



AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 2010



VICTOR CRITTENDEN, OAM

20 OCTOBER 2010



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LOG OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: **VICTOR CRITTENDEN, OAM**

INTERVIEWER: ROSLYN BURGE

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 20 OCTOBER, 2010

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: MR CRITTENDEN'S HOME
COOK, CANBERRA

SPECIFICATIONS:

 LENGTH OF RECORDING: 3 HOURS 45 MINUTES

 RECORDING EQUIPMENT: EDIROL R09HR 2 EXTERNAL RODE NT3 MIKES

 DIGITAL RECORDING: WAV FILE

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NOTE: ALL QUOTATIONS IN ITALICS ARE VICTOR CRITTENDEN'S WORDS

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP

1961	Came to Canberra College of Advanced Education
1980	Foundation member of Australian Garden History Society
1982/86	Joined ACT Branch
1988	Treasurer ACT Branch
1989-1993	National Management Committee – State Representative, ACT
1992	President, ACT Monaro and Riverina Branch

BRIEF SUMMARY

CELEBRATION OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE AGHS: *Australia's first gardening guide of 1806 : observations on gardening*, George Howe. Victor Crittenden reprinted this book to mark the foundation of the Australian Garden History Society on 29 March 1980: it was offered to all those who attended the Melbourne Conference.

BIO DETAILS: Victor recounted extensively his recollections of growing up ~ his mother's influence about gardens ~ both parents influence to further education.

INFLUENCES: Victor spoke at length about the influences which furthered his interest in garden history ~ from his mother's dislike of white flowers (emblematic of death) ~ his purchase of white roses, and the daffodil bulbs he bought when a youth which he continued to transplant from each house and has in his garden today ~ the purchase of an old house and derelict garden in Armidale which he proceeded to renovate and restore, respectively, and how this fostered an interest in garden history and the purchase of garden history publications. Later in the interview Victor spoke about the influence of the English writer, Beverley Nichols, in undertaking the development of his own garden.

COLLECTING GARDEN HISTORY PUBLICATIONS: Victor recounted visits to bookstores (long vanished) in Sydney seeking out garden history publications and journals – including his pursuit of Thomas Shepherd's publication. The story of his successful purchase of a copy at auction in Tasmania became compelling when he recounts opening the cover only to read the name of the previous owner – John Glover!

Victor has an interest in and published about John Lang ~ and also has a Napoleon Collection.

ENVIRONMENT WHICH ALLOWED THE AGHS TO DEVELOP: the "Garden State" that was Victoria ~ different geographies of NSW and Victoria.

ACT BRANCH: Victor spoke of the fun and warmth of the ACT Branch ~ its working bees, stalls at Lanyon, gardens surveyed, fellow committee members and his role as Treasurer (somewhat ineffectual in his estimation, he sometimes had to reimburse the inadequacies of his practice).

WIDER INFLUENCES WHICH IMPACT AGHS: Some of his recollections are not explicit memories of the Society, but they reflect the influence garden history (through his bibliophile's interests and domestic practice) have made upon him and which led to his early membership of the Society. He spoke of being compelled to travel to Melbourne to attend the first meeting of the Society ~ of his work assisting with the production of booklets on the history of various gardens ~ and recalls the meetings of the NMC and his committee work for the ACT Branch.

CELEBRATION OF FOUNDATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY: In August 1980 Mr Crittenden produced *Australia's First Gardening Guide of 1806* celebrating the foundation of the Society. It was offered to members of the Melbourne Conference for \$2.00. (see copies of correspondence August and September 1980 attached)

