



AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY
NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
ACT MONANO RIVERINA BRANCH



Interviewee:	CEDRIC WILLIAM GEORGE BRYANT
Interviewer:	ROSLYN BURGE
Date of interview:	15 MAY 2019
Place of Interview:	WATSON, ACT
Details:	2 HRS 53 MINS
Restrictions on use:	NIL
All quotations	SHOULD BE VERIFIED AGAINST THE ORIGINAL SPOKEN WORD IN THE INTERVIEW

CHRONOLOGY

1939 10 July	Born - Bovingdon, UK		
1956	December – completed schooling		
1957	January - Migrated to Australia aged 17 as part of Big Brother Movement Kurri Kurri – clergyman / Welsh godfather Gunnedah – jackaroo – moved to Sydney, Forbes		
1968	Transferred by Esso to Canberra, began cultivating fuchsias Horticultural Course at TAFE		
1979	Bought property in Yass		
July 1980	Bryant's Nursery, Victoria Street, Yass (trading as The Herb Garden of Aberlour) New type of nursery – not rows like a supermarket but gardens Buildings in parlous state but fruit trees already growing there		
1981	Fuchsia nursery		
1987	NSW Nursery Industry Association's 'Outstanding Achievement Award' for a retail nursery		
1988	John Brookes OBE – 5-6 week intensive course in UK https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/john-brookes-mbe-1933-2018/		
1 May 1988	Bryants Nursery closed Stable Gallery part of the nursery?		
1989	Return to live in Canberra		
1991	Established garden design / horticultural consulting business in Watson, Canberra with demonstration garden trialling plants for Canberra's climate.		
Since 1991	advised on over 750 gardens from the smallest town house to acres plus country gardens. Primary emphasis is advising on residential properties; commissions have also included the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redevelopment of the main street of Yass following the building of the Hume Highway by-pass - from paving, garden beds to mature tree planting• Redevelopment of the 1930's National Film and Sound Archive gardens in Canberra [a Commonwealth project]• Restoration of gardens of historic houses at the Royal Military College, Duntroon Canberra. [Commonwealth Defence Department/ Australian Heritage Commission]• Advised on the gardens at 'Cavan' Yass, rural home of Mr Rupert Murdoch• Numerous commissions at historic homes in Sydney and Blue Mountains and gardens in many parts of NSW (including country property of Mr and Mrs Shand-Kydd in Yass - Mrs Shand-Kydd was Princess Diana's mother)		
Life Member	Herb Society U.K.	45 years	
Life Member	The Horticultural Society of Canberra	43 years	
Member	The Royal Horticultural Society [U.K.]	44 years	
Garden Writer	<i>The Canberra Times</i>	1988-2011	23 years
Garden Writer	<i>Canberra CityNews</i>	since 2011	8 years

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Cedric seizes opportunities at every turn: he recounts a story of enterprise and endeavour. He discusses his family's background in farming, growing vegetables and fruits at Bovingdon UK, where he was born in 1939 and grew up - *So I'd been brought up in an atmosphere of gardening, as well as farming. I guess it was in the blood, as they say.*

His grandparents had a flower nursery and in 1946 his grandmother branched out to open a wholesale nursery specialising in begonias. Today Bryants Nursery in Bovingdon is a large wholesale nursery with approximately 80 staff supplying bedding plants to many garden centres throughout the south east of UK.

His father was a champion dairy farmer whose *pride and joy was his cows*, and winning the Clean Milk Competition and the Challenge Cup in 1979 for the quality of his milk. And his enterprising mother established a successful chicken and egg business in order to pay for the education of Cedric and his sister.

At the age of 7 Cedric went to boarding school and loved every aspect of it. In 1953 he began public school and recalled his cadet military training. He finished schooling in December 1956 and in February 1957, at the age of 17, he joined with the Big Brother Movement to travel by ship to Australia, describing himself then as a *man of the world*.

He first spent time at the Big Brother camp at Cecil Park near Liverpool near Sydney before travelling by train to Gunnedah to work on Bulga Station. It was a huge property with many new experiences, learning to slaughter sheep and cattle, working with shearers and plowing. After 18 months Cedric moved into town on the Saturday and had a new job by Monday at the modern co-op store where he also did sign-writing for shop displays. Shortly afterwards the shop owner became the first Australian distributor of PortaGas and Cedric was trained as a gas fitter. Cedric describes the immediate improvement access to bottled gas provided to farmers and with a surge in demand the business prospered.

When Cedric's father died in 1959 he returned to the UK then came back to live in Gunnedah the following year, bringing with him his mother and younger sister. His mother became house manager of a ski lodge in Thredbo.

Cedric met his fiancé in Gunnedah but her job took her to Canberra. During his courtship every month he drove a 1,215 mile round-trip to Canberra to visit his fiancé and to Thredbo to see his mother, then back to Gunnedah.

After he married in 1965 he worked for Esso and PortaGas, moving to Sydney, Cooma, Forbes then to Canberra in 1968 where he helped established the gas industry – and began growing fuchsias. Initially a relaxing hobby soon he had more than 300 varieties of fuchsias *in the backyard, which disappeared under glasshouses*, and 3 – 4,000 small pots of fuchsias. Cedric ran weekend workshops which became known as *Mr Bryant's Fuchsias*, served afternoon teas, printed a magazine and was winning many prizes at the Horticultural Society of Canberra's shows. *I was mad on fuchsias ... entered in my fuchsias, won the competitions.*

In the evening he studied at the School of Horticulture in Canberra where fellow students included members of the public and government employees who looked after Canberra's parks and gardens, creating a Garden City, Bush Capital. He comments about the changes to Canberra – smaller blocks of land *with virtually no room for gardens*

Cedric wanted to establish a nursery from scratch and purchased two and a half acres in Yass. The whole family moved there and he and his wife, Gerdina, established Bryant's Nursery. Initially it was to be a fuchsia nursery but because there was no nursery in Yass people kept making requests for various plants and trees and they expanded into a general nursery and Gerdina grew herbs. It

became very successful, awarded Outstanding Nursery in New South Wales in 1985 (or 87) by Nursery Industry Association NSW. Cedric describes the activities of the Nursery, herb growing.

During this time Cedric heard about John Brookes and his *new scheme of gardening, bringing the outdoors in and the indoors out. Instead he would have big doors you could open out onto patios into the garden. His first book, "The Room Outside".* He attended one of Brookes's courses at Denmans in the UK and describes the course content. On return to Yass Cedric ran his own small classes in garden design.

He had a particular plan for the nursery, with trees for sale identified by numbers, not plant names, and arranged as display gardens ... *people could take the list, it was a bit like a Chinese restaurant. They'd go along and say well we'd like a number 24 and ... could see the actual trees growing and what they looked like.* At the same time Cedric was giving talks to the Agricultural Bureau about growing trees and *encouraging farmers to grow more trees.*

Cedric started the Yass Garden Club - still in existence. He highlighted the benefits of the training he received at Esso and how he was able to adapt that in his nursery; bookkeeping, marketing and capturing ideas at national horticultural conferences about pricing, design of the layout of nursery plants and overseas nurseries, when Cedric was constantly alert to ways of adapting European methods of nursery management, describing his approach as *a constant learning experience.*

In 1988 Cedric and the nursery were caught by the financial crisis; sold the business and moved back to Canberra the following year and began his garden design and horticultural consulting business.

Always ready to adapt and provide heightened customer service, Cedric discussed some of his projects which include:

- Providing Lady Stephens (when Sir Ninian was Governor-General and living at Yarralumla) with plants
- garden design at the National Film and Sound Archive, with details about plants and difficulties with missing flowers
- Royal Military College, Duntroon
- Main Street, Yass
- Mr Shand Kydd, owned the Sanderson Wallpaper Company and his wife, Frances Shand Kydd, Princess Diana's mother
- Rupert Murdoch's garden, Caven, at Yass
- One of his smallest jobs (garden 10x2M) at a retirement home in Canberra
- *Canberra Times* building in Canberra
- he estimates he has designed a front garden, or back garden, or the whole garden for about 750 homes in Canberra

Coloured plant labels now taken for granted in nurseries, but after attending a conference in America Cedric believes his nursery was the first adapt these.

During the 2003-8 drought Cedric worked with ACREW as a water ambassador making films and tv advertisements educating the public about saving water and conducted water-wise workshops about irrigation.

Cedric discusses his entirely organic approach to gardening, and contemporary discussions about Roundup and glyphosate and various products.

When he moved back to Canberra, to Watson, he set about establishing his domestic garden with radiating pathways (echoing Walter Burley Griffin's approach to Canberra). Essentially there was nothing growing in the garden and since 1991 Cedric established the garden to provide privacy and as a display garden, a showcase so potential clients could readily imagine which might be achievable.

Cedric spoke about his love of camellias and the camellia Priscilla Rose which he developed, registered and named for his sister who died in 2008. He and Gerdina used to open their garden as part of Open Garden Scheme with 1,800 people coming through the first time it was opened.

Cedric referred to visiting John Brookes when he came from UK to NSW to give talks for Marilyn Abbott at Kennerton Green. He describes the confidence John Brookes gave him as an *entrée into a new business and a new way of life which lasted from 1988, when I went to his course, up until last July 2018, when I turned 79.*

Cedric designed the garden at the *Canberra Times* and had also written a gardening column for the *Canberra Times* from 1988 when in 2011 he was sacked. Cedric was employed almost immediately (along with many of the other journalists) at the *Canberra CityNews*, writing a weekly gardening column ever since.

The interview concluded with Cedric discussing the benefits of gardening until old age and the role of gardening clubs in not only providing socialising but interests as people age; and climate change and droughts which are a regular feature of Australia.



This is an interview with Mr Cedric Bryant who is being interviewed for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection. Particularly, the ACT Riverina Monaro Branch. Mr Bryant is being interviewed about his association with the Society and his role in horticulture in Australia. The interview is taking place at his home, in Watson in Canberra on Wednesday, 15 May 2019. The interviewer is Roslyn Burge.

Audio file 1 – 2 hrs 4 mins

Cedric, thank you for participating in this oral history collection and giving your time.

It's a pleasure.

We might just start with some biographical details. Where and when you were born.

Yes, I was born in England, just north of London. My parents were in farming as was my grandfather and great grandfather. We've been involved in farming for many, many years. So my background is farming and farming in England also includes a lot of horticulture, rind fruit and vegetables.

Whereabouts was the property?

It was a little village called Bovingdon which is 25 miles north of Marble Arch in London.

It's in the country and yet so close.

Absolutely in the country in what they call the Green Belt, which after the war when tremendous demand on housing and development, but they wanted that green space all around London, which unfortunately we don't have in places like Sydney.

Is it still part of a green belt today?

Absolutely yes.

What sort of farm was it?

It was a mixed farm, primarily dairy farm. We used to supply surrounding villages, delivering milk to people's houses. Growing hay, straw, corn, a totally mixed farm.

Was that your mother's side of the family or your father's?

That was my father's side. Father's side was always the farming side.

And who was your father?

My father was William George Bryant, of which two of my names include William George.

Are you the first born?

No, I'm the result of a second marriage. My father's first wife died and then later he married my mother. He had two children in the first marriage, and then two children, myself and my sister with the second marriage.

Who was your mother?

My mother, Catherine Bryant, who came from a family that were involved with the military. Her father was in the Army, in the Lancashire Regiment, and Cheshire Regiment with one of his first postings to India in the 1890's, and then he was in the Boer War and later in the first World War and then he retired later on. But it was the military on my mother's side of the family.

So how did the military and the farmer meet?

I have never found out exactly. I do not know. I heard stories but I've never been able to verify how they met.

It's quite a big business, that farming business. You showed me the photos earlier, tell me a little bit about it now.

Well, my father had the farm, but my grandmother, or rather my step-grandmother, her husband was a farmer, my father's father. But she branched out in 1946 and decided to open a wholesale nursery. It was specializing in those days amongst other things in begonias. They started a nursery, a small nursery in Bovingdon still, just up the road from our farm. And it grew, and grew, and it is still there as Bryant's Nursery, wholesale today. They supply bedding plants, to many garden centres throughout southeast England.

It looked like a huge nursery, it must cover some acres.

Oh yes, yes. I don't know exactly how many acres because when I was there a couple of years ago, my cousin Richard Bryant who now runs the nursery, Bryant's Nursery, they were buying and putting up more glass houses and expanding rapidly with 80 on the staff.¹

Heavens, that's a very big enterprise.

Yes.

Just again coming back to your early days, your very early days, when were you born?

I was born on 10 July 1939, just before the outbreak of war. So I was six years old at the end of the war and remember parts of the war, remembering the big American air base that was established in our village. I mean we had bombs dropping literally within yards of the farm house. There's still bomb craters still there from where the bombs dropped close to the house, but yes I remember. But I went to boarding school fairly early.

What age, Cedric?

Well I started school at three, but I started boarding school at seven.

Oh.

Didn't think anything of it, and then I stayed at boarding school until 1956 when I was 16.

Which boarding school was it?

One was in a place called Hemel Hempstead, (Heath Brow School). Then later to public school, it was All Saint's College, Bloxham, commonly called Bloxham School.

Was that nearby?

That was in Oxfordshire between Oxford and Banbury.

So you weren't banished to school and never saw your family?

I thoroughly enjoyed boarding school.

Did you? What particularly?

Absolutely, I enjoyed every aspect of it. The army cadets, because at that time it wasn't that long after the war, 1953 I started public school, but there was still around about the time of the Korean War and every boy had to be trained basically the same as National Service. So we

¹ Bryants Nurseries Ltd, Water Lane, Bovingdon, Herts

were fully trained using weapons and even had a course on driving tanks at 16 years old on Salisbury Plain. But it was very intensive, but as part of the school curriculum was the Army Cadets, but of all of the school ... I loved boarding school.

