Australian Garden History Society

Oral History Programme 2003/2004

This interview is one of a series of interviews being conducted throughout Australia with early members of the Australian Garden History Society. The AGHS was formed in 1980 and these interviews will play a crucial part in recording the formation and early days of the Society. The AGHS acknowledges the support of the State Library Victoria for use of interview equipment in Victoria. The AGHS is funding some interviews and in NSW the project has been assisted by funds allocated to the Royal Australian Historical Society through the NSW Heritage Office.

This interview with Professor Richard Clough was carried out by Roslyn Burge on 9 December 2003 at his home in Double Bay, Sydney, NSW

Professor Clough, thank you for participating in this project. I wonder if for the tape you could give me your full name.

My full name is Richard Clough, no second name.

And your date and place of birth?

I was born on 28 May 1921 at Wagga Wagga.

How did your family come to be in Wagga?

My family has lived in Wagga - all my great-grandparents lived in Wagga, including my great-great-grandfather who went to Wagga in 1855 as a police sergeant [Professor Clough's later correction – should be Police Constable].

And you left there at what age?

I left there to go to university. I finished my secondary education at Wagga and I suppose it was 1939 I started at the university, I think it would be 1939. I started doing a Bachelor of Architecture degree when there were only thirty students in the faculty, in the whole five years of the faculty.

Any women in that group?

Mostly women, I would think at least fifty per cent of the group were women. The fifth year at that stage was one hundred per cent women.

I suppose the men were away at war.

No, no this was before the war. This … well it must have been 1938, It might have been … it wouldn't have been 1937 I wouldn't have gone to university when I was sixteen I don't think. When … I had been at university for three years when Japan came into the war. I'd finished my third year at university and I was in camp at Ingleburn as part of the Sydney University Regiment when … on the night that Japan declared war.

Your studies were interrupted for some time?

Yes. I think it probably was only two years although it seemed longer at the time. I came back. People who had done the large part of their course were allowed to leave … were brought back to Australia and allowed to leave the army at the beginning of the year the war finished, so they must have anticipated the end of the war. And so I was back in my fourth year at university in 1945.

Just going back to your schooling in Wagga, what prompted you to do architecture?

The fact that I had no relations who were architects.

Why was that an influence?

Well I had lots of relations who were doctors and lawyers and so on and they all advised me against doing whatever they were.

What was your father's occupation?

He was a stock dealer.

And did your mother work?

No. Women didn't work in those days, no.

So you came to Sydney and you completed your architecture in 1949? [Interviewer has wrong date.]

No, I would have graduated before that. I left for England in 1949 and I worked for two years for Foyle Mansfield, that would be 1949 and 1948, and 1947 I worked at Sydney University. So I must have completed … 1945 and 1946 were my two last years as a student and in 1947 I taught at Sydney University.

In the Faculty (of Architecture)?

Yes

What drew you to go overseas?

Oh in those days I think it was the accepted thing for students to complete their education abroad. I think that almost all the students in the Architecture faculty in fact intended to have experience in some country other than Australia when they could afford it. It would have been more unusual to stay in Australia than to have gone overseas.

Was England usually the first choice?

I think England was the main place. Very few people went to America in those days.

Were you the only person from your year who went?

Oh no not at all. Jack Starkey preceded me and he … when I went there. He was in my year and when I went to England he'd already found a place to live and I went and stayed at the same boarding house in Bayswater as he did.

And where did you study?

Well I didn't study at that stage I really went to work and I worked first of all for a firm of architects called Westwood Sons & Harrison. And after some time there I … well I was still working for them when I began studying at University College, yes. But while I was studying at University College I moved from … Westwood Sons & Harrison had their offices in Baker Street in the West End, not far from the Courtauld Institute, and I left them and went to work for Sir Henry Tanner in the City of London right near Fenchurch Street Station.

And what finally pushed you towards studying in London?

I was studying … I was at university with Ian Waterhouse, he's the same age as I am, and I got to know the Waterhouse family and Professor Waterhouse had been in charge of the landscape at Sydney University for years and years as well as being famous for the creation of his own garden. He had been … he'd had a Carnegie Fellowship which allowed him to study campus design in America and he tried to get Sydney University to establish a course in landscape architecture without success and he constantly urged people to take up the study of it.