Timer	Content	KEYWORDS
FILE 1	1 : 08 : 09 HOURS	
	<p>Biographical details</p> <p>27 April 1925, Hamilton in Newcastle, NSW</p> <p>Parents from Maitland, father working in Newcastle. Older brother (named for an uncle who died in World War One) died of meningitis aged 5. Grandfather was a bullock driver. Father lost his job during the depression and his money invested in a shirt factory. Family lived on a block of land</p>	<p>Maitland Newcastle Gaza Beersheba</p>
7:30	<p>Family leaving Newcastle – move to Quirindi, father working in department store – first schooling at Quirindi.</p> <p>Discussion of early gardening influences – mother loved roses – grew polyanthus roses. Now has shrub roses in own garden.</p>	<p>Newcastle Quirindi</p>
9:00	<p>Move to Sydney, suburb of Ashbury, late 1930s. Mother bought more roses and bulbs. Discussion of garden – Queensland wattle, vegetable garden. Victor’s job was mowing the grass during father’s absence at war.</p>	<p>Sydney Ashbury Queensland wattle</p>
12:15	<p>Discussion of schooling – Canterbury School, Homebush Boys School. Finished school and worked in a warehouse in Sydney, Sargood Gardiners, in York Street in the city – next door to the Grace Hotel.</p>	<p>Canterbury School Homebush Boys School Sargood Gardiner Grace Hotel</p>
16:47	<p>Sargood Gardiners – worked in the soft good furnishings (curtains, carpets and blinds) – also dealt in men’s and women’s clothing.</p>	<p>Sargood Gardiners</p>
18:00	<p>Discussion of ambition – to go to university and study architecture. Had to be put on hold because of need to help support the family.</p>	
18:30	<p>Discussion of creating mud buildings and gardens as a child. Victor always imagined his palaces had a chandelier <i>and so ever afterwards, every house I’ve had, I’ve owned, has had a chandelier in it.</i></p>	
22:00	<p>Discussion of lunchtime excursions in Sydney – bought plants in Selfridges and Coles in Pitt Street. Description of buying a white rose – Frau Karl Ducschki – with its roots wrapped in cloth.</p>	<p>Frau Karl Druschki</p>
22:30	<p>Discussion of white flowers – mother would not have white flowers in the house. Mother would not drink tea – drank Chicory coffee.</p>	
25:08	<p>Bulbs – supposedly daffodils, but fritillias. Mother planted more in the front garden. Victor has taken some of these bulbs with him each time he’s moved – Armidale, Canberra.</p> <p>Daffodil bulbs from his childhood – loved daffodils for the poems taught at school.</p>	<p>Armidale Canberra</p>
29:00	<p>Discussion of leaving Sargood Gardiner in when he turned 18 and went into the army, based in St Ives. Discussion of doing garden work on the commanding officer’s block of</p>	<p>Sargood Gardiner St Ives</p>

	land at St Ives.	
30:49	<p>Left Army and went to university post-war. Initially began courses planning to become a teacher. Discussion of Army tests, university scholarship as a returned serviceman, university entrance. After war, in 1946 studied Higher School Certificate as a private student.</p> <p>Graduated from university and began teaching at a private Presbyterian school ~ Ballarat College in Ballarat. Spent a year teaching and then moved to Geelong College (also a Presbyterian school).</p> <p>No teaching qualifications but system of studying for teaching certificate whilst teaching.</p> <p>Discussion of colleague in Geelong who encouraged Victor to undertake further study: he enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Economics at London University. Further discussion about how Victor came to be studying in Canada.</p>	<p>Ballarat College</p> <p>Geelong College</p> <p>Colleague was Professor John P. Matthews, Queens University Canada</p>
44:00	Bachelor of Library Science – a library degree at the University of Toronto. Worked in University of Toronto Library. Returned from Canada to University of New England Library.	Toronto University of New England
45:00	<p>Discussion of the role of education in family – encouragement from father, who wanted Victor to be a civil engineer. <i>Sometimes when we drove into Sydney in the bus from Ashbury, we would drive past the university and he'd say, "There's the university. That's where you should go." So I suppose I was indoctrinated with the idea of going to university from childhood actually.</i></p> <p>Mother regretted her education was limited.</p>	
49:15	<p>AGHS – joined the English Garden History Society before the AGHS was formed.</p> <p><i>it was a house on a double block and it had the remnants of a garden and a number of plum trees and so I said, "Oh, well, if I'm restoring the house, I've got to restore the garden too", so I set to and restored the garden</i></p>	
51:45	Discussion of beginning a collection of gardening books – first purchase was <i>Mrs Rolf Boldrewood's book</i> (The flower garden in Australia) ~ Marion Cran	Mrs Rolf Boldrewood Marion Cran
54.45	<p>Discussion of purchase of Thomas Shepherd's book – <i>Horticulture in Australia</i>. Also bought Shepherd's second book – <i>Landscape Gardening in Australia</i>.</p> <p>Discussion of successful bid at a book auction in Tasmania - \$500+ for <i>Landscape Gardening in Australia</i> – a treasure of Australian gardening books which had formerly been in the ownership of the painter, John Glover.</p>	Thomas Shepherd John Glover
1:00	<p>Collection has been bequeathed to the University of Canberra, where Victor was the Foundation Librarian. Landscape gardening is a course at the University of Canberra.</p> <p>Discussion about where Victor might bequeath his various book collections.</p>	