So, I'm intrigued about that military training. Was it part of your 'keeping fit' or was it an awareness of the Korean War?

No, it was every school in England had what they called the combined cadet force, and there was no option, it was just compulsory in the cadets.

I'm just going back again before we leave your school, I'm intrigued with your grandmother establishing the nursery in '46 immediately after the war, what prompted her to do that?

I've no idea actually my grandfather, he was a successful farmer, quite successful. I know he owned at least nine houses in the village so he was quite well off. Then when he died I think each of his eight children got a house given to them in the village, but my father then bought a farm known as, Street Farm in Bovingdon.

What was the name?

Street Farm.

Street Farm because the house was built by John de Street in 1530, a large two story farm house and to this day still called Street Farm.. And it's still lived in.

You return often to see that farm house?

Every time we go to England, I would not necessarily go into the house but I would drive past it. It's still there, yes.

You showed me a photograph earlier too, Cedric, was it your father with a large silver cup?

My father's, yes, his pride and joy was his cows. He really looked after those cows and the quality of the milk at that time was excellent and as I showed you in the picture there, there were medals going back to 1926 for what they called the Clean Milk Competition, and in about 1979 he won the prestigious Challenge Cup, which as you saw in the photo, was huge for quality of milk in the Clean Milk Competition. That was for Britain.

The best milk in Britain, wasn't it?

As far as I understand according to the citation on the cup.

You also mentioned that your father and mother had a different approach to education, how did that come about?

Well my father, he left school when he was 14, because his father, my grandfather said "Well, you know, you don't need schooling, you can come and work on the farm." So I think he learnt to read and write, but not much more and so he left school at 14 and my father said, "Well, okay, I can work on the farm." His first son was what they called the hay and straw dealer, he used to cart hay and straw, in fact he used to cart hay up to the pit ponies in South Wales.

That's a fair hike.

Yes. Up there, he got contracts there for many years. That being my step-brother, Ernest.

How would he get the hay to the coal mines?

11.29 In big trucks, loaded up, take the hay there. We used to sell hay and straw to all sorts of places, estates and so on around the area.

Cedric, we were just talking about your parents and you spoke about your father's approach to education and leaving school at 14, did he expect that you would leave school at that stage too?

I'm sure he did, and he said to my mother, "Well if you want to educate the boy," he said, "you pay for it." And so my mother said, "Not a problem." ... Interestingly there was the Ovaltine factory -- just down the road. They had a huge demand for eggs. So my mother started with chickens and egg production, and ended up with thousands of them. Nowadays you can't put eggs in lots of foods. Ovaltine nowadays doesn't have eggs in it for a variety of reasons of course, but in those times we would supply the Ovaltine factory with eggs. My mother paid for my education, and for my sister, both going to private schools with eggs.

So did she continue to produce the eggs and the chickens after you'd finished school?

Well yes, and my father was still running the dairy farm and the general farm and mother was doing the chickens, though my father was involved with it as well, when I left England to come to Australia.

So we've made a big leap here. You left school, and what did you think you'd do then?

No idea, except I had a person who at that stage I thought was my godfather (and it was only about a month ago I discovered he wasn't my godfather) but he was a reverend gentleman who came to Australia on lecture tour for a religious college at Morpeth near Newcastle, north of Sydney . He would send me books back to England saying about Australia and how wonderful it was, and then war broke out, and he couldn't get back to England because all the ships were tied up as troop carriers, and he was stuck here. After the war he decided to stay, he said, "Well, send the lad out to Australia." He was a clergyman at Kurri Kurri in the coal fields out of Newcastle and so my mother said, "Well, why not?" So I left school in December 1956 and I was on the boat to Australia in February '57.

How did you feel about that?

Oh great adventure. I'd been to boarding school for 10 years, and I really was very independent and so on. When you're in boarding school you learn to look after yourself and stand up for yourself and there was a movement called the Big Brother movement, which sounds like something out of 1984, but the Big Brother movement was set up for young people that wanted to come to Australia but didn't have a sponsor, because you had to have a sponsor if you were under 21 or you didn't have family here.

So the Big Brother movement sponsored groups of boys to travel from England to Australia and found us jobs. The boys that came from the towns were found jobs in the towns, and the boys from the country, from farming were found jobs in farming. So I left ... well the ship was supposed to leave, the SS Otranto, an Orient Line ship was supposed to leave on 13 February, 1957, but they had engine problems so we didn't leave until the next day, on Valentine's day in 1957. At that time, the Suez Canal was closed with all the problems with President Nasser and it was all blocked with ships, so we came around the Canary Islands, Cape Town, Durban, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney.

What do you remember of that journey?

I remember lots of it quite well. Also, I went through my old diary from that time, only last night as we were talking and discovered things that I'd forgotten all about that trip. There were another 20, 25 boys on the ship and they also had an equivalent scheme for girls.

Was there someone travelling with you to oversee you?

Yes, we had two escort officers, very responsible and we were having lessons and things like that on the ship. We'd get up early in the morning, PE, seven o'clock in the morning, but it

was a long trip - six weeks and two days. We broke down a couple of times and the ship, that was its last trip, it went to scrap immediately afterwards.

Goodness. So you came to Sydney first?

Came to Sydney and the Big Brother Movement had what they called a training farm, just down by Liverpool and it was a transit point for boys to get used to Australia.

What was it called?

The Big Brother movement it was called Cecil Park. Cecil Park is still an area outside Sydney. Most of the boys were there for about two weeks and then sent off. They found a job for me as a jackaroo up in the sheep and cattle station up at Gunnedah in the north-western New South Wales. I travelled on the north-west mail, a few days later.

You did all that on your own?

Yes. I was, as I said, 10 years of boarding school. By that time I was 17, I was a man of the world, and arrived down at Gunnedah at the station and the cockie picked me up and drove me out to the sheep and cattle station about 10 thousand acres, 10 thousand sheep, 500 head of cattle and it was a learning experience.

18.49 What was the name of that station?

It was Bulga Station near Gunnedah.

Did you enjoy that?

Not really, no. the owner was making use of me, certainly. I learnt to do everything from dealing with sheep and cattle, and killing sheep and cattle, and cutting them up for meals and that sort of things. Dealing with the shearers. It was a good experience. Plowing, as an example, our farm in England totalled 115 acres. The first paddock they put me in, he said, "Right now, 115 acres, this paddock I'm putting you in now for plowing, it's a thousand acres." Quite a bit of difference, but I wasn't there long.

I was there only about 18 months and one of the stock carriers who used to come and pick up stock said, "Look, why are you putting up with this fellow?" In the end I told him what I thought of Australian farming methods, and he had told me what he thought of smart young pommies, by that time I'd turned 18 and the cattle fellow said, "Look, move into town. You'll find a job." In those days, you'd step out of one job and there was another job waiting for you. So I moved into town, he was staying at a boarding house, run by a wonderful German lady, "You can come and board here as long as you like," she said, and I you don't have to pay me any money until you have a job." I moved in there on a Saturday, and I found a job on the Monday.

What was that new job?

The new job was with a big co-op store, very progressive in a new building in the town of Gunnedah and literally the story was that I was wandering around the street, having a look around the town and this fellow was standing next to me and said, "Oh yes, you're the young English fellow at Bulga Station?" I said, "No longer," and he said, "Oh I can understand you leaving that fellow," so he said, "What are you doing now?" I said, "Oh well I'm just having a look round," he said, "What do you think of this building? It's a bit out of character with modern two storey building in the main street of Gunnedah," and I said, and it was the only two storey shop in the town, and I said, "Well it's good," but I said, "Look, you've got shop window displays," and I said, "You've got blow flies everywhere," and I said, I didn't know who he was, and I said, "You'd think the owner would get somebody to at least clean the blow flies out of the window and tidy it up, and the windows need a clean and a decent display." And he said,

"Right, okay so well you haven't got a job, so you have now because I'm the general manager of the shop," and he said, "you'd better come inside," and by lunch time I had my new job.

I'd also learnt to do things like sign-writing in school, in the arts section. So I used to do all the sign-writing for the shop for the window displays, and doing the window displays. Then they took on not long after that, the first Australian distributor of PortaGas bottled gas.

PortaGas was owned by Australian Gaslight Company, AGL, which all Canberra people are familiar with. He said, "We're taking on the agency, and he said so I think it'd be a good idea you learning a trade, so they sent me down to Sydney to train as a gas fitter with AGL. Then he put me in charge of the department installing gas because at that time, in the rural areas, there was no rural electricity.

No electricity in Gunnedah?

Not in the country. Not on the farms. There was no electricity at all. They had slow combustion stoves, chip heaters, chip heaters like wood fire heaters for the hot water systems. Copper for boiling the clothes, some of the farms certainly had generators, but that was limited on the amount of power. All of a sudden gas coming in, bottled gas because they could use it for cooking, heating, hot water, and the demand was tremendous.

A booming business.

It was, and really, really took off.

So by this time, you're 18 or 19?

Yes.

Were you ... coming to Sydney, that didn't tempt you as a place of more opportunity?

At that time, no. Although it was interrupted because my father died in England in 1959 so I went back to England because we didn't know what was going to happen with the farm, and travelled back by sea because it was all by sea in those days. I went on the P&O liner, the Orion, and at that time the Suez Canal was open, and we went through travelled there.

Then in the area where we lived, some of the areas were being resumed for housing and my uncle lost his farm for housing development and was fighting for compensation for years afterwards, and so my mother said, "Well why don't we sell the farm and come with you back to Australia."

That's a very big step for your mother to make.

And my sister was 13 at the time. So we sold the farm, and there was a few other family problems involved which I won't go into but we packed everything up in a big shipping container and brought everything and arrived back in Gunnedah in 1960.

So your mother and sister came to live with you in Gunnedah?

Well we bought a house in Gunnedah and I went back to my old job.

Did you like Gunnedah?

It was a good town, progressive town. I mean it still is. It was at the time the biggest wheat receival centre in Australia. It had huge silos and all the farmers were bringing their wheat in and then shipped out by train.

So you brought bottled gas to Gunnedah?

More or less, yes. Yes, more or less.

How long did you stay there for?

26.21 After a while, 1965 I married Gerdina. Her parents had come from Holland as migrants in 1952. Gerdina at that time was seven years old and Gerdina and my sister went together to school, Gunnedah High School. At that time I didn't take any notice to these giggly school girls, Gerdina left town to go nursing after finishing school. All around in the country areas, regular dances, rural shed halls and so on, and I was mad keen on dancing. Loved dancing, and used to drive to Tamworth, 48 miles away every Saturday night for the big dance in the Tamworth Town Hall.

Gerdina went to a dance at the Gunnedah Town Hall and I happened to be at the dance and asked her for a few dances, asked her out and the rest is history.

Though in the meantime, she had got a job with the National Bank in Gunnedah and they asked her temporarily if she would come down to Canberra because they were short of staff over the Christmas period. About six, seven months later she was still down there. So I used to travel from Gunnedah down to Canberra. At that time, my mother was the house manager, and my sister was the head receptionist at the big hotel at Thredbo, so then I'd drive on to Thredbo and drive back to Gunnedah, it was a 1,215 mile round trip. I used to do it once a month.

One of those trips, with Gerdina we went up to a new restaurant at that time, the Carousel Restaurant, at the top of Red Hill in Canberra and proposed to her, and yes that was fine and then in 1965, day after Boxing Day in 1965 we got married in Gunnedah, built a house in Gunnedah.

Then I saw opportunities with PortaGas with the head office in Sydney. Gerdina said, "Go for it." So we moved down to Sydney to PortaGas head office, which was just around the corner from AGL and later we had our first baby born, Ayesha, at St Luke's Hospital in Sydney.

Then PortaGas decided they were going to open up in Cooma because all the ski lodges wanted gas. Electricity was there but it was impractical because every time there is a snow storm they used to pull all the power lines down. So they said, "Okay, we're going to appoint you as the manager in Cooma."

We were there only about two years, then Esso, the big oil company stuck oil and gas in the Bass Strait. They decided then that within a short time they'll run a pipeline from the Bass Strait in Victoria to Sydney, up the east coast. They were taking Canberra, and so I thought well, okay, Esso had gone into the gas business and one of the top people of PortaGas had joined Esso, and I went and saw him and he said, "No, we've got no jobs at the moment," he said, "at all." So we went up to Gunnedah because Gerdina was expecting our second daughter, Yvette, and she was going to stop with an aunt in Gunnedah for the birth, and I arrived at Gunnedah at the aunt's house and there was telegram waiting, "Be in Sydney, nine o'clock tomorrow morning." I went off to Sydney, with an interview with Esso and they said, "We've changed our mind. You can forget PortaGas, and we're offering you a job immediately now, anytime you'd like to start."

What sort of job? What was the title?

It was just as a sales representative, and then Gerdina subsequently had Yvette and I wasn't there for the birth, but still that's rankled ever since. Just tracking back, when we built our house in Gunnedah and we were ready to move in, we got married, second day after Boxing Day, 27 December We'd gone on the honeymoon to Sydney, and a huge storm came through Gunnedah, which we didn't know about, and I rang Gunnedah about ... I can't remember what, and they said, "Oh, look. Forget all that with your honeymoon business," they said,

"you'd better come back because the roof is gone off your house." I wouldn't believe them until they put the boss on, and he said, "Yes," he said, "It took six rooves, it was a metal roof, they took six rooves off houses in Gunnedah, stripped them off, then we got couple of inches of rain on top, so that collapsed all the ceilings."

Oh no.

32.07 So Gerdina is still waiting for our honeymoon in 2019! So we drove straight back to Gunnedah. We had one night away in fact, in motel we stopped at in Sydney, we said, "We can't get any hot water." They said, "No, the hot water system's collapsed, because it's Christmas time we can't get a plumber urgently, so there's no hot water."