In 1950 the Royal Horticultural Society in London organised the Camellia and Magnolia Conference and Professor and Mrs Waterhouse came to London to attend that conference and I had afternoon tea with them one afternoon in Westminster – no, in Victoria and Professor Waterhouse was telling me that he'd had lunch with Lanning Roper that day and they'd talked about landscape design. He said, 'That's what you should be studying while you are here,' and I made some enquiries back at the office with people who were familiar with what courses were available and I was told that in October of that year a course in Landscape Architecture would be begun at University College, London and I must have gone along and applied to enter. I can't really remember how I got into … what difficulties I had getting into the course, possibly none, but I began in October of that year which I suspect is 1950, but it might have been 1951 I'm not too sure now.

So you were one of the first students attending that course?

I was the first Australian I think to study Landscape Architecture at a tertiary organisation outside Australia. Yes, and I think I'm the only person actually to do that course. Because there had been a course at the University of Reading which was run by Frank Clarke but that ceased. And then there were … in its place both Durham University and University College, London, were given money by the Cement and Concrete Association to begin courses in Landscape Architecture. And the course at University College was run by a Cambridge graduate, a Peter Youngman, who had a horticultural background. The course at Durham University was run by — no I can't think of his name, Frank Clarke ran the one at Reading — but the one at Durham was run by somebody with a planning and architectural background, with a design background. I had already had a design background so it was sensible for me to study at University College.

Most of the Australians who followed me and went to study in England came from horticultural backgrounds, Burnley in particular, and so it was very sensible for them to go and study at a course which was more design-oriented. So in this way we both got the necessary tuition to complement what we had already studied.

Do you remember any particular influences from your time at University College?

Well Mr Youngman was a very inspiring person. He is still alive … as far as I know. And he had worked at Cutbushes – no… at a nursery, Wallaces Nursery, in Tunbridge Wells and he knew lots of people in the horticultural area including people like Vita Sackville-West and so on. And he organised for us to meet and to have talks with these sorts of people.

The worldwide profession of landscape architecture in those days was very small so I was able to go and visit practising landscape architects in Italy, Professor Porcinai, and so on. In Sweden and Norway and Spain and Germany and Denmark, where people weren't … the world was rather small in those days and so they took trouble to show students their work. It was very different, I think, from these days.

Did you ever think that you might stay on in Europe?

Oh I would have liked to have stayed on in Europe but I had never sort of told my … I hadn't gone to Europe with the intention of staying and so I thought it was very unfair on my parents if my did just go staying there. And so … although I would have liked have gone on living there I felt I had better come back home.

So you came back in 1956, but before you did that you worked with Sylvia Crowe for a time.

That's right. After finishing … I did the course really because I was interested in it, not with any intention of ever working in the area, just … I mean I was intellectually interested, I have been interested in gardening all my life, so I … it wasn't with any professional intent that I did the course. However, the faculty … the profession even in England was very small in those days so that everybody knew everybody else.

And the secretary of the institute, Mrs Brown, knew me, … you know, she knew that I'd completed the course and completed the entry into the Institute so that I was a member of the Institute; the British Institute of Landscape Architects; and she said to me, 'Oh, Sylvia Crowe is looking for someone to work at Basildon why don't you go and see her?'

And I thought, you know, that's all very well to have all this theoretical information but without having any idea about putting it into practice was perhaps rather foolish so I went to see Miss Crowe, who in those days shared an office with Miss Colvin, and she asked me if I'd be prepared to go and work on Basildon New Town which was the last of the first range of British new towns and it was in Essex on the way to Southend.

And I said … thought why not, so I agreed to go and work there, which I did. And Miss Crowe was the consultant for the new towns. She'd been the consultant for Harlow New Town - probably at the same time, and … but I was employed by the new town itself.

Miss Crowe came to Basildon every Thursday for the day and spent the whole day there and gave me tasks to do and then looked at what I had done on the following Thursday and so it went on. And it was … I really learnt everything, well perhaps I shouldn't say everything, but Miss Crowe's influence on me was much more important than anybody else's influence has been.

How did she influence you?

