

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS BRANCH



Photo: provided by Sue Whitehouse

Interviewee:	JANET STORRIER
Interviewer:	SUE WHITEHOUSE
Date of interview:	4 FEBRUARY, 2020
Place of Interview:	HOPEWOOD HOUSE, BOWRAL, NSW
Details:	TOTAL 1 HOUR 05 MINS 28 SEC
Restrictions on use:	NIL
All quotations:	SHOULD BE VERIFIED AGAINST THE ORIGINAL SPOKEN WORD IN THE INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW WITH JANET STORRIER, HEAD GARDENER AT HOPEWOOD HOUSE,
BOWRAL ON 4th FEBRUARY, 2020

This is an oral interview with JANET STORRIER, owner and Head Gardener at Hopewood House, Bowral. Janet will be speaking with me, Sue Whitehouse, for the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) as part of a collaboration with the Berrima District Museum (BDM) to create an exhibition of 8 significant gardens of the Southern Highlands, to be showcased in the BDM digital gallery 'Story Centre' in 2020.

Janet, on behalf of the AGHS and the BDM I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.
(Janet's comments in *italics*).

Thank you.

This interview is taking place today, 4th February, 2020, commencing at approximately 2.30 p.m.

This interview is intended to cover the history, development and adaptation of the gardens at Hopewood House, from commencement in 1884 to the present period, and in particular since your acquisition of the property in 2012, and including any future plans you may have for the gardens.

We'd like to start with some biographical details:

Where were you born?

I was born in Singapore in 1961 and I have a younger sister, fairly close in age.

Where did you attend school?

I went to Sunny Way Kindergarten in Singapore and then when we came out to Australia in '66 I started at Ascham, and had a brief stint at Sydney High but finished at Ascham in Sydney.

Who were your greatest influences in your early years?

Yea, that's an interesting question. I think it's probably more a place, than who, although with my parents it was a very gentle, cosseted lifestyle growing up in Singapore in the '60s and was extremely privileged I guess with, in terms of comfort and stuff, although when you talk about comfort today, we didn't have air-conditioning – ceiling fans, although certainly it was a gentle time, a lovely lifestyle, cooks, chauffeurs, gardeners, that sort of thing.

Mmm, and a cultural mix.

Yes.

When were you first introduced to gardening?

Not really introduced to gardening. My parents had a beach house, and going up there, I used to pot up things as a teenager and I felt drawn to working in the garden. My mother was an Australian country girl, and I'd spent time on her parents' property, and with my

sister, who was a mad keen vegetable gardener. It was probably with my sister in the vegetable garden that I first became intrigued, a sort of drought stricken vegetable garden on an Australian country property. You can imagine, with cyclone fencing to protect it from the rabbits.

So that sort of instigated the passion for gardening? Or certainly, the interest?

Yes, I think it did.

And then when I was in my first job I decided I was going to study horticulture and I did that in the evening when I was working. I'm so glad I did. I went to Ryde School of Horticulture in probably about 1980-1981.

OK, and what would have influenced your gardening style?

Oh, that has evolved over the years, but probably someone whose style I admired or found so different years ago was Myles Baldwin, who I was introduced to when he was doing, or just after he started doing Bronte House with Leo Schofield and it was just so exotic and very different to anything I'd seen. Then, in fact Myles was instrumental in us being here at Hopewood, because my dear friend David Ellen who is a good friend of Myles' said, 'we know you love gardens, you must come and see this beautiful garden and I came to the Hopewood Garden years before we bought it, and that was with Myles, when he was working on the Hopewood Garden at the time, and that was a lovely connection. He'd actually done our garden in Sydney, and he'd done our garden in Bathurst, so that was a connection.

Yes, very fortunate timing.

And was travel an influence at all? Singapore an influence at all, or not?

Yes, look Tim took me on one of our first trips to Bali, and we happened to look up an old friend of his Marday Mujaiah, and Michael White, and very sadly Marday passed away. Michael became a very successful gardener throughout Asia, and did all the big hotels and we actually went to stay at one of the hotels. Tim