Drove back to Gunnedah and surveyed the house. The insurance company were fantastic, but at that time, because it was Christmas, all the steel which was coming from BHP in Newcastle, factory was closed down. So we waited a month living in an hotel in Gunnedah, until the steel arrived. They then said, "Okay, we're going to start at 4:00 in the morning," because that time of the year, Gunnedah, January, the temperatures were in the 40s. They said, "We'll start early in the morning." We had it all covered with big tarpaulins, and so they took the tarpaulins off the night before, ready for a 4:00 am start. That night a thunderstorm came through, and we got a couple of inches of rain, and it collapsed all the ceilings again.

Oh, goodness. Did you feel like going back to the UK at that point?

Then we finished the house and so on, and it was all put together in March, but that was also the time we moved to Sydney, and interestingly enough, this is part of the history of Australia, first person that rented the house was an American who came here to establish the cotton industry.

Who was that?

I don't remember his name at all, but they were going to grow cotton. They ended up actually growing cotton around Narrabri, 60 mile away, not at Gunnedah itself. He rented a house, establishing the cotton industry in Australia. But nowadays cotton is growing right down to the speed limit in Gunnedah.

Cedric, we've just had a small break, and you've just joined Esso. Where to next?

Yes, I joined Esso. Initially they sent me to Forbes, New South Wales, and they said, "You're going to be there for three years." Then after six months they changed their mind, and they said, "No, we're appointing you the Canberra manager." So I joined Esso, and that was in 1968, I joined Esso. I was there for the next 13 years establishing putting gas into people's homes, cooking, heating, hot water, etc.

Then at the same time I had a hobby growing fuchsias. I'd always loved fuchsias seeing them growing in Cornwall.

How so? Did you spend time in Cornwall?

Holidays, because when we had the farm mother and father couldn't get away together, so father would take me for holidays, and then my mother would take me and my sister.

Always Cornwall?

No, oh no. Oh, Wales, all over Wales, North Wales, middle of Wales, Aberystwyth, Rhyl, all over. All over England we'd go for holidays...

But clearly the fuchsias made an impression.

Fuchsias in Cornwall grow everywhere, because Cornwall is basically a tropical climate. It's in what they call the warm Atlantic gulf stream. They even grow palm trees there.. And I love my fuchsias. In fact, when we were in Sydney with PortaGas, we were renting a house and they had fuchsias growing in the garden and the garden was neglected, and I said to the owner, "How about I do something to the garden and fix it up a bit?" He said, "All right, I'll reduce the rent accordingly." We were married with one baby, money was fairly important. ... I used to tidy up the garden, prune the fuchsias, everything.

So, in Canberra, I started growing fuchsias as a hobby. It grew and grew, and it would fill your weekend because it was a full-on job with Esso, but you needed something for relaxation. I was growing about 300-odd varieties of fuchsias, and I had, in the backyard, which disappeared under glasshouses and so on, in Canberra, there was about three or four thousand small pots of fuchsias.

So you didn't have a garden as you've got here today.

No, it was only about half the size of this one, but fuchsias everywhere. Then I'd run weekend workshops and they became known as Mr Bryant's fuchsias because everybody said, "Oh, have you been up to see Mr Bryant's fuchsias?" "No." And fuchsias were very fashionable at that time. There were some huge wholesale fuchsia nurseries around ...

Around Canberra?

Well, Gundagai, around Bowral, Bundanoon, there was a huge fuchsia nurseries . Very, very fashionable.

This is the '60s?

Yes, the good old days, and then the '70s.

So how long did you continue that business?

Well, the whole time I was with Esso, 13-odd years. I used to have our own little magazine I'd turn out, and so on, all about fuchsias. Afternoon tea served, showing them how to take cuttings. It was basically a hobby, but it was bringing in money.

What sort of people came to your classes? Old? Young?

Oh yes, just a mixture. In fact, one young fellow from Yass who had a car agency. Well, I say young, he was in his 30s. Bought some fuchsias and only recently I bumped into him, and this is like 30, 35 years later. He said, "I've still got some of your fuchsias in hanging baskets in Yass."

Esso decided, quite unexpectedly, to pull out of Australia, except for the oil and gas business in the Bass Strait. So all the service stations, everything, they were all sold off to Mobil. They pulled out and said to me, "Okay, well you don't have a job." I could move to Melbourne, but no. But just before that we'd been looking to the future, of buying some land to start a nursery.

Your children would have been growing up by that time, and at school?

They were at school, yes, but also I was, in the evening times, studying at the School of Horticulture in Canberra.

What prompted you to do that?

Well, because I wanted to know more about plants, growing plants. Individual courses, we had a course on plant propagation, plant identification, grafting. So a whole series of courses. In the evening times I'd go there.

Were these courses for people who were in business?

No, anybody. Anybody at all.

But I mean, were they nursery apprentices, say, or people who had proper jobs, quote unquote, and doing this on the side?

Yes. Anybody and everybody. I mean, they encouraged, certainly, nurseries that had young staff - encouraged them to go. Also, at that time, the government were taking on a lot of apprentices because the government was the federal government, it wasn't self government at that time. So they had dozens and dozens, they had hundreds on the staff, looking after all the parks and gardens. Canberra was expanding rapidly, tree planting. Initially every home, they supplied all the trees and shrubs, going back years ago. All the trees and shrubs, and I'm going back, oh, to the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s. Front hedges, they would clip the front hedges for you. They'd mow the lawns on the nature strip for you.

Then eventually, after a while, as Canberra ... certainly after the war and going into the 60s, they were moving thousands of public servants from Melbourne, which had been basically where most of the public servants were still. Moving them to Canberra, building hundreds, or thousands, of government homes. So then they reduced it to ten trees and 40 shrubs provided free by the government, to create a Garden City. The Bush Capital idea came up later, but the Garden City, the concept of ... Walter Burley Griffin.

So there was huge demand, also, because if people had no plants in the garden, okay, oftentimes they wouldn't bother, but if they got their ten trees and 40 shrubs, it would encourage them - they'd need, say, insect sprays, whatever, this, that, and the other, and so they'd go to the garden centre, and it encouraged gardening. It was very competitive. I mean, the Canberra Horticultural Society started in 1929 It was the first horticultural society here.

You joined a number of those societies very early on in your time?

Yes, 1973, when I was with Esso, but also I was competing with growing fuchsias. With all due modesty, I was winning lots of prizes at the shows for the horticultural society. Technically the Horticultural Society of Canberra, and I was mad on fuchsias, all the shows, entered in my fuchsias, won the competitions, and-

Cedric, as you tell me this you lift about three inches taller in the chair. So you seem quite proud of that achievement?

Oh, well yes. I mean, definitely. I mean, the Canberra Horticultural Society still have four shows a year, and they're all fantastic shows. Now the Camellia Show, the Rose Show, the rhododendron and azalea show in springtime. They're always great shows, but it's only one of a number. I mean, Canberra, there's about 20-odd garden clubs. There's the Geranium and Fuchsia Society, the Camellia Society, Succulent Society, two bonsai societies, African Violet Society, etc.

Certainly Canberra isn't the Garden City it was.

How so?

44.0 Well, with the size of blocks being dramatically reduced. I mean, the traditional thing in Australia was, you had a house with a quarter-acre block, and you had a little concrete path going up, and a rotary clothesline in the back, but there was room to grow a few veggies, for the kids to play cricket, etc. The blocks of that time were 880 square meters, equivalent to a quarter-acre block. In some of the new suburbs, the blocks are down now to 270 square meters. So, if you imagine this block here cut into, say, three, there's virtually no room for gardens and so on. It's one of those things.

Coming back to the fuchsias, and so on. When Esso pulled out, we'd been looking for land and we'd looked at various places, more up at Carcoar, near Bathurst, out at Bungendore, out at Canberra. Then we found this place in Yass.²

You were looking for a nursery or a place to have a nursery.

No, not buying a nursery, but land that we could start a nursery from scratch.

Is this at the same time you're working with Esso?

At that time, towards the end of working with Esso. We were looking for the future, that if anything happened with Esso, or we decided to go in a different direction.

This is the late 70s by this time?

It was the time of the advent of permaculture, the permaculture movement, etc., which I was involved with that at the time. So we were looking around, and we found this place in Yass, two and a half acres. Historic old buildings, the old coach house and stables, with the hayloft up the top, built in 1880. The house was built in 1919. It was an old orchard, which went back to 100-odd years previous.

Were the trees still productive?

Some of the trees were apricots.... you were talking about persimmons a minute ago, they were the size of those persimmons, the apricots, absolutely. We saw an ad in *The Canberra Times*. Saturday morning, drove over, had a look, had a walk around, and bought it in the afternoon.

Can you describe the land for me when you bought it?

Well, it was on a sloping block. The block, actually, the land, was part of Hamilton Hume's estate in Yass, which is only 45 minutes from Canberra. It was part of his estates at that time, and then it had been subdivided and subdivided etc. But actually, the orchard was about nine acres, but it had been split off and we had two and a half acres, but the lovely historic brick stables and so on, we saw the potential ...

But there were no gardens there established?

Oh, there was nothing there.

It was just paddock, open paddock land.

Yes, nothing there at all, except two or three trees that was remnants of the orchard. So we started from scratch, and we started a nursery. Gerdina had been mad on herbs for a long time, and so Gerdina said, "Well, I'll grow the herbs", and I'll do the trees and shrubs. Initially it was to be a fuchsia nursery, and we thought this was great, but there was no nursery in Yass, and more and more people saying, "Oh, could you get us a few grevilleas?" or, "Can you get us a couple of claret ash?" etc. So we expanded into a general nursery.

How would you source your plants?

Well, from wholesalers. I mean, they came from as far away as the Dandenongs, to Sydney, at Rouse Hill, near Windsor, they had a big wholesale nursery market once a month. So all the retail nurseries, like us, would go up there and buy our plants. .

² Bryant's Nursery, Victoria Street, Yass

No more?

No, it doesn't exist any longer, but at that time it was a big operation. I'd take the truck down to Melbourne regularly.

Would you buy from catalogues as well?

No. Always, if I was buying from a nursery, I would inspect the stock to make sure it was top quality. That was important because, in about 19 ... let me see, 1979, we started the nursery, and about 1985 Then it was the Nurserymen's Association,³ now it's the Nursery Industry Association, New South Wales, we won the award for the Outstanding Nursery in New South Wales.

So, between '79 to '85, in that short period of time, you'd established a nursery that was award winning?

Yes

A lot of hard work I expect.

Gerdina got to the stage, the amount of herbs she was growing, and I showed you pictures of her sitting in the herb garden. You said it looks like something out of an 18th, 19th century picture.

It does.

She was supplying just about all the garden centres in Canberra with herbs. Like, we were retail, wholesaling them then I'd take the truck in, say, once a week, and go round the nurseries and supply all the herbs. But we were growing everything from fruit trees, for sale, as a general nursery. Then the old building, we actually turned it into a little self-serve coffee shop. You could go in and there was always some cakes, this, that, and the other, and you could make your own tea and coffee in there.

Who did the catering part of that?

No, it was just self-serve.

But the cakes and so forth? Did you make those-

Oh, Gerdina made those, or with just got commercial biscuits. I can't remember exactly.

Where were you living at the time?

On site.

In that cottage?

No, at Yass, the house was quite a substantial house. It was what they called a Californian-style house built in 1919. It was actually the first tile-roofed house in Yass. The tiles came from the old Lion Tile Company at Ashfield in Sydney. If you went years ago, into Sydney on the old Hume Highway, and you'd go through Ashfield, there was a big lion on the entrance to the Lion Tile Company in Ashfield.

Just so I get a picture, or for someone listening to this, what was the proximity of the house to the nursery? Next door?

20 or 30 paces.

³ formerly The NSW Association of Nurserymen Limited

Okay. So it was all ...

All on site. It was all on site.

Were your girls still at home? They travelled into Canberra?

51.00 No, by that time they were attending the Yass high school.

Right.

Then one of them, later, joined the Department of Finance in Canberra, and the other one got married and had children, and looking after the children. The two daughters. But neither of them really expressed any interest in the nursery at all. "You want to do that Pa, that's fine. Don't tell us your problems."

So was that ... harking back ... there must have been some early influences on you to establish that.

Well, for a start, in England, on our farm, we grew not only hay, and straw and wheat, and all that sort of thing, but we had an extensive gardens, vegetable gardens and we were growing all sorts of raspberries, blackcurrants. All of those sorts of things over there. So I'd been brought up in an atmosphere of gardening, as well as farming. I guess it was in the blood, as they say. Certainly, it helped with me attending the School of Horticulture and learning more about it.

What other courses did you do, besides propagation?

Well, it was towards the end of when we had the nursery, in about 1988, because we moved out of the nursery 1989. I'll come back to that in a second. Because of the family in England, we would go over there occasionally to see the family, and at one stage, my mother, who was here, and my sister, returned to England to live, and we went over to see them over there. Looking around at various things, and also, who were good garden designers. The name kept on cropping up of John Brookes, MBE ... who died only a few months ago, was still considered one of the most eminent garden designers in Britain.

John Brookes, later John Brookes MBE, and, as I say, he only died recently. He introduced a new scheme of gardening, bringing the outdoors in and the indoors out. Instead he would have big doors you could open out onto patios into the garden. His first book – *The Room Outside*. It was a little paperback book, which I've got one of the original copies. This was a whole new concept.

It must have been quite innovative in England, at that time.

Oh, it was hugely innovative. So, I thought, "Well, if he's one of the best around," and so I called him up and said ... I can't remember if I wrote or rang, and said, "Look, how do I get into one of your garden classes." Very select, they only had a maximum of 12 people in the class, and it ran for about five, six weeks. Very intensive. They said, "Oh, no, look, we're booked up for the next two or three years, but we can put you on a waiting list."

And a few weeks later they rang me and said, "Look, we've had somebody drop out of the course that's going to start in about a fortnight's time. Can't find anybody here. Your name came up. Are you interested?" I said, "Right, I will be there." So I took off to England, and studied under John Brookes.