Well it was her approach. She was the most intellectually stimulating person that I came across and of course working for her is quite different from just being talked to by somebody, by being lectured to by somebody. And I mean she … she was … when I said I was going to go and work for her I said to a friend of mine, Judy Lloyd-Jones, 'I'm going to go and work for Miss Crowe,' and Judy said, 'Oh never work for a woman.'

I have never worked for anyone whose was so … whose work was so based on well thought through principles that she never changed her mind. That doesn't mean she was uninfluenced by other considerations that were brought to bear but she was never one of the people who said, 'Try this,' and when you tried it said, 'Oh no I don't care for that, try something else.' If you did what she said, you know, she never wanted you to change it.

As well as enjoying working with her did you enjoy the project itself?

Oh yes it was fascinating, I could go on forever about it. It was one of the … it was the last of them and I suspect the largest of the new towns and it was in a rural slum. It was in an area of degraded rural landscape, very heavy clay soil, and in the middle of the nineteenth century it had gone out of agricultural production because the wheat and so on started coming from America and Australia and it no longer was profitable to use it agriculturally. And it was sufficiently close to the West End of London for the land to be (and it was on a railway, the railway to Southend) for it to be sold off in blocks for five pounds a piece.

And the whole area was sub-divided in this way and people were given tickets to come down in the train and if they'd buy a block of land. So it was an area which … and then during the war when people were bombed out of the East End of London - they might have had a shack down there, or a tent or something and they moved down there and they lived there. And people used their lands differently. Some grew vegetables and so on, some did nothing and it returned to forest. It was an ecologically fascinating area because there was every stage of natural regeneration from agricultural land to oak forest and to take this degraded landscape and use what was there … and that's the great thing about Miss Crowe's teaching - that you must make use of what's there; you don't do what landscape architects seem to me want to do these days which is just to ignore the situation and just impose something upon it; and Miss Crowe definitely insisted on building on what was there.

I am just looking at my notes, there is a quote that I am reminded of as you speak. You were talking about the Black Mountain Peninsula in Canberra and you said *the things that no one notices are the things that please me most, where nobody no longer knows those places existed*. Did you incorporate some of those practices that you developed with Miss Crowe in your work in Canberra?

I think … I *hope* I did, I certainly *tried* to. I mean it's always been my intention to follow that principle, to see landscape; and especially landscape in Canberra; as a means of unifying the total area. As a means of hiding unpleasant and distasteful developments such as quarries or garbage dumps. To unify the area with the landscape by landscape means and I've been

most satisfied with the work that I've done when nobody realises that it's … that anything has happened. Quite frequently people say to me, you know, that that's always been there, but of course it hasn't.

Which particular places can you recall?

Oh lots of places around the lake, you know. But it's the same sort of approach that I've used in other places too. I mean I was the Landscape Architect for Macquarie University from the beginning and it was again a similarly degraded piece of landscape. It had been divided up into small holdings, some of which were chicken farms and some of which were vegetable plots, some were developed for cut flowers, and so on, and some were just left waste.

It was a very patchwork piece of landscaping and I think that people who go to Macquarie University these days are unaware of the past history of their site, they see it now as something which is integrated and which relates to its surroundings. I hope that in all my work, you know, I take note of the surroundings as much as of the work that goes on within the site itself.

Professor Clough you were engaged in 1959 to work on the National Capital Development Commission, did you do the work at these various campuses, including Macquarie, at the same time?

Yes. In those days there weren't too many landscape architects around and the Commission gave me permission to work on a selected number of outside projects as long as I did it in my own time, yes.

You must have been quite busy, you had a number of outside projects.

Yes. I worked with Professor Pryor on the Flinders University and Latrobe Universities. And I worked with Mr Lane Poole on the new Kings School here in Sydney.

And you worked with some private gardeners as well?

Only occasionally with friends. I … Before I went to Canberra I'd begun working with the Valders on their garden at Mount Wilson, that's before I went to Canberra, and I continued to advise them as friends. And occasionally I would do a garden for a friend in Canberra. But private gardens isn't necessarily my *forte*, I'm not necessarily … I'm much more interested in the social aspects of landscape architecture than in the purely decorative.

