>

(50 cent ticket fee applies to online bookings)

Bring a chair and small plate to share for afternoon tea. Cold refreshments supplied.

Remember to review the 2025 AGHS Journals and WA Branch Newsletters for the hotly contested **Chair's Annual Quiz**.