Where was his school?

His school was in a place called Denmans, which is just out of Chichester in the south of England, which is still a very famous garden. He established a garden, a display garden, there, and although John has died, it's now run by a Trust keeping it going. It's very famous.

Not a huge garden., two or three acres, but it was the basis for his design school, the ideas he had were completely new to landscape design in Britain.

Even in the 80s?

Oh yes.

So what were some of those ideas?

Oh, well, certainly, more moving outside. He was great in promoting perennial plants. The use of gravel, actually, he had a big stream running right through his gardens which was about two meters wide, and the stream was actually gravel, with little bridges across it. So it gave the appearance, and then it ran into a real pond. As I say, his ideas were just so much to the fore, and when we first arrived, there was only 12 in the group, and the first thing he said, "Right, I'd like you all now, please, to write down the ABC. Okay, write ABC." Then he said, "I want you to write the ABC."

You mean the alphabet, A to Z?

A to Z. A to Z. So, we wrote that down. Then he said, "Right, now I want you to make each letter big, like 6" big, and I want you to cut it out. A, cut it out, 6" high and 3" wide, whatever, and cut it out," he said. So, we did all of that, and come morning teatime, and there was an architect from Ireland who was involved in the course, and he said, "Well, I didn't come here to learn about cutting out ABC. I did that at primary school." He walked out of the course and we never saw him again.

After lunch he said, "Right, now you get those, and you start putting them together. So put an A next to a D, and a B next to a W. Then trace around the outside, and it's starting to give you shapes for a garden." It was so clever, and so simple. Every night we had homework to do, and at weekends we were given a list of gardens to visit. They were all over the south of England, they weren't just close by. He'd give us lists and look at these various points of these gardens. So Saturday and Sunday, and fortunately I was at a bed and breakfast place, and the people were fantastic - they had regularly got students from John Brookes going there, so they had a nice little clientele. And there was one other lass was there from New Zealand, with me. And the people we were staying with used to run us, voluntarily, all over, right down to Cornwall, to Somerset, to look at the gardens, because they said, "Well, we'd like to look at the gardens as well."

So some of the gardens were as far away as Cornwall, from Chichester?

Oh yes.

That's a fair hike for some English people.

1 HR Two or three hours' drive, sort of thing, to the gardens. Then we had to come back and do a precis, the first thing Monday morning, of the gardens. What we noted, taking lots of photos, that sort of thing. Then progressed more and more, to bigger gardens, and then measuring buildings, and how to incorporate the buildings into the garden, how to design gazebos, etc. By the end of it I was fairly competent at designing a garden, and then, coming back to Canberra ... in fact, the first garden design I ran in Yass, to a small class of five or six people.

Running your own course?

Running my own course. Canberra was ... because of the nursery, at that time, we hit a major financial problem. The bank, literally, with a recession hitting the whole country in 1988. I had done a valuation, and they said, "We value the whole property at \$350,000," of which we owed about \$80 or \$90,000. I spoke to the bank manager and he said he wanted the whole

overdraft paid out as was happening over the whole country at that time commercial interest rates had hit 22.5%, literally.

And somebody said to me only recently, "Oh look, they never reached that." But a bank manager, who belongs to one of the garden clubs in Canberra said, "Oh yes, I was a bank manager at the time." So my bank, at that time ANZ said, "No, that's not a problem, we can sort that out. We'll just reduce this, that, and the other, but we value it at \$350,000."

They unexpectedly changed bank managers and all the banks were the same. They came in and they said, "No, we need this reduced by 50% in the next three months," or whatever it was. I said, "Well, we can't do that." I thought, "Okay, I've studied my garden design," and so I walked into the bank manager and told him what I thought of him and said, "Right, okay," and I said, "Right, that's fine," so I said, "Well, it's coming up to 30th June. It's a good time," I said, "I think we'll close the nursery 30th June, or we'll put it up for sale and we'll go out of the nursery."

How did you feel doing that?

Well, I don't think I actually used too much bad language to the bank manager but I explained the facts of life to him. He was only new to the town, he came from the city, he didn't understand country ways, and that sort of thing. It was running very, very well. We were well established. As I say, we were winning awards and so on. Anyway, so we took the plunge and said, "We'll put it up for sale." Well, nobody at 22.5% was borrowing money, but somebody came along and they bought the place, but when they tried to get finance to continue the nursery, they couldn't get finance. They had enough money to buy the place. So they bought it, we moved back to Canberra, and I started my garden design and horticultural consulting business. That was in 1989.

1hr 2 But you say that so simply, Cedric. You're in your 50s by this time. You've put a lot of sweat and toil, surely, into the nursery. Was it ...easy ...

Yes, huge, and Gerdina. I mean, gosh, she was working ...

It can't have been an easy thing to walk away from.

No, but what were we supposed to do? We couldn't meet the bank's demands, we didn't want them just foreclosing on us, and we thought ... but, we sold it, and we walked away, literally, with, \$25,000.

After all that work.

Yes. Initially, when we came back to Canberra, we bought a unit in Hawker in Canberra, for a couple of years, whilst we were deciding where to buy, and to set up the business. Gerdina got a job with the Public Service because she had studied her first degree with the University of New England, at Armidale and then she got the degree in psychology with the University of Canberra and then later she had a degree with the Charles Sturt University at Bathurst, she was doing lots of studying.

What was her last degree in?

Oh don't ask me. I got all the pictures of her.

Not horticulture.

No, no, not at all, no. It was all psychology, all that sort of thing.

Could I just go back to John Brookes? I'm intrigued, did you see the writing on the wall for the nursery when you started your course with John Brookes? Or did you ...

No, not really no. Because this recession came in. Was it Keating? Wasn't it at the time? And the recession came ... *the recession we had to have* and it all moved very fast. Recessions oftentimes everything's going well and then next thing everything crashes.

So you did the course with John Brookes intending to come back to it Yass and continue your life designing ...

and designing gardens but more and more in Canberra, because we had lots and lots of people, well certainly 65% of our business was Canberra people, because there was virtually no garden centres in Canberra, not many at the time.

There was the Government nursery ...

Oh well that started a bit later and them selling to the public.

Later than the 80's? Or ...

Yes, yes,

Okay. So, again, just to dwell on your nursery a little bit longer. What was the name of your nursery?

Bryant's Nursery and the Herb Gardens of Aberlour

And why that name?

Because that was the name of the property when we bought it.

One of the first settlers in Yass came from Scotland and he built a stone cottage first, he came in about 1850 and about 1853 he was already Mayor of Yass. I'm trying to think of the name of the first cottage, I can't remember, but then the second house he built in the middle to late 1800's was called Montrose, after Scotland, and then they built the house we were in, in 1919, and that was Aberlour in Scotland.

And aside, some people from Scotland came in one day and they said there'd been some other people from Scotland had been all through our nursery and taken photographs and the photographs of the Herb Gardens of Aberlour and so on. And they said there was the display at the railway station at Aberlour, in Scotland, and there are photos of some of your nursery. So they said we came especially to have a look at this here and we brought some Aberlour ... a bottle of Aberlour whisky and some Aberlour shortbread biscuits especially a message from Aberlour in Scotland.

That's lovely.

That was amazing, and I believe ... I believe that those photos and everything are still in the museum at Aberlour in Scotland.

Goodness. In some of the newspaper articles about your nursery, I've read that you had a particular ambition with the nursery, you didn't want rows and rows of plants. What was your ideal for that?

Oh well the nursery ... only about a third of it at the most, maybe a quarter, was actual nursery, the rest was display gardens. Which we had, as you've seen in the garden here, clip box hedges, formal rose gardens, gazebos and whole display of trees. And we had the trees, not names on them, but a number on them, and then people could take the list, it was a bit like a Chinese restaurant. They'd go along and say well we'd like a number 24 and we'd like a number 37 buying their trees, but they could see the actual trees growing and what they looked like.

Was that your ambition for that?

Oh yes, it was to develop that, and at that time we were also getting coaches in because of my association with various garden clubs and so on. I mean coaches were coming to Canberra, Canberra was the mecca of ... tourists, like it is still, but they would call in coming from Victoria going through Yass. Call in at the nursery, some of them had their picnic lunches in the gardens, and it was a regular venue. The Canberra garden clubs to come over and not only that, people like the Arthritis Society and for their ... as part of their treatment, they'd bring the patients over, psychiatric patients of the hospital, they could wander round the garden's relaxed atmosphere, have lunch there.

So it was a much wider thing because harking back, Gerdina with her interest in psychology and so on, she had worked at one stage with the Chief Psychiatrist for the Canberra Hospital for quite a number of years. And then she had got this, like, inner mind so later on ... even when we had the nursery, she was studying and she was driving from Yass to Armidale to residential courses. And so it was not just a nursery where most nurseries were just garden centres, because in Australia, as opposed to say England, a nursery is strictly a wholesale nursery, as opposed to a garden centre. Here they call them nurseries but nurseries where you grow the plants and so on, it's not a retail outlet but here it's all intermixed ...

But we didn't want just a nursery, we wanted it so people would wander round the garden centre natural atmosphere, sit on the seats underneath the trees, have lunch, have weddings in the garden, which we did. Even had a christening in the garden at one stage. So it was really for the people of Yass and the surrounding district. And I was also giving talks all over the place, particularly talks to the Agricultural Bureau, surrounding towns and so on, on growing trees and encouraging farmers to grow more trees.

So I've got a number of thoughts there Cedric. You were ... so you really embedded yourself into the community there, not just into the nursery?

Oh yes. I mean one of the things that I was very pleased with that we started the Yass Garden Club. Called a public meeting and the Mayor of the town was the convenor and by the end of the meeting we had a committee already formed and the Yass Garden Club is still going.

Is it? Do you still attend?

No. Occasionally I have been a guest speaker but no, no I don't ... because my involvement with so many different garden clubs, I can't be too heavily involved ... in fact some of them I've actually dropped out of as being a member because there's only so much you can do with ...

The other question is ... that I had, thinking about your establishing the nursery, did you have staff besides yourself and Gerdina?

Initially, no, no it was just the two of us and then we had a casual man that came in and helped mow the lawns and when the trees came in in winter time. In those days the trees came in as bare rooted stock, in other words they had no soil on them and so on. And they arrived on the truck from say the big Fleming's Nurseries in Victoria and they dropped huge bundles there and you had to get them dug into the ground as soon as you could to cover the roots so they didn't dry out. And I've got pictures here of Gerdina with a shovel digging away and we had ... Ron was our casual man ... and then later on we had a couple of ladies, they were in their late 30's, a couple of twins that used to come in and help in the nursery but basically no, there was no extensive staff.

And no apprentice?

No, no, no. We did take on one ... the Government asked us if we'd take on an apprentice and so on but the apprentice obviously wasn't remotely interested and so on, and was always calling in sick or this, that and the other. And no, we said that it wasn't worth the bother.

We've just had a small break here Cedric and I'm just reminded, as you talk about the nursery in Yass, that you ... when we spoke on the phone earlier, you talked about working with Esso as being one of the best training grounds for management. Was that helpful for you in Yass?

Oh yes. I mean Esso ... Standard Oil of New Jersey. It started with Rockefeller. It was ... and I think it still is the biggest company in the world.

It's now known as Exxon Mobil Corporation ... because they were going to change the name from Esso to Exxon but they didn't do it internationally but they wanted to develop and ... well worldwide they were massive but, for example, when we were doing training sessions with Esso, they were bringing in and using videos before virtually any company in Australia were using videos. They were bringing them from America, and even bringing in the video equipment from America to project. And they were excellent at their training courses, they really were. I mean it was ... when I left Esso in Canberra I had built up to a multi-million dollar business. And everyone was so surprised when they pulled out for a variety of reasons they did, but the training ground ... but anybody going into business ... they were ... I can't speak highly enough of them. And the support of the staff and the senior staff ... oh brilliant.

1 hr 15 And you were able to adapt that to your nursery? In what ways?

Well, just the business ... accounting, record keeping ... all of that sort of thing that one needs with a business but I was also ... we had the Nursery Industry Association. It was split up into areas and we had a Southern District's area, which took in all this area and it even took in the South Coast, New South Wales area, and we'd have regular meetings and we would have regular promotions within other garden centres around the place. So it was combined promotions.

And also going to conferences ... I attended always the Nursery Industry Association Conferences, one was in Sydney, one was in Perth and so you're looking at other ... when you have the conference part of it was, as most conferences, we did a tour of other nurseries and saw how they did things, how they laid it out and my camera was on the go all the time, before digital. Nowadays ... in those days it was either colour slides or you took them from the chemist and got them developed, but I was always great at bringing ideas back.

From the conferences.

Oh yes.

Were they an important aspect of your work?

Oh, very much so. For example, two people in England came across ... called John Stanley and Ian Baldwin and they had a ... consultancy business on specializing in nurseries. But they were a terrific pair, they brought out a book on garden centres, which was an absolute manual, really terrific.

As an example, one meeting they got all the wholesalers together and said right we want you in the room separate from the retailers. Okay, now you wholesalers we want you to write all the things that's wrong that ... dealing with the retailers ... pay the bills fast enough, they complain about this, they don't like the shape of the pot. And then the retailers, what you think of the wholesalers. Then they brought us back into the room and they said all right - retailers this is what you think of the wholesalers and put it up right in front of them. And the

wholesalers, this is what we think, dirty pots, weed on some of the tops of the pots etc. They weren't expecting this at all, they thought it was just our group were doing it. This is the sort of thing.

One other important aspect was the Perth Conference, that all our bedding plants, like pansies and so on were all had up near the front entrance of the nursery. And they said like a supermarket where is the milk and so on way down the back, and on the way people would pick out something else, a packet of biscuits and so on. And so they said, no, you've got to have that towards the back of the nursery.