What do you mean by the social aspect?

The provision … I'd much rather work on a factory or a sewerage treatment works than on a private garden.

Why do they appeal to you particularly?

Well because they're the things that … they're the things where you are doing some work which will benefit society rather than an individual.

I'm a great admirer of the work of Miss … oh dear me … Mrs Gibson in Melbourne. I mean she's really the first person in Australia that I know of, well that's not true, but she's really the first person to do any *considerable* amount of work on things like factories and other industrial projects.

Was she doing that work in the 1950s?

Well, yes I think she was. You'd have to ask John Stevens, and people like that, in Melbourne who knew her and worked with her, you know, because, you know, I think Melbourne was ahead of Sydney in those days in that sense.

In its landscape architecture? Why was that?

Largely because of the presence of Burnley and the influence of people who studied at Burnley. Burnley had from the very earliest days sort of attracted women to study there and made special provision for them. There were even people from New South Wales, like Erica Ball went down to Melbourne to study at Burnley. I'm pretty sure she did, I might be wrong about that.

We can always check that later.

I might be wrong about that.

Side B

Professor Clough you worked for a long period of time in Canberra on National Capital Development Commission, starting in 1959 through to 1981. When you left in 1981 by chance the Garden History Society was just beginning, its first conference was in 1980, do you remember those early beginnings of the society?

No I don't. I don't recall the part that Canberra played in the first beginnings of the Society, certainly I had nothing to do with it. The exhibition that perhaps prompted the formation of the Society, the one that Howard Tanner helped organise, I can't remember seeing that exhibition so I don't know whether it came to Canberra or not. I certainly saw the Catalogue and was fascinated by that.

You've been a great collector of catalogues yourself along the way.

That's right. I've been … I collect … I decided once I retired to do certain things which I hadn't done when I was working. I didn't believe that in retirement one went on doing the same things one did when one worked and I thought nobody has been … studied to any great extent the rise and fall of popularity of particular flowers and I thought one way of quantifying that would be to look to see when new varieties of dahlias, roses,

verbena or whatever it happened to be, came on to the market. In other words popular flowers would, I thought you could quantify how popular a thing was by looking to see how many new varieties were offered for sale. And so the only way I thought of doing this was to make a fairly thorough search through old catalogues and note down the new varieties each year that you could … that I came across. Then by going to public libraries and so on I found that, you know, there wasn't such a great collection of catalogues available so I decided to concentrate, if I could, on acquiring a number of them. And that was the reason … it was a means, I thought, of charting the popularity of particular flowers in the garden.

And you have given some of these collections to the State Library in Sydney?

I have given the catalogues to the State Library, yes, they have them now.

Have you derived much pleasure in making those collections?

Oh yes, tremendous. I've been, I suppose, a collector most of my life of one kind or another, of books of one kind or another. I … while I was in England I collected … while I was in Europe I visited gardens in most countries of Europe; I didn't ever get to Portugal, I didn't get to Russia, but I didn't get to Iceland; but otherwise I travelled through Europe and looked and visited gardens. As well as talking to landscape … as well as looking at modern landscape works I also looked at historical works, so I got to know the history of European gardening fairly well.

Just going back to your early years, was there some particular influence in your family that developed that interest in gardens?

Oh yes. I have one … my mother's father's family came from Germany and they - my great-grandparents - had a very big garden, they lived in Wagga alongside what was then called the Lagoon. And my great-grandmother … in those days in country towns there weren't nurseries nor florists, not in country towns of that size anyway. But particular people would have as a side-line sold plants or sold seedlings, made wreaths, made up wedding bouquets and things of that kind. My great-grandmother, according to my mother, imported bulbs from Holland each year and no doubt she would have only done that if she was selling the plants, she wouldn't have been able to afford to just do it for her own pleasure. So she was a very good gardener and her son, my grandfather, was a good gardener and my mother was a good gardener too.

Did the succeeding family generations stay in this house?

Oh no, no, no, no. I won't go into … I won't go into family rows.

Coming back to your retirement, you didn't really retire in 1981 completely? [should be 1986]

Not completely, I continued to have a few students who were doing … writing theses and I also I think continued to give lectures, yes.