1:03:00	Victor knew he was doing something eccentric collecting garden books – understood he was in parallel with Richard Clough. Began his Bibliography of gardening books in the early 1970s and was given a desk in the Petherick Room at the National Library.	Petherick Room
FILE 2	36 : 47 MINS	
	<p>Discussion of joining English Garden History Society. Took on leave from University of New England and went on one of the UK Society's garden tours. Became enthusiastic about garden history societies: when it was suggested a Garden History Society should be formed (in Melbourne) <i>you couldn't hold me back</i>.</p> <p>Attended the first meeting about forming the Australian Garden History Society – joined and offered to help.</p> <p>On return from Canberra, Victor thought there should be a Branch in the ACT ... there was no response to his letter suggesting this. Victor spoke to Richard Ratcliffe, landscape gardener, about the idea and he agreed.</p> <p>Victor took a year's sabbatical leave from Canberra College – to undertake bibliography of the First Fleet. On return Victor found Richard had formed a Branch in the ACT and promptly joined the committee as Treasurer. When Richard retired, Victor became President of the ACT Branch.</p>	Richard Ratcliffe
6.45	Atmosphere of the first meeting – group of people – <i>you couldn't hold them back, there wasn't any doubt about it being a Garden History Society</i> . Some thought Victor might have learnt about the idea of the establishment of the AGHS through his membership of the National Trust, of which he was a member.	
	<p>Discussion of emergence of AGHS in Victoria. Jean Galbraith writing in <i>The Garden Lover</i> the Victorian magazine – writings of Edna Walling and understanding of her gardens in Victoria. Victor published an Edna Walling book – it was a messy collection and not properly finished and no other publisher would publish it. Titled <i>Wildflowers in Australia</i> – she wrote about finding native flowers in the wild.¹</p> <p>Victor wrote to Jean Galbraith to enquire about manuscripts and it was Jean who had the Walling manuscript.</p> <p>Discussion of photographs and copyright permission from Edna Walling's neice.²</p>	Jean Galbraith Edna Walling Barbara Barnes
19.00	Discussion of response of book seller within the book department at Myers who declined to sell Edna Walling's book. It is the only book where Victor sold all the copies – decided not to do a second print run.	Myers
22.10	Discussion of the pleasure of publishing books – a favourite was Jean Galbraith's book describing the restoration of a	Jean Galbraith Dandenong

¹ *On the Trail of Australian Wildflowers*, 1985, published posthumously with the aid of Jean Galbraith and the illustrator, Moira Pye.

² Barbara Barnes

	garden in Dandenong. Discussion of Victor finding the serialised version of the story in <i>The Garden Lover</i> , a set of magazines he found in Berkelouw's Book Barn.	Berkelouw
25.00	That book gave Victor great pleasure – relate to the restoration of the garden. Visited Jean Galbraith in her home – saw a painting of the garden restored which was used as the cover. Victor had a similar pleasure in publishing the Edna Walling book – often it is the connection with the people that gives the pleasure.	
27.45	Discussion of the AGHS publications on gardens and properties – Richard Ratcliffe began the idea. Discussion of first publication about gardens in the Canberra district, Durham Hall – its garden history and plan. In Braidwood another garden had a direct Canberra connection – the sister of one brother who owned Woden Homestead and another brother who owned Yarralumla Homestead. [St Omer]	Richard Ratcliffe Durham Hall Woden Homestead Yarralumla Homestead Braidwood St Omer
35.00	Discussion of process of looking at a garden now and then pondering how it might have looked ~ trying to get a sense of how the garden might have looked but have to have a concept of the original feel (without taking it back to the original, which is impossible).	
FILE 3	44 : 24 MINS	
	Discussion of the ACT branch committee meetings, initially at Richard Ratcliffe's home ~ committee members – Astrida Upitass was secretary. Description of the activities of the AGHS ~ looking at old gardens or parks in Canberra ~ increased membership through garden tours ~ Braidwood gardens organised by Mrs Royds ~	Richard Ratcliffe Astrida Upitass Mrs Royds
8.45	NSW Branch ran a garden tour of the Blue Mountains, departing from Sydney to Mt Victoria.	
11.00	Discussion of early members of the AGHS ACT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ken Taylor ~ Victor Crittenden was overseas in 1982 when Ken Taylor was Secretary (and professionally, Head of Landscape Design Course, School Environmental Design, CCAE). • Joan Fry • Lyn Meredith • Olive Royds ~ very fond of Olive. She was so keen – drove back and forth from Braidwood. 	Ken Taylor Joan Fry Lyn Meredith Olive Royds
15.30	When AGHS ACT Branch committee met at Victor's home he would provide a bowl of soup in winter – engendering an atmosphere of working together rather than simply businesslike.	
16.40	Questioned about the idea of the AGHS making itself more "cutting edge" – Victor was emphatic about the difficulties this generated and arose with the introduction of the professional landscape gardeners who wanted to make the AHGS more professional. Instead Victor <i>saw the Garden History Society as a group of</i>	