And I came back from the conference on the Sunday afternoon and I worked nearly all Sunday night and I moved everything there down to there. Literally, the next day or so a lady came in and she said, "oh you've got no bedding plants" she said. "No", I said, "yes - just down there." "Oh" she said, "you've gone into trees and shrubs now." We've been into trees and shrubs for ages, she'd just walked into the shade house of the front entrance, bought that and left. "Oh" she said, "have you got some grevilleas." "Yes". Okay she bought about ten grevilleas and it was just from the conference that made a huge difference.

And also in pricing, they said everybody goes ... if Mercedes now say ... a top Mercedes car it's \$105,999 ridiculous. Most everybody's going 9.95. So they said right - go back to your nurseries and take it from 9.95 to 9.98 ... a little bit of figure. And they said that little bit of difference, you add it up by x number of thousand pots you sell each week, you'll be amazed at the difference just on that price.

This is what happens when you go to conferences.

And so, constantly I was ... like a thirst and Gerdina attended conferences as well. It was a thirst for knowledge, learning as much as we possibly could. And even wholesale nurseries, I'd go down to the Dandenongs and talking to bulb growers. And I would say now what's the best time to put them in, do you cut the leaves back when they're dead this, that and the other. Asking, asking, asking questions all the time.

Is it an industry that people are prepared to share in?

Oh yes.

Share their knowledge?

Oh yes. Always very, helpful. And when I was overseas I'd be constantly looking at, not only gardens, but garden centres in England, in Holland ... in France. Looking how they did things over there and how it was different from here. How we could adapt their methods over there. Because it's a constant learning experience.

Do you find yourself still doing that innately?

In what respect do you...

Well it seems, I mean you're very animated as you talk about this and clearly it was something that drove you for your business. But I wonder whether it is so much a part of you that it's ... it's in your DNA as it were now. That you can't not go to a garden centre and think how they could rearrange it or how you could adapt it if it was your centre. It's just an idle ...

I went into a major garden centre, I won't mention the name, in Canberra. And I walked in and I said. "Oh excuse me," the garden staff in uniform, and I said "Excuse me, could you tell me which area have you got your Camellias?" "No. I don't know mate". "Sorry but you work here in the garden section?" "Yes". "But you don't know where they are?" "Not really, no you need to ask so and so," a lady's name. But there was another fella on the cash register. And I thought well ... he looks... and I said to him. "Okay, could you tell me please in the nursery

where your Camellias are?" "Not sure mate," he said "Look, ask for so and so she'll know where they are". So I said "Where do I find her?" He said, "Oh somewhere in the nursery."

Now, little points you mentioned and still you see today. They're doing the watering of pots and they've got the hose dragging all over the place watering the pots in the middle of the day, which means the pots are dripping water and you go to put them in the back of your car, or people are likely to fall over the hose.

All our watering in the nursery was done the night before. So, next morning, excess water had drained through, the hoses were put away by 7 o'clock in the morning or 9 o'clock when we opened, all hoses were put away, the tools were put away etc, etc. which I've learned from going to other nurseries. But still you see these things, I'm horrified when I see some of these things at garden centres and so on nowadays. It really is ...

You mentioned earlier Cedric that there were a lot of nurseries, small nurseries, in Canberra at one time. Was there a sort of collegiality between you at that point? Or ...

Oh yes

Or were you in competition?

No, we would help each other and so on. And if I was running short of plants ... I mean not only that but also we were building up a real clientele in Canberra because people ... well I'll drop names, Lady Stephen, Sir Ninian Stephen's wife when he was Governor-General, rang one day and said "Do you have any Manchurian pears?"

Now this is the time that Manchurian pears were suddenly coming into their own. They're now everywhere, God they're all over Canberra as well, I've got one in the front garden here. But at that time they were relatively rare. And I said "Oh yes" I said "I think so, just a moment I'll just check I think we've got 13". She said, "Well I've tried all round Canberra". She said, "Either they've sold out of it, they didn't have many or whatever". And she said, "Oh we'll take the 13," and she would come across to Canberra to Yass. And after that ... and you would see at that stage it was a Rolls Royce with a crown on the front. Nowadays I think they got a Ford or something. And wander around and I was a regular visitor taking plants to Government House.

For planting at Government House?

At Government House in Canberra. Got on very well with the gardener at that time. And ...

What other plants did you take there?

Oh all sorts, the whole range. But more and more people said oh do you actually design gardens, do you come and help us lay the garden out in Canberra more and more.

And so, yes, one lady came in and she said, "I want some flowering plum trees". right, okay?

And she said "Oh you've got what I want" and I said "Yes" and she said "Do you deliver?" and I said, "Oh yes of course we deliver". She said, "But I'm in Canberra" and I said, "So?" because I was taking herbs to the herb gardens in Canberra every week - I said, "That's not a problem".

"Oh" she said, "Well I've bought x number. and I've got the cheque written out and I've bought these from the nursery in Canberra but they told me they don't deliver". And so she said, "I told them to forget about it." And she said, "Look I've got the cheque made out to them." She said, "If I just change the name and so on will you deliver the plants?" And I said "Yes."

And she said, "Oh you've got box hedging as well". And I said, "Yes". So when I went to her place in Red Hill (it's supposed to be a prestigious suburb in Canberra) and she said, "Oh look I need to put all box hedging round here and here and here". She said, "I'm looking for about a hundred odd box hedging." She said, "And I noticed you grow them yourselves". And I said "Yes we propagate". "Oh" she said, "If you can supply me with that" this is the type of thing we were building up in Canberra and that's why I saw the need for a garden designer in Canberra.

Because subsequently in Canberra with the garden design business I was involved in restoring some gardens, historic gardens, at Duntroon Military College. And then also when the National Film and Sound Archive was established, which was the old Institute of Anatomy and became the National Film and Sound Archive, they wanted to lay the gardens out properly and so they asked me to lay them out.

In fact it was always interesting that I'm ... outrageously boasting now, but I never had to ever put a tender price in at the Royal ... at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, with the historic gardens there, two of them and they were a one acre a garden each there in one of the historic houses when Duntroon was first established in 1911 or whatever it was. And the Defence Department had a meeting with me and said right we'll give you the contract, to lay the gardens out, I didn't have to put in a tender price.

Why was that? They liked you.

Because I was good. But ... and I remember I think it was a General Phillips I think I was dealing with, and I said there's only one thing though, I said you won't be able to comply with this but I said always with all my clients I said if it's not payable at the time when I present each stage of the work, I will give you an invoice and that's payable within seven days. And he said "Well this is for the Defence Department which is one of the biggest departments in the whole government". He said, "I don't think that we can do that sort of thing". No I said "That's all right" and I literally picked up my papers and I said "Well obviously we can't agree on that for a start," so I said, "Look forget it" and I walked out. And as I got to the door he said "Cedric come and sit down".

Right okay he said, "Seven days", he said, "Well we want you to do this," he said "I think we can comply." And I think the longest time that took I had to ring them up at one stage because it ran into ten days.

But the National Film and Sound Archive, they just asked me to do it. When the main street of Yass - I was involved ... and I arranged the contractors and so on I didn't have to put in a price. And they said, "Cedric you charge ... whatever your charges are, give us the invoice, we pay them".

It's a huge credit to you.

Well, yes but I think it was important that I did my level best to produce something that not only I, but they, would be proud of but also that would stand the test of time.

And have those gardens?

Yes, I mean I don't get round to all of them to ... the ones because, as I say, when we're in Yass, we had for example the Shand Kydd's who owned three properties, they were from England. Shand Kydd, he was a millionaire, owned the Sanderson Wallpaper Company and his wife, Frances Shand Kydd, she was Diana ... Princess Di's mother.

And they would spend three months every year with their properties in Australia and one of their main properties I helped lay out some of the gardens or improve some of the gardens for them. The same as the Chair of the Board and Managing Director of Woolworths, who had a property in Yass and I helped with him laying out his gardens, and that was in the early 1980's. And it was only a couple of years ago I contacted ... or met him by mistake ... or by mistake, met him by chance at a local garden in Yass and he said, "How about coming out and having lunch with me?" and this was like 30, 35 years later.

Rupert Murdoch, with his second wife, I think it was Elizabeth⁴, I'm sure it was Elizabeth was a very keen gardener and asked me to help with doing the gardens at *Caven*, which is his country property at Yass, which he still owns.

So these are big, substantial projects. It's not a suburban garden. How did they know about your work?

1 HR 32 Well oftentimes it was coming in to the nursery to buy something. Like Elizabeth Murdoch came in and said, "Oh I just want to have a look around" and so on. "Do you do work on gardens? ... Would you be prepared to come out and have a look and give us some advice?"

I mean it was word of mouth but we did establish two things. We established I believe that I was ... or we were the first nursery in Australia to introduce coloured labels on plants. Before then it was just a black and white label stuck in the top of the pot but not coloured labels on plants. And I've been to a conference and we'd been shown in America that they were using coloured labels, with the descriptions, the technical names are the same worldwide, except only for Japan they'd be in Japanese but America strangely enough they sort of speak the same language as us. And so I was importing huge boxes of coloured labels from America and putting it on our plants. And I don't know of any other nursery at that time, later on big firms like Norwood Press and so on in Sydney went into coloured labels and are still doing that now. But at that time nobody was doing coloured labels they were just printed black and white labels.

We take them so for granted, as coloured automatically today.

That's right.

So you were attending conferences not only within Australia but also overseas?

No, no I was, no, no. It was American speakers that came to Australia.

Okay.

To attend the conferences. That one speaker came and ... in his American drawl. He said, "It's amazing" he said, "I look around", he said, "all of our trees have grown over here".

And we said "What trees?" And he said "Well I'm from California" and he says "Our main tree is the Eucalypts,". He said, "I notice you're growing quite a few of them here".

And we all sort of thought oh my god, it must be an American joke. And so when tea time came we said "I think they're native to Australia, they've been introduced into California". "Oh no I don't think that's right" but we convinced him in the end. But yes ... but there were speakers ... conferences were always bringing international speakers.

⁴ Misspoke, Rupert Murdoch's second wife was Anna. Elisabeth Murdoch is his mother (Prudence first daughter, Elizabeth second daughter).

So you belong to ... well I'll just finish ... not finish but come back to Yass again. So those big substantial gardens that you worked on there. You mentioned you bumped into the man from Woollies at the Open Garden and you ... did you go to look at his garden and had it changed? That you did?

Largely, yes I mean ... I'm not sure if he's still alive now but he was about 85, 87 or something like that when I went and unfortunately his wife had died of cancer but ... I think largely, although some as ... when I was showing you some pictures this morning of a garden with intimate box hedges and so on, had been there for 20 odd years, with a couple of owners and then a new owner comes in and bulldozes the lot. Doesn't touch the house, the house is fine, but they just put a Bobcat in, clear the lot.

Again, with these big, and I don't want to ask you detailed questions about individual gardens or gardeners, but have you been asked to do gardens that you've enjoyed doing, or have you been asked to do gardens that weren't right for the setting or for the house, but simply because someone wanted that style?

No, I did the gardens that I thought would be right for the house. If they didn't like my style, because, like I showed you the book of photos that was all divided into different types of paving, different types of hedges and I would run through the book with them and they would say "Oh yes, I like that, no I don't like that", and by the time we'd gone through the photo album at the end of it I had a fair idea of exactly what they wanted.

Just for clarification on the tape, this is a book of photographs that you've created yourself of your work as a sort of template book.

Yes. So they could go through, have a look, and they'd say "Oh, I don't like that type of paving, but oh yes, that type of paving", because I'd have two or three pages just on paving, two or three pages on gazebos, two or three pages on swimming pools.

But there would have been books around, published books you could have taken and said *What about these?* Did you use those as well?

Well, no. Because that's somebody else's work. All the photos in my book are all my photos of my gardens. I don't use other people's ideas. Certainly, picking up ideas from overseas in gardens, or even within Australia. But all of those pictures, even just entrance gates and the shape of gates, and sometimes I'd match the shape of the gates to the roof of the house. You could build up a picture, basically, of what they wanted. I can't think ... possibly there may have been people I'd show them the pictures and they said "Look, I really can't see anything I like in there, it doesn't suit me" or whatever. No, we'd always work around it.

Again, those big country gardens that you did, Cavan and for the Shand-Kydd, were before you went to your course with John Brookes?

No, after.

After, okay.

Oh no, sorry. Yass ones, like Rupert Murdoch's place and all of those etc, and some of the others, they were while we had our nursery.

So Duntroon and the National came after?

Duntroon came after, yes. Anything in Canberra came after, the country ones were before. A lot of the times it wasn't drawing a formal plan, sometimes it was just putting marks on the ground or pegs in and saying "This area, we can put as the rose garden so you can view it if you look through the windows of the house, you can look at the roses", that sort of thing. Or we'd move pegs or flags around without necessarily doing a formal plan of the gardens.

So, again, before we started this morning you showed me that beautiful design that folded out from a book you had?

Canberra Times, yes

So, you wouldn't go into that sort of detail normally before you did a garden?

Oh, no.

Before you did the Brookes course?

What I'd do is I'd do pencil sketches, the potential, and say "Well, we could do this, that and the other", we'd do the potential. This is after John Brookes' course. I'd do pencil sketches and say "This, that and the other" and they might change it to "Well, can we run the path this way instead of that way?" We'd rub it out and change it and then I'd say "Right, you're all happy with this?" Then I'd draw up the final plan.

Then I would call in landscape contractors and I'd say "Right, here's the plans, I need a price on it", and invariably when I did the plans, I gave it to the contractors, then I'd come back to the people and almost every time I did not get three quotes. I would say "I've got my landscaper who I've been using for 15 years whatever, there's the price, I've gone through it in detail, I think it looks reasonable. What do you think?" And they would say to me "Well, if we're not satisfied with the end result, we'll tell you and we'll give you some wonderful publicity on whatever. But if you think it's reasonable.", and very, very rarely did I ever get two or three quotes. Normally I would give them and they'd say "If he's doing it wrong, we're not going to hold him responsible. We're going to hold you responsible. You designed the garden, and if he's not doing it right it's up to you to tell him."