You became the Professor of Landscape Architecture at UNSW in 1981 didn't you?

Oh that's right, in 1981. Professor Spooner, who was a graduate of Durham University, had started the course firstly as a postgraduate course and then as an undergraduate course and it was going as an undergraduate course when he retired and I came to fill the gap.

Did you enjoy teaching?

Oh very much. I believe that I owe a tremendous amount to the people who taught me and I think it is only fair to … if you gained something from your teachers to repay it to another generation.

You were also telling me previously about the particular emphasis in your teaching – the Asian …

Well yes, I found that at the University of New South Wales while I was there there was a big influx of students from South-East Asia and the course was a very Western oriented course. There was very little, or nothing perhaps, that related to their cultures and so in the Faculty of Architecture I taught Eastern Architecture to the architecture students and I also taught Oriental Landscape History to the landscape students and I think perhaps … I think it might well have been a course that other students in the Faculty could have taken on a voluntary basis.

You also mentioned previously that Professor Sadler had been a particular influence.

Yes Professor Sadler was a particular influence on me. I, like most people who were brought up in the 1920s and 1930s, had a very western oriented upbringing. History that I was taught was English history and Australian history. Our literature was purely the literature … western literature. Religion. There was nothing really to connect us very much with Asia or any other cultures other than European.

And Professor Sadler gave a course … taught students in the School of Architecture Oriental Architecture and I did that course before I went into the army and I enjoyed it so much that when I came back from the war I did it a second time.

Mr Edlin, who was Professor Wilkinson's assistant, was still in the army so there was no one to show the slides or do any of the sort of technical work associated with Professor Sadler's course and so I did that just on a voluntary basis because I was interested in it.

You mentioned previously Professor Clough that you encouraged students in your teaching to take up Australian history in their theses.

Yes. Well I've always thought that if … that writing a thesis in … does give people an opportunity, if they're so interested, to follow some particular aspect of Australian garden history or landscape history and quite a number did produce really quite nice works. Some that have been, I think, particularly useful to other people since. There was one girl who took up a suggestion I made to go and see Jean Walker and her sister and get information from them and write about them and I think this is a valuable thing.

I remember when I was at Sydney University, Nancy Price had written a thesis on Walter Burley-Griffin, which Walter Burley-Griffin had … when she worked for him, he had then corrected the draft, he made notes on the draft that she'd produced. That's the nearest the Griffin ever went to writing an autobiography. So I am really impressed by the fact that Nancy did that and I hope that some students in the School of Landscape Architecture will have done something similar.

I think either the Garden History Society or the School, I can't think now how it came about, but there was some prize being offered for a history essay or work of some kind and that is how I met Peter Watts. I'm pretty sure that he came and adjudicated the exercise that we had.

This was while you were at UNSW?

Yes probably in 1981 or 1982.

About that time too the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects which you were one of the initiators of that group, also reported on the development and the initiation, again, of the Australian Garden History Society. It devoted a full page article to that in 1980. And then the next year, just within months of the formation of the Garden History Society, decided it would have an article in each issue about a garden. The first one was *Bolobek* in Victoria,

Oh yes.

Do you remember that?

No I don't. I've probably still got those old issues. My memory of sort of detailed things like that is very indistinct these days I'm afraid. I can remember things from a long way back fairly clearly but not recent things too well.

You spoke at one of the Garden History Society conferences in 1997, the Canberra conference, titled *The City As Garden*, and you gave a paper, *Creating Lake Burley-Griffin*. Do you remember the conferences?

Oh yes, I remember that conference - well I can remember giving that talk and also I can remember various people had bookshops set up there. It was in the National Library. I can't say that I remember too much more about it.

While I was with the Commission and while I was at the university I went to so many conferences, they all have become rather sort of mixed up in my mind and it is difficult to recall one from another. I occasionally sort of come across a photograph or something and suddenly realise – oh yes, so and so was there.

You served on the committee of the Garden History Society here in the Sydney branch.

Yes. Peter Watts called a meeting at *Lyndhurst* that I attended. I suppose I must have joined the Garden History Society, but I can't remember when or how it came about, I must have been a member and I went to that meeting. Peter was anxious to get the New South Wales group working and I was on it for a number of years.