	<p><i>enthusiasts rather than a group of professionals ... at one stage at a conference in Hobart there was a great discussion ... where a group of people wanted to change the Society into a horticultural society, the history of plants rather than the history of gardens ... (we) were most emphatic that it had to be a Garden History Society, not a plant history society.</i></p> <p>Victor thinks it still happens and believes the AGHS is going too far towards the profession landscape garden. He also believes the journal is concentrating too closely on landscape rather than gardens.</p>	
21.00	Discussion of 'what is a garden' – Victor's views about collective gardens ~ little regard for the involvement of governments (their lack of support for) heritage gardens.	
23.00	Discussion of the garden of Sir Harold White at Mugga Way ~ though the garden was registered, Victor recounts the loss of the garden by subsequent owners. The AGHS fought a legal battle but did not win the court case – with no support from the government. Discussion of the court case – witnesses who spoke in support of this Canberra garden: Richard Ratcliffe, Judith Baskin.	Sir Harold White Richard Ratcliffe Judith Baskin Sir Harold White
28.00	Description of the regular Saturday morning drinks Sir Harold White had at his home and garden. <i>He was very welcoming to the Australian Garden History Society ... and would open up the garden.</i> Victor recounts his limited connection with Sir Harold White and the National Library.	
33.00	Acton Peninsula – discussion of the various offices of the early development of Canberra and the ACT located at that site. Agitation about the destruction of trees on Acton Peninsula. The AGHS did not win its preservation ambitions for the vegetation.	Acton Peninsula
34.50	Co-operation between the ACT Branch and the Branch in Berrima. Tim North lived in Edgecliff initially and moved to Berrima later.	Tim North Edgecliff Berrima
37.40	Victor recounted the work undertaken by the Branch to raise funds during his term as Treasurer – a stall at Lanyon. Members such as Olive Royds, Joan Fry, Richard Ratcliffe would all pot up plants from their garden for sale. Victor potted cottage Shasta daisies.	Olive Royds Joan Fry Richard Ratcliffe
43.00	The AGHS was a friendly group, some people through it may not have been serious enough - <i>we were serious in our aims and what we did, but we always enjoyed ourselves doing it actually, and I think that's the important thing about a society</i>	

FILE 4	44 : 58 MINS	
	<p>National Management Committee – not always friendly gatherings ~ Victor disagreed when the Chairman and Secretary made a decision without informing the committee ~ it led to the secretary resigning.</p> <p>Discussion of changing logo of the Society ~ Victor opposed a change to the logo at National Management Committee ~ discussion of the generation of the logo.</p> <p>Peter Watts' idea to change logo was something Victor opposed ~ he feels the cross section of a tree is more fitting to a tree destruction society.</p>	
5.08	Earlier logo – wreath designed by Joan Law-Smith and the landscape community do not like flowers!	Joan Law-Smith
6.31	One of the important moves was the development of the garden history database by Richard Aitken, which became <i>The Oxford Companion to Garden History in Australia</i> . (which) .. <i>is one of the important things that moved garden history forward into garden history, not just garden looking.</i> Most of the activities had been visiting gardens	Richard Aitken
7.40	<p>ACT Branch began the publication of histories of individual gardens ~ <i>and Melbourne took on a number of gardens it had supported and assisted in repairing and restoring, and Tasmania, of course, was always a very strong garden history group and so that those three states or three branches of the Society were the ones who were primarily interested in garden history.</i></p> <p>Discussion of South Australian emphasis of garden history, Queensland is behind and WA is isolated. New England and northern NSW area is also neglected by the AGHS ~ NSW should be promoting.</p> <p>Importance of "promoting" gardens and interest.</p>	
12.20	Problem of geography in the ways in which the AGHS has developed.	
14.50	AGHS began with the National Trust and as part of the "Garden State" idea in Victoria.	
17.00	Discussion of the role of the National Trust in Sydney.	
17.57	Strength of the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne ~ Melbourne sees itself as a Garden City ~ NSW did not experience the same boom in gardens and houses as Victoria did ~ differences following on from Victoria being a 'protectionist' state with the development of industries and NSW a 'free trade state' which did not develop industries.	
21.00	Victoria has a garden consciousness ~ the open garden scheme started there. Discussion of the <i>tone</i> of Society: Victor recounts that <i>the people who owned beautiful gardens... [were] ... the backbone of the creation of the whole idea and the whole concept of the idea ... wanting to preserve and promote the beautiful gardens ... so you had the ladies who wanted to have a garden history society</i>	

	<i>which was ... a ladies' society.</i>	
22.55	<p>Canberra tone differed as a government town ~ gardens were part of the promotion of Canberra as a garden city ~ set up a suburb, plant trees and then build houses.</p> <p>When Victor first came to live in Cook there were no trees apart from a few in the park opposite ~ now a plethora of trees and gardens created since 1968 ~ an entirely different concept ~ explaining why the ACT Branch was more interested in trees not flowers.</p>	
26.40	Discussion of the ACT Branch activity in Victor's garden – how to draw up a garden plan, organised by Richard Ratcliffe.	Richard Ratcliffe
31.30	ACT Branch discussed the idea of a scrapbook but never achieved this. Discussion about various state tours post conference and comment about AGHS not writing these tours up.	
35.00	Conferences ~ enjoyed the conference in western district of Victoria ~ saw superb gardens ~ never read anything about the houses and gardens in that part of Victoria. Victor loved the Tasmanian tours because he knew of the gardens ~ like visiting old friends.	
37.40	Has the AGHS balanced the mix of intellectual and social aspects of conferences? It is a difficult mix and the AGHS has done a good job of papers followed by garden tours.	
39.30	Winter seminar of ACT Branch in Cooma – Trisha Dixon organised it, later becoming President of the ACT Branch after Victor. Trisha organised a garden tour in Cooma with its bare structure visible in winter months.	Trisha Dixon
42.20	<p><i>Erudite Literature for the winter months</i> was the title of a paper Victor gave at one of the winter seminars in 1994~he spoke about his interest in winter flowers and the interest in garden history which Victor credits to Beverley Nichols, the author of a number of bookss about English gardens.</p> <p>Beverley Nichols said you should own your own garden and it was this comment that convinced Victor to buy his own home in Armidale.</p>	Beverley Nichols

FILE 5	33 : 40 MINS	
	Continuation of the story about Beverley Nichols' garden restoration ~ Victor purchase of his own home, with instructions to the real estate agent to find him an old house in bad condition, wanting a house he could restore. It was Nichols who set Victor off in his interest in garden history.	Beverley Nichols
3.00	Difficult for Victor to leave the Armidale garden but he wanted his own library – to work on, develop and create – started a new life in Canberra. Never returned to look at the house and garden.	
6.48	Discussion of the role managing the role of Librarian, creating a new library ~ at the same time Victor had his home in Cook built.	
11.50	Mulini Press – began in Armidale, printing using an old hand operated duplicator. Retirement on 4 July 1986 – Independence Day for Victor. Discussion of some of the books published since Victor retired – principally a number of books of writings which had previously been serials in papers. Discussion of John Lang ~ his history, publication.	Mulini Press John Lang
18.50	Significant contribution to garden history ? Victor believes his bibliography of Australian gardening books is his chief contribution. Other publications have also promoted garden history: Thomas Shepherd, Jean Galbraith, Edna Walling. He believes his publication - <i>The Front Garden: the Cottage Garden in Australia</i> – began the craze for cottage gardens. Polly Park prompted Victor's research into cottage gardens/front gardens and the role of the geranium ~ publication looks at gardens from First Fleet onwards.	Thomas Shepherd
23.00	Has the AGHS fulfilled expectations? It has made gardens an important part of the landscape, of cities and made people aware of the beauty and value of historic gardens. Some may not be preserved in reality, but preserved in publications.	
25.00	Trees – discussion of a small publication at school, a small society which produced a magazine with articles about gardens, including one on gum trees.	
29.40	Discussion of learning French ~ interest in Napoleon ~ love letters of Napoleon to Josephine. Referred to his Napoleonic Collection – to read the letters (published in French) Victor is studying French and beginning to translate the letters.	Napoleon
	END OF INTERVIEW	