I remember in one instance, he built a stone wall and I could see the wall wasn't going to last and I said "Right, you're going to have to pull that whole wall down and rebuild it", at which he acknowledged that yes, he hadn't put the right people on the job. Literally, the contractors, occasionally, and I've got a good friend of the ours, we're doing a small job for her., those contractors I've used for 17, 18 years, they know how I work, I know how they work. Sometimes I've been to a job, one job some detailed paving, and I just stood there looking at it, and the contractor said "Don't worry, we'll fix it." They knew, because when you've been working with teams that length of time, they knew how it worked. They knew the standard that was required, and it was also dealing with people with money. They weren't worried about paying out the money, as long as it was a good job.

Did you do jobs for people of less substantial...?

Oh. One of the smallest jobs I did was a retirement home, a new retirement village just up the road here north of Canberra, and the whole garden was 10 metres by 2 metres, so that was the length of this room, about half the width of this room, and that was the whole garden.

We selected the plants for them and laid it out, and we put in irrigation system, because during the big drought in Canberra, 2003 onwards, which was serious water problems and we had huge signs all over Canberra saying "Reduce water" and all fountains had to be turned off, all the government fountains were turned off and it was really a desperate situation. I'd been working with ACTEW [our gas, water and electricity company] and they said "Cedric, we want you to help in this with a television series, ads to get people to reduce water." They chose me and the captain of the Raiders football team, Simon Woolford. They said "Cedric, we'd like to appoint you as the water ambassador for Canberra." And I said "Right, an ambassador, that means I get a car, a chauffeur, and a flag on the front, because we've got all the embassies in Canberra running around with flags on the front. And they said, "We

possibly won't go that far", but we did a whole series of films for TV, ads, coloured things called "Stop the drop, save water."

What was the impact at the end?

In addition, I was running classes with another irrigation expert.

Who was that?

1 hr 45 Austin Goodfellow from Canberra, but he advises vineyards from South Australia to all over, and we were running Water-Wise workshops, showing people how to install drip irrigation because all overhead sprinklers and anything was banned, totally. You could put in drip irrigation, which I've got in the garden and I can show you here drip irrigation. So we were running classes, two or three a month, 30 or 40 people at a time, and we ran those for around eight years.

Goodness, there was that interest.

Well, people were getting desperate. They had cars patrolling the streets all the time from ACTEW, and heavy fines. The first fine I think was \$200, the second fine was \$1000.

For someone listening to this, what's ACTEW?

ACTEW stands for ACT Electricity and Water, nowadays it's ACTEW AGL, it used to be just AGL.

So they were the water authority, and they organized for us to run these workshops and we'd demonstrate different types of mulches for the garden, suitable plants for the garden, how to reduce the water to absolutely nil. It got so desperate that the schools, even the primary schools, with flushing the toilets, we'd say "If it's yellow, don't flush the toilet, if it's brown, flush the toilet." It was as serious as that and with washing up we'd say "Okay, you run off the bowl of water for washing up, and then you leave that and add some more hot water to it next time without filling the basin".

Did people respond well to that program?

Oh, yes,

And did it make a difference in the gardens?

Generally, no. An example, in Goulburn, where they had complete ban on watering altogether, even if you filled the bucket from the tap and went and watered your plants, somebody would be dobbing you in. Even hairdressers and so on, they used to measure the water meter in the morning, and then in the afternoon, the Goulburn, seriously, they'd say "Right, you've used past your allocation, so tomorrow you'll use less and we'll come along and we'll just turn the water off." Goulburn was really severe.

When was this time, Cedric?

This drought was from 2003 to 2008.

So I'm wondering, did that set the scene as it were for that terrible bushfire that followed?

No. That was February 2003, that was a huge argue that they maintained, that if they'd moved fast enough in conjunction with the New South Wales Bushfire Brigade, if they'd moved fast it out enough to get it out in initial stages ... but it was dithering and so on and so forth. It was just a whole Inquiry, went into all that. Over 500 homes in suburban Canberra were destroyed plus hundreds others severely damaged.

Before we get lost in the fire, could I just return to the National Film and Sound Archive. What was your idea for that garden?

It was rather controversial, because the building was built in 1930. The building was opened by Sir Isaac Isaacs, who was the first Governor-General in Australia, he came from Yackandandah. I was having lunch at Yackandandah only a couple of weeks ago, and I thought, well at that time, really and looking at the catalogues, and I've got nursery catalogues in Yates and so on, but going back to the 1860s outside. And looking through those, native plants weren't used very much, it had to be also with the gardens that it was user-friendly, because they would have whole groups of school children going through, and they tend to run around the gardens and so on. So it had to be ... previously they had some minimal gardening done there, and some plants they'd put in like yuccas. Do you know a yucca? Yucca with spiky plants and so on. In fact, a friend of ours, he lost an eye running around when he was about 10 years old, ran into a yucca plant in the garden or somewhere. So we removed all those and made it, also in keeping with the times of plantings, which is basically exotic plants.

Keeping in time with the time the building was constructed, you mean?

1930s. One particular professor in Canberra who mounted a whole press campaign in *The Canberra Times* that said "This cannot be, every plant must be a native plant and this is totally unacceptable, and where planting's already started that should cease immediately and those plants be removed", and he tried every which way, but the Director and other Directors at the National Film and Sound Archive, stuck absolutely by me and said "If Cedric's designed it that, and in keeping with the times and so on, we will go along with that." And it's still there.

So when you looked at the plants of the era, were you looking at plants that were in Canberra at that time, or plants that might have planted outside the anatomy school at that time?

Oh no, there was really no plants there as such. Although going back in history, when the building was built, they had quite extensive rose gardens all out the front, but the maintenance and so on of those, they gradually disappeared. I had a wonderful picture taken about that time of a house-drawn plough, ploughing up the ground, getting ready for plantings in the 1930s.

So you have catalogues or publications of that era that you consult?

Oh, yes. I can show you later on. I've got extensive catalogues.

But I'm just wondering, for someone listening to this in a hundred years' time, how you might have worked on the research for that project as it were?

Well, going back, looking at the plants that were grown, and that were grown at similar buildings at that time, like in Sydney. I'm thinking of Bronte House, which was the connection historically, Bronte House was that the Governor lived there in the early stages? But Bronte House, right up high in Bronte. I did a garden almost opposite Bronte House.

So you did that garden from here or when you were in Sydney? You weren't doing gardens in Sydney.

Yes I did, yeah. I did gardens. I did a three-acre garden just up at Blackheath in the Blue Mountains, just along from the Hydro Majestic, a three-acre garden at a historic 1920s house. I did gardens in the South Coast, Moruya, Bateman's Bay. Anywhere.

Not based solely in Canberra.

No, no. I mean, mainly in Canberra, but the people in the Blue Mountains, they inherited the house. He was actually the head of the Air Safety Authority in Canberra, and I knew them, and so when he inherited the house up there and they decided to move up there they said

"Cedric, well you better come", because the garden was basically non-existent. Another client said, "Could you come along and help us with the garden?" I did a garden for them in Canberra and then they moved just up the road from Bronte House, bought an 1870s house up there and said, "Will you come and do a garden there?" Then they came back to Canberra to Red Hill, and it was a garden that they said needed improving or altering, which we worked on that, and they subsequently owned a large winery there, Lerida Winery, which you pass along the Lake George. You'll see the signs, Lerida Winery, and they were going to build, and they contracted the famous architect in Australia.

Glen Murcutt.

Glen Murcutt. He designed the winery, and they said "Well, this will be the fourth garden you'll be doing for us", but through certain rules and regulations, they weren't allowed to build a residential house on the land out there and so the garden never went ahead, but Glen Murcutt did all the buildings for the winery and so on.

Just again, before we leave the National Film and Sound Archive. Again, too, for someone listening to this in a hundred years' time when it might be very different, what sort of plants did you put in?

Oh, everything from Japanese maples in the trees to Claret Ash. Some of the trees were planted as commemorative trees for somebody who had died connected to the Archives in the gardens, out the front I planted diosmas and ericas in a Ying Yang pattern, I used a whole variety of plants that still grow nowadays extensively, but were certainly grown at those early days.

And again, there was an article in the paper about the daffodils that were stolen, a huge number?

1HR 56 Yes. That was an interesting story because we planted mass daffodils, in fact I think there was about 4,000 we put in, in the grass, which is a very popular concept in Britain. You plant them, and when the leaves start coming up you don't mow that area and so on. I had a friend, I was her guardian, and she was 92 at the time, and I thought "Okay, all the daffodils have come up", and she was English and I thought, "Okay, I'll take her over to show her all the mass planting of daffodils at the front of the National Film and Sound Archive", a sea of daffodils, Wordsworth, et cetera. And we got there and there wasn't a daffodil in sight. The evening before they were all there. And I looked closely and during the night they'd all been cut off. If you'd have gone to the market somewhere, you'd have seen fresh daffodils en masse.

The following year, they all came up again because the bulbs were still there and I went there and all the daffodils were there. I went later on and the daffodils were still there, but it looked like they'd all been cut off but not picked. And I couldn't understand that, I thought "What is happening?" So, I staked the place out, two or three o'clock in the morning, and a whole procession of wood ducks came up from the lake and they were just chomping away at them. I thought right, okay.

The third year, all came up, but before the leaves were above the ground, we marked an area around special paint on the ground and said to the city parks at the time "You don't mow inside those areas, you stay right away." And so all the bulbs started coming up and they thought "Oh, they're all weeds." And so they went inside the area and mowed the lawn to ground.

Oh no.

At that time, I gave up. I don't know, I haven't looked recently whether there's still a few bulbs coming up, but I gave up at that time I thought that was a funny story. Because of that actually, or partly because of that, I also arranged for private contractors to do all the

maintenance work on the gardens at the National Film and Sound Archive. I was going back for quite a few years, and that contractor is still looking after the gardens there. We took it away from the government.

That touches on a whole other realm of work, having that continuity and that corporate knowledge and that investment, emotional investment by those people who care for the place over a period of time, rather than, a different person every year.

You mentioned Duntroon and I wanted to just revisit that. So, what sort of planting did you place there? Which house was it, do you remember?

Yes, there were four two-storey buildings in a row, and they were built for the first professors. One of them was the Professor of Military Art, nothing to do with drawing, the art of fighting. And these were built in 1911. I found pictures going back to 1911 of the buildings being built, and there were the workers there with the wheelbarrows and shovels and so on, because I'm not even sure if they had cement mixers in 1911, but building the buildings. There's four in a row, 1, 2, 3, 4 Bridges Road in Duntroon.

Two of them were major problems with them, one they had problems with the foundations of the building. But actually the military personnel weren't using them, they'd been turned into flats, and a horrible steel staircase on the outside was the fire escape, and then later on believe it or not, they found some (not vandals, whatever) but derelicts living in the place. And they'd pulled out some of the wooden beautiful fireworks and burnt them in the fires and so on.

But they were going to demolish, because serious subsidence of the building. They were going to be demolished, and then the Australian Heritage Commission became involved and said "Uh-uh, you're not touching those buildings", and so they went to enormous trouble putting all new concrete foundations around the outside of the buildings. T

he buildings also had an original carriage loop, and they had a beautiful big Malus tschonoskii crab apple in the centre of the circle, and so the carriages would come around by the front door and then go out again, and this had largely been lost, and also the picket fences around, so I restored all the picket fences, restored all the carriage loop, put in bitumen, because bitumen was used then. Bitumen driveways, fixed all up, and then re-did all the gardens, largely, again, with plants that were from the 1911 period.

Interesting story, there was the head of ADFA, which is the Australian Defence Force Academy, was going to go into Number One, Bridges Road, and they were beautifully restored inside. They spared no expense on it at all, it was absolutely terrific, working really with the Australian Heritage Commission. Before we started we took hundreds of photos, brickwork, ironwork, fences, this that and the other, and kept it as much as possible as the original. But then the head of the Army, General, whatever his name was, he was going to retire but he'd signed on for another three years and had a look at this house and the way it was, and ADFA have got their Military College a little bit away from Duntroon. And he looked at it, and he pulled rank, and said to the ADFA fellow "Well, you can buzz off, because I'm moving into this now." Number Three, Bridges Road, a certain General, and I won't mention his name, was going to move in. He looked at what had been done to Number One and Two and said "Well, before I move in, I want it brought up to the same standard as the other ones."

AUDIO FILE 2 – 49 MIN 15 SECS

If I remember rightly, it was about \$600,000 they spent on doing it up for him.

Were you involved in any of the garden work for that?

No, not that one, no. Just numbers 1 and 2. But maybe I'll tell you off camera the name of the other person. But yes, no. They're all interesting jobs, and the builders, Belvedere Construction, they were fantastic at restoration. They were terrific people to work with. absolutely fantastic, yes.

You mentioned the Australian Heritage Commission. Did you do much ... Was there many jobs that overlapped?

No. No, that was the only job I did with them.

Did you know people like Max Bourke or David Yencken? Were they involved ...

No, they were not involved although I know, Max Bourke, he gave a talk to the Horticultural Society I arranged for him to give a talk a few months ago.

About what topic?

Well, I wasn't there at the time, I can't remember because I've arranged all the speakers for the Horticultural Society for quite a number of years. But I think I was overseas at the time.

You mentioned earlier that you gave talks when you were in Yass, what sort of things do you speak about?

Oh. Well, for instance, when I was doing the fuchsias, I was giving talks at conferences, garden conferences in Sydney, Bateman's Bay, wherever, specifically talking about fuchsias.

And I think I gave talks, actually, to the Australian Garden History Society at some stage. But also, not only garden clubs, but I was giving talks to people like Rotary, Probus and other organizations.

Do you enjoy giving those?

My talk next week is to the Women's Division of Legacy.

What's your topic then?

Well, it will be just a general because, basically, it's at a ... as far as I know, a lot of retired people, but it will be a general (almost a question-and-answer session) but I'll give them little hints, because one thing I do promote in gardening is totally organic. All chemicals, fertilizers, everything, they have to be certified organic. In my garden page, it's all certified organic to comply with the Australian Standard, which is AS.6000, covering organic and biodynamic products and it covers everything from food stuffs to chemicals, to sprays and so on.

How long have you been organic?

Since we had the nursery in Yass and herbs.

Was that ahead of your time at that point?

Well, it still is, because the big controversy at the moment is with Roundup or glyphosate herbicide.

Yes. And I wrote in the *CityNews* about this, and one organization in Canberra, a Farmers' Organization Lobby Group, took exception to this and they started legal proceedings saying there's nothing wrong with glyphosate, and it can be used so safely, and there's no country that's every banned it. Technically speaking, no country as a whole had banned it totally at

that time. But since then, and in the last few weeks, like Vietnam have banned it totally because they claim and said science people, and a possibility of cancer and as it came out in the courts in America. And the first case of America came up in a state jurisdiction but this one was a federal. And this listed at the moment, 12 and a half thousand cases in the federal court in America against Monsanto.

Wow.

Monsanto has since been bought out by Bayer in Germany, which they paid I think \$65 billion or something like this for it. Coincidentally, a cousin of mine in England, not in the nursery industry but he worked with Bayer for about 25 years. But simple things like snail bait - and it's only just come out now, any snail bait with the chemical metaldehyde in it is fatal to dogs and animals and so on. And they've now banned it.

But, for example, Gerdina wanted for her wedding present only a golden cocker spaniel dog. I bought her a beautiful, pedigree, golden cocker spaniel dog which we had for quite a number of years ... let me see, that was before the children were born and they were about 10 I think when I killed it. And I was using, and I don't mind mentioning the name, I was using Defender snail bait, which is the green one. And I was in the garden, and I must have put the packet down, gone to the phone, whatever, can't remember ... but, came back and the dog was turning funny, raced to the vet, he said, "Sorry," he said, "It's like rat poison, coagulates the blood. Nothing I can do." So then I went to a Bayer product called Baysol, which is blue pellets. Do you have a garden by the way?

Yes.

Right, so, and I tried killing the next dog when we were living here. But the vet's only 100 yards down the road, raced down, he gave an injection and he brought everything up and saved the dog. But it's now said in Australia we are very much behind overseas on like Carbaryl for codling moth.

What do you use now for your snails?

Ah, use a product by Multicrop, which make also seaweed products, and they have a snail bait that's an iron base. Because people forget not only dogs, not necessarily cats, cats don't seem to worry about these poisons, but things like blue tongued lizards and so on. In my garden page and in my talks I present a variety of products that are certified organic. Maxicrop seaweed, Neutrog seamungus, that these comply with certified organic. And I've done that for a long time.

We've just had a small break. I'd just like you to tell us something about your own garden and your plans here.

When we came here, and the house was built in 1964, it was one of the first houses in the suburb of Watson, which was developed because this area was the experimental farm for the CSIRO, growing wheat crops and so on growing here for about 60, 70 years. And then the government resumed it in about 1960, and 1964 it was fairly well-established. And this was a fairly standard sort of home at the time.

The important thing is with a garden, same as in Yass on a mini scale was, if I was designing gardens I had to have a garden that looked pretty good. Because if people came and looked at the garden here and thought, "Oh my God," you know, "We've got the wrong person here", but if people came to the garden and walked out and said, "Oh wow, look at this," I'd got them. I'd got them. Hook line and sink, I'd got them.

9 mins So, initially I based the garden on the layout of the early plans of Walter Burley Griffin. The central spot which was a water feature which unfortunately during the drought we had to abandon (the 2003-2008 drought). But everything radiated out from a centre point because Canberra's renowned for its roundabouts in the older parts of Canberra certainly. And so everything radiated out; so the paths are not square, they all go out at an angle, and the hedges go round in circles just like the picture there, somewhere, of the first plan I had of the garden which showed it based on Burley Griffin.

But right from day one it had to be more or less a Wow factor in, like you looked at the back hedge and say, "Gosh, look at the Camellia hedge, it's three metres tall." And so that was the basis of the garden and also, basically, it was an English-style garden. When we came here, it was non-existent the garden, front and back it was couple of shrubs but nothing there at all, really, we came here ... 1991 we came here, and started establishing the garden.

Interesting things, like you commented on the front hedge. Everybody has hedges all going square, square. Ours graduates from about one and a half meters tall up to nearly three metres tall and the big curve around the front garden. Doubly in that where it curves, the high part, is where the neighbours are so it gives a sense of privacy both to them and for us.

Because otherwise you have these, I noticed these small, low fences just a few centimetres high.

Here ...

Between ... At the front, between the houses. Small brick fence.

Ah yes. Well here there's a little brick wall that actually belongs to the next-door neighbours. Although we keep it painted and maintained because we've got three neighbours around us ... that are not gardeners in any shape or form.

And they haven't picked up any hints over the last ... two decades?

No, no, no.

You also have a collection of daphne?

I love daphnes, I don't know why I started this daphnes. But certainly, between myself and a couple other members of the Horticultural Society we're almost competing; and there was a very well-known daphne nursery ... specializing in daphnes at Mount Wilson, in the Blue Mountains.

Who ran that, do you recall?

Merry Garth was the name of the place, and the Raines family, ran that, and they had dozens of different varieties of daphnes. Unfortunately, Mrs Raines died not long ago and he is in retirement village but their daughter, whom I spoke to, she works for the New South Wales Conservation Department, something like that. Any rate, she's tried to keep it going. But, at the moment as I say, there's a definitive work on daphnes by an English fellow that specialised in growing them in the south of England and that has listed 200 varieties of daphnes. I've only got about 22 at the moment, although I lost one recently. And they flower, because most people think daphnes all come from China, for example, daphne odora from China, but most of the daphnes (and you can tell straight away by the tiny leaves when you are looking at down the back there), are from Italy from example.⁵

⁵ Robin White, *Daphnes: A practical guide for gardeners*.

What was the name of that one that particularly caught my eye?

That was eternal fragrance, Daphne "Eternal Fragrance". That was developed in England but also promoted by Plant Growers Australia in Victoria. Plant Growers would be one of the biggest wholesale nurseries and particularly of perennials. They supply garden centres all over but their quality is excellent. Interestingly one of the present owners, when we had our nursery in Yass, he was the truck driver delivering plants to use in the late seventies. He now owns the nursery (Michael Cole). I think they said it's about one and a half, two million plants per year they turn out at their nursery in Victoria. But they're very, very good standard, I can't over emphasize the standard of their plants, but they were promoting some of the daphnes.

But the small leaves, anything with the small leaf, like rosemary, those sorts of things, you'll know they come – or grey or silver leaves - they come from a hot climate. But one or two plants we bought from our Yass nursery. One plant I'll mention in particular was a chance seedling, because with any plant if you take it from a cutting it's exactly the same or cloned like the parent plant, if you take it from the seed and say it was a pink camellia, the seed grows, it could turn out as a white one or a red one, or any colour under the sun.

- 15.00 But we had a seedling growing in Yass and I brought it and planted it in the garden here. Later we had an expert on camellias (Barry de Salvia) giving a talk on camellias to the Horticultural Society, he came from Leeton. Coincidentally it was winter time and so I took some flowers off this particular camellia and I said, "Could you help me, tell me what it is?" And he looked at it and looked at the leaves and said, "Well, can I come and have a look in your garden?" So he came over the next day, had a look and he said, "Right-O," he said, "What is it? Because I don't know it. I said, "Well you're the expert who's part of the International Camellia Society." He said, "I don't know it." And I said, "Well, I thought you'd be able to tell me." He said, "No."

And so he brought a couple of other experts for camellias over and he said, 'right okay, try taking some cuttings, I want to take photos of this and record it'. And so for the next two and a half years, literally, they took pictures of the leaves, of the shape of the flowers, the design of the bush, et cetera, et cetera.

At the end of it he said, "Look, this is a new variety of camellia," he said, "It's now registered worldwide and you as the breeder, what are you going to call it?" And I said, "Well I'm going to call it Camellia "Priscilla Rose", after my sister who died of cancer in 2008." And he said, "Right, so the first thing," he said, "We need to take a quantity of cuttings to make sure they're all uniform." So we took 100 cuttings, and I had a grower just out of Canberra who has a wholesale nursery (he used to be the chief plant propagator of the botanic gardens - but he's got his own business) and out of the 100, 75 took and they all came out true to form. So he said, "It's totally registered. It's registered as Camellia "Priscilla Rose."

Is it appropriate to put on tape the name of the man who helped you with the propagation and grew them? And the nursery.

- 17.20 Oh yes, Peter Ollerenshaw at Wonboyn just out of Canberra. He's very well-known for developing new cultivars of native plants, one Correa 'Canberra Bells' was developed specially for the centenary of Canberra.

How do you feel about this very special camellia?

Well, what we did was, we decided to sell them and the funds from them, after I've paid Peter for the propagation side of things, they were still about \$10 left over each plant, and we sold them, the money went to the Kids with Cancer Foundation at Westmead Hospital in Sydney. And so the next batch, we took 200 and we sold virtually all of those. But because it takes,

from the time you take the cutting until they're big enough for sale, it's really about four to five years. By that time I'll be 85, and I won't be really be able to look after several hundred camellias in the garden. So we've actually stopped production but I've got one put aside for you to take back to Sydney, along with the story.

Oh that's lovely, thank you.

But that's one of the pride and joys of our garden and people who have bought the little ones from me have come back to the garden club and said, "Ooh yes and they're covered in buds, and they're just about to come out in flower." Which they are at the moment because they flower in winter. And this is the beauty of the camellias, for instance my camellia hedge at the back of our garden flowers in winter, and also it brings in the honey eaters because they love the nectar of camellias.

Basically the garden is a display garden and I still have groups we have the Geranium & Fuchsia Society, came here a few weeks ago and had afternoon tea in the garden and chatted, and all brought their chairs and were here for several hours, relaxing day, and so on. But I don't open it to the general public. Well it used to be under the old Australian Open Garden Scheme, but that collapsed unfortunately and that doesn't exist, although there's a mini group in Canberra that gardens open, but generally. We used to regularly and we'd have 1,000, 1,500 people through the garden on a weekend. I think the first time we opened we had 1,800 through. One weekend it poured with rain, in mid-winter we decided to open in June, people could look at a winter garden, poured with rain and they came with their gun boots and umbrellas and we still had 600 through. And we donated to the Red Cross who have different organizations.

So why is there such an enthusiasm in Canberra for gardens?

Well ... really, you'll be surprised at this comment but there really isn't.

There isn't?

No. Really, there's not many gardens in Canberra.

But not so much the gardens, which are open, but the fact that people want to go and look at a garden or people want to buy a plant. The fact that there's this list that you belong to of seven or nine.

Yes but they're mainly specialists ... well, you know, like they're general garden clubs. But even those are now struggling to get people to go on the committee, they're struggling ... and

Why is that?

Well, people don't have time. Young people, you know they've got their four-wheel drives. Two four-wheel drives in the family because they think that's it. You only need to look at any coffee shop in Canberra, particularly Saturday or Sunday, and they're there with great mountains of food on their breakfasts and that sort of thing and then they're off because the kids are playing football or cricket, or whatever, and they don't seem to ... they've got so many activities, besides, they're so busy looking at their mobile phones.

So the topic I think we could spend a long time on.

So I think we'll leave that, but really speaking, it's not the same as in the early days of Canberra, as far as gardening goes.

Just darting around, Cedric, going back to the camellias, I know the Australian Garden History Society in Sydney is about to have, or just recently had, Stephen Utick talk about garden camellias. And of course there was Peter Valder with the beautiful garden at Mount Wilson (*Noroo*).

That's right, yes ...

Are those people, have they been an influence or assisted you in some way?

No, certainly not Utick, Stephen. I've known him for a while. But Peter Valder, I've always had a great admiration for him....

We're going to pause a moment.

Peter Valder.

Peter Valder, one of his best books is *The Garden Plants of China*. Excellent book. And it's a book I refer to, and I know Peter Valder and I've been to his place in the Blue Mountains, although he hasn't been there for quite a number of years. But, no, people like that, you know they've done so much for horticulture. They really have, I'm certainly influence by him. Another person was Marilyn Abbott at Kennerton Green in Mittagong, and I just loved her garden, and Marilyn, she's a real character. She was, I think she was the general manager of the Sydney Opera House, something like that. And she had a magnificent garden at Kennerton Green. Interestingly enough, she ran garden courses and on two occasions had John Brookes from England came out to run classes there.

Did you attend those?

No no, because I was familiar with his designs ... I mean I went up there, I got photos of him, Marilyn and myself and so on, but no. Basically, he was talking more in general rather than specific designing gardens.

Just ... I don't want to go back too far, again, but just touching on John Brookes as you're talking about him, I wonder, Cedric, not quite sure how to, sort of word this but you designed gardens before you, and worked in nurseries, before you went to his course, so ...

No, not really, no. I was giving advice on gardens, but not specifically designing gardens before I went on his course. So I was giving general advice and saying, "Well you could put a rose garden there." But not specifically designing gardens as such.

So he gave you, I'm guessing, presuming here, a particular element of confidence about doing that?

He gave me the entrée into a new business and a new way of life which lasted from 1988, when I went to his course, up until last July 2018, when I turned 79 and I thought, "Oh I might not be really wandering around, up and down", particularly, as I said to you, I had a new hip and a new knee, and trying to clamber around gardens and measuring gardens.

30 years.

I decided to, except for garden talks and that sort of thing, basically retire.

And again, just finishing that thread with John Brookes, again you showed me in your studio the beautiful drawing of the Times garden-*Canberra Times*, yes. *Canberra Times*. Could you tell me, this design in diamonds, it's a very restricted space, could you just tell me something about your design and the genesis of that garden?

26.30 Well, it was after they built a new building and so there was a U shaped space in between the buildings, it was very long and narrow. And wouldn't have looked right with these buildings, and the way they were designed, to have circular garden beds and so on. And so, diamonds like on a pack of cards, a set of diamonds interwoven with box hedges through the garden with several water features, and then some trees, groups of trees, to give a bit of height.

Which trees? What kind?

Well, we used conifers to screen off an ugly part of a building. But lots and lots of things, like daphnes, fragrant plants. And there was two small gazebos we built, because *The Canberra*

Times, like any newspaper, runs 24 hours a day and staff working at night, and if it was a warm summer's evening they could go outside and smoke or eat their meal or have a cup of coffee and sit outside. And so ... and then, with a particular statue [I had to place in the gardens donated by Kerry Stokes, the owner of *The Canberra Times* then] ... but yes, it's a long narrow garden but it suited that, with a diamonds shaped outlined with the box hedging, small areas of lawn, because you're dictated by the building, and the shape of the building with any garden really.

And you'll know if the people really are gardeners, and if they're interested in gardening or they just want a garden for effect. Because I had ...

Fairfax?

No, the other millionaire that, he's just involved with his casino.

Packer?

Packer, was it Packer?

But up at Red Hill in Canberra, and we laid out the garden, but they said he doesn't do anything in the garden. No, it wasn't him it was somebody else, but when we'd just about finished the garden, we were planting some silver birches. And he said, "Right, I want to be involved in this, planting the silver birch." Right, so he dug the hole and we supervised him planting the silver birch, that was it, and we said, "But you don't have anything to do with the garden." And he has gardeners come in to do every aspect of the garden, from the pruning to this, that and the other but when he had a group there, they would say, "Oh your garden!", because he'd open to the public, charities, "Oh your garden is magnificent." He said, "Oh yes, you know, tell you what, when I was planting that silver birch the ground was so hard." Gave the impression that he did the whole garden, but some of them didn't do anything in the garden. But most of the gardens, 99% of them, the people were gardeners that I designed gardens for.

Recognizing the value of garden clubs and as I say, the Australian Garden History Society, because it's so important to recognize and preserve lots of the aspects of historic gardens. It really, really is. Certainly you get that in Britain, fortunately in Britain they have the National Lottery Fund. There's only one lottery in England, well no, two - National Lottery and the National Heritage Lottery Fund, and anybody can apply - if you want a new roof on your church roof, or you want some tennis courts, or whatever, you can apply to the lottery fund. And the promoters, they only keep 3% of the money coming in and the rest goes out to the community. And it's billions, enormous - the first prize is normally about £40 million.

Before we get lost in envy of such wealth and prosperity for gardens, I wanted to return to your garden writing as well, which ...

Right, well I started off writing for *The Canberra Times*, an off-shoot was *The Canberra Chronicle*, initially, which was a free newspaper, and that was in 1986, but then after a short time, they said, "Would you write for *The Canberra Times*?"

How did that begin? In '86.

Oh, I went along to them and I said, "You need a garden page."

Oh, did you?

And they said, "Oh, really?", I said, "Yes." We were still in Yass at that time with the nursery and I said, "I'll write about our garden." And we started off writing about, let's go for a walk round the garden, see what's in flower. And that was the basis of the garden page. And then

transferred to *The Canberra Times* proper [with their new *Sunday Canberra Times*] and I was writing from 1986 to 2011.

Every week?

Every week, yes

32.13 How do you carve out the time for that task?

Oh, that doesn't take long.

Or the inspiration?

Couple of hours. Oh, I might be driving down the street somewhere and see a particular plant. I've even knocked on the door and said, "Excuse me, I don't know that plant, what is it?" And they'll tell me and I'll do a bit of research and say, "Gosh, I've seen this plant growing in the garden, I know it grows here." And that's the basis for part of the garden page.

Do you have a big following?

Huge. *Laughter* ... Roslyn! I can't honestly answer that!

I mean, *The Canberra Times* 2011 the editor (I don't mind saying this because it's all been in print) I was collecting the mail and he said, "Oh, Cedric, have you got a minute?" and I said, "Yes", he said, "I'm into change", he hadn't been there long, "In *The Canberra Times*, we've got to boost sales or whatever, I'm into change." So I said, "Oh yes, what do you have in mind?" So he said, "Well, firstly, you've been here what? 23 years, so I'm going to terminate you today." I said, "Oh, okay. So you're not happy with the garden page?" He said, "Oh no, I explained to you, I'm into change."

You must have been gutted by that.

Then he said, Karen Middleton, who's the senior political reporter on SBS television, she was writing an article. He said, "I don't know if it makes you feel better, but I terminated Karen Middleton last week." Right okay, so, that was it. He said, "Oh, you can finish off this week's column and we'll put it in next week's," but he said, "after that, we won't need you any longer."

How did you feel to be told that?

Well, slightly shocked., slightly shocked. But, I discovered later, not long after, because when it change hands from Kerry Stokes to Rural Press (which was also Fairfax at that time when they bought it out from Kerry Stokes) ... Ian Meikle, was the general manager of *The Canberra Times*, when I did all the gardens, Ian Meikle was the general manager. He then subsequently, when it changed hands, he went and he joined Pacific Publications in Sydney, who turn out heaps of magazines. Ian literally started in journalism in Adelaide, whenever it was, when he was a young lad. But the *Canberra CityNews* was in existence but it was struggling, so Ian bought out ...

He bought out?

The Canberra CityNews and he already knew me and also I went to see him and I said, "Well, you've got no garden page in the *Canberra CityNews*." And he said, "Right" he said, "Okay, today's Thursday, so if you have a copy on my desk Monday morning" he said, "You'll be the garden writer of the *Canberra CityNews*." And that was the start of it.

That was last year.

No, this was in 2011.

2011, yes.

2011.

Yes. So you really moved from one to the next?

Now, subsequently, also I didn't know that half the contributors like the social reporter, the arts and entertainment reporter, the advertising manager, had all been terminated by *The Canberra Times*, and Ian said, "I've dealt with you people for years, you know how to write a page about arts and entertainment, this that and the other" and I didn't realize until we had a meeting, that somebody said, "Oh, you're here as well, oh hello, oh hello" the whole team had virtually joined Ian Meikle in the *Canberra CityNews*. That's been hugely successful. He's got some very, very good writers in it. It's based on advertising, you know it's ...

But your, the ethos of your columns hasn't changed across the ...

Except that in *The Canberra Times*, at the moment, the present writer has no say on, for example, what photos are used. I was telling the story but the *CityNews*, I write, I put my photos in, they put them in as I present them and I have more or less total control over my garden page each week.

And you must have correspondents who write to you regularly about ...

Oh emails, "My lemon tree, the leaves are turning yellow, what do I do?" to "Will you come and give a garden talk?" So that's been going continuous since 2011 and that's been highly successful. The magazine, it's both online (the other thing is the *Canberra Times* would never, ever, put it online so you couldn't look up my garden page, which of course it happens nowadays), but from the start they had my garden page online. And it's there going right back to 2011, so you can look up spring gardens in 2011 and then you can look at what to do in spring gardens every spring from 2011, so the round figure's 30 years I've been ...

It's an extraordinary record.

... a garden page each week.

Have you thought of turning that into a book?

Oh, yes I had Cilla Rosenberg from Victoria, a publisher said to me, "Cedric, when are you going to put it together?" If you just put ... well, even a couple of years ...

It'll be a book. A fat book.

It's a book already.

Yes.

38.00 Oh it's time, you can only do so much.

I think that's a fitting lead towards the end of our interview, Cedric, and just before we do wind up though, is there anything that you want to talk about that I haven't asked you about in particular?

Oh, not really. I love the promotion of gardens from a lifestyle. Particularly people who are, I use the word elderly 'cause I'm certainly elderly, but retired. It's so much better if they're in their own homes, they have a garden rather seeing people sitting around and we've had personal friends that have lived to be 100 and one 98, but sitting at the nursing home, they're all sitting there in a circle around the room, TV is going, nobody's ever watching it, they might be knitting and so on. Whereas those, certainly elderly people that I was involved with, the lady I was saying at 92 she still had a big garden growing all her own veges, didn't believe in heating except for an open wood fire, chopped up her own firewood at 92, she lived til 98.

But this is terrific, they're out in the open air. They're getting some exercise even if they're walking around the garden. And I think that is so important.

Quickly, just one classic example was Mowl Village, an Anglican retirement village out near Castle Hill (Sydney), and when it was put in and the gardens were put in, lots of the units had their own small gardens. They said, "You don't do any gardening because it's dangerous, you could put a fork through your foot. Nothing in the gardens. We've got professional gardeners that do all that." Well, there was almost open rebellion. In no time at all now the gardeners come in, mow the big lawns, if somebody wants a bit of help, they help them. But, the people, and they give each other cuttings and so on.

Were you involved in those gardens?

No no, not at all, but I knew the site and knew the story. And I think that is so important, but also young people, for instance Yates at the moment have a competition going. The schools and organizations can apply for a \$1,000 grant, they submit a school garden and they can win a \$1,000 prize and I think that is great - trying to encourage the young people. Just up the road here we have Majura Primary School at Watson in Canberra, and they've got a fantastic garden - they've got chooks there, everything. And I think this is ... once the children get a bit older, they get into sports and so on, or if the parents don't have time or are not interested and encourage them, but the younger ones, if they get that to start off with usually it sticks with them. And the older ones certainly or retired people I think that is so, so important that's got to be encouraged.

Indeed, indeed. So just as we wind up, how has your work contributed to the awareness of gardens and gardening, would you say, in Canberra?

Well hopefully I've done, certainly either a front garden or a back garden or the whole garden, around about 750 gardens in Canberra. Mainly private gardens. Plus the commercial ones shall we say, like the Film and Sound Archive, whatever. And most of those, the people ... some of them, 20 years later have come back to me and said, "Cedric, we're thinking of changing part of the garden, would you just come and have a look and walk round. We don't want a plan, just a walk around. Give us some advice and so on." And so, almost reluctantly I do it now, but yes, certainly, I've hopefully, that I've helped in promoting gardening. And through my garden talks, everything I have to do with gardening, hopefully it's contributed.

But also, as I say, garden clubs and societies play an important role not only just as a garden club but lots of them come along as a social ... meeting friends, like the Bellconnen Garden Club, they'll have a guest speaker, they'll come to the guest speaker at 10 o'clock and he finishes at 11 o'clock or half past 11, have morning tea, and then they go off in the club where they are, they'll all go, a little group of them will go and have lunch there and have a chat. It's a social thing as well as just straight gardening.

Not just about knowing the botanical names but also engaging in a conversation.

Absolutely, I think that is so important. And our environment, we didn't mention climate change, etc it was only last night I was looking and I found a site there where they can assess now the climate in Canberra, and trees and shrubs and so on for the last 500 years.

500?

For the last 500 years.

In Canberra?

And they can do in Australia, in the whole. They can do it through - I'll show you later, but they can do it through two things. One is trees and one is coral. And trees can tell us, as an earlier

conversation I had, which we don't have time for now but, trees ... say in Britain, six, seven, 800 years old, and some olive trees we know in the south of France are 2,500 years old and they know because they can take core samples, they know the growth rings of the trees, and they can tell when there's been dry years, when there's been wet years, when there's been droughts, etc etc.

And so the worst droughts in the 1700s in Australia, 1797 I think it was, was far worse than any drought that we've had at present time. So it's been happening.

And also, the monks in the monasteries recorded (cause they were the only ones that were writing) recorded when the peasants were starving and they were digging up earthworms to eat to survive because of a massive drought right through to flooding rains and they'd lose all their crops to rain. And it's recorded, and it's recorded almost parallel with what the trees said and what the monks said in the monasteries.

But for Australia and Canberra, you have the rain measurements?

I have the rain measurements since 1870 and it's very interesting in that with those records (I've got them here somewhere) they start ... in the official weather station of the Queanbeyan Bowling Club, 1870, and the Queanbeyan Bowling Club registered with the Bureau of Meteorology, it's a registered station that's still operating. Station number 070072, opened 1870.

Cedric, I think that's the topic of another interview.

Well yes, but just one thing for example, in 1902 a massive drought in these areas, a massive drought. They say climate change, it's all happened before, so you know ... I'm a skeptic on climate change because I've examined and read reports and so on, and reports from scientists in the UK and other European countries and so on. There's going to be droughts, doesn't matter what we do. Except, if we keep increasing the population in Australia and increasing, increasing, increasing, there's going to be more and more demands on our water. But I think it's important promoting and particularly promoting the planting of trees.

And one just last quick example. In Denmark in 1865, and it must have been a fair-sized estate, they decided to plant 10 acres of oak trees. And they planted 10 acres of oak trees every year since 1865, and they are still planting, and the first oak trees, the earliest ones, they use for timber, but deforestation, take everything out - when they take 10 acres out, they add 10 acres in, and it covers several thousand acres.

What a gift.

And we're not doing that in Australia. We are just not planting trees.

Again, with much regret, Cedric, I think that's also another interview. But I think for today, you've been incredibly generous and patient with your time and your recollections, both, so thank you for this wonderful gift to the Australian Garden History Society and for your time.

Well, I think also, I appreciate their thought of doing this and recording not only myself but some of the others of what's been happening in Canberra, the Southern Tablelands and this area, of gardening and what's been happening with gardening, and I congratulate them certainly on the initiative of doing this, I think that is tremendous.

Part of the history of Australian gardening. Thank you, Cedric.

Thank you, Roslyn.