And you've contributed to the journal of course.

Yes.

***Plant Hunting in the South Sea Islands*.**

Yes

Then again in 1996 with your *Record of plants in the Sydney Botanic Gardens 1827-28.*

Yes

Some of the people who are in the Australian Garden History Society overlapped with the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects.

Yes

Oline Richards, do you remember her?

No I don't. She's from Perth or from Tasmania?

I'm not sure offhand. Phil Simons who was from Tasmania?

Yes, Phil Simons I can picture her.

Professor Clough could you tell me about your interest in the Garden History Society?

Yes, well my support for the Garden History Society is based on a number of factors, firstly, because it publishes a journal. It publishes what I think is a very good journal and the only one which enables people to set out the material on the history of gardening that they've done research on. And secondly, I think the Garden History Society has encouraged people to look at gardens from a historic point of view. I think that the work of the journal, even though some people … some sort of academics want a refereed journal, I think that the work that's gone into the journal is the right sort of work for Australia at this particular point in time. I don't really think that a refereed journal, whatever a few academic people might think, is a requirement at the moment.

The Society has a very impressive record of publishing other individual publications, and of course the *Oxford Companion* most recently, and you contributed that too?

Oh yes I enjoyed very much contributing to that. The Garden History Society, of course, was unbelievably lucky in having someone as dedicated as Richard Aitken to edit that. To undertake the editing of that *magnum opus* - I can't think of anybody else who could possibly have achieved what he did. I think it's absolutely extraordinary. I think it will be of value in a hundred years time, unlike most publications that you see these days which are based around a few coloured photographs.

And you've also worked with Colleen Morris.

Yes Colleen I think is an ideal person to undertake garden research. She is a thorough worker, absolutely reliable and most imaginative and I think her work is extremely valuable for the whole of Australia.

You've also worked with Victor Crittenden - I saw at the Library that you published in 2001 the *Gardening Poem of 1809.*

Laughter -- Victor Crittenden's been a friend of mine for years. He was the Librarian at what was the Canberra College of Advanced Education when it was founded and a close friend of mine, Roger Johnson, was appointed to Head the School of Environmental Studies and the Library had to be created from scratch and Victor worked on that. He has always had a particular interest in gardens and garden literature and his early bibliography of Australian gardening books, especially with its very valuable introduction, I think is probably an equal landmark with Howard Tanner's Catalogue for the exhibition. Those are the two major elements that promoted the scientific study of garden history in Australia I think, two primary starting points.

Since the Garden History Society started in 1980, or its first conference in 1980, how do you think the study of garden history has continued and developed?

Well it's developed in various ways. I mean there are a few academics who rely on having publications in order to get promotion and they write not because they are particularly interested in the subject often, not because the subject is important often, but simply to gain financial advantage to themselves and some of the material that they publish I think is of questionable value.

But the whole idea of garden history is spread probably by the Society, but not only by the Society. I mean you come across libraries in various country towns or suburbs where a particular historic garden history material is featured, so there's a widespread interest in the past, in the cultural past, I think. Happily it's not just political history that we consider … or economic history that we consider important. I think that all aspects of cultural history are gaining, fortunately, in our society.

And a greater appreciation for garden history itself.

As part of that, yes.

… You were just talking about garden history

Yes, well garden history is about gardening, certainly, as well as about gardens. I think while the study of gardens is important it's also fascinating to study gardening. The changes in fashions that have occurred, why those changes have occurred and to try and understand the gardens of the past, and to try understand that we can't actually retain them as they were. I mean gardens unlike architecture, are constantly changing. If we … there are a certain limited number of gardens that can be retained exactly as they were designed but in almost all cases gardens depend very much on the gardener. The gardener, the person who created them and the person who shaped the plants, who combined the colours, who did the weeding, who made the changes. And people's interest in gardens wasn't in establishing a single unity that's unchanging, their interest in gardens was in *change* and if we stop change then we stop the real essence of a lot of gardens, I feel. We've got to accept change, we've got to realise that garden history isn't about preservation solely in the sense of keeping them as documents. There we are that is a sort of heresy to end up with.

Professor Clough, thank you very much for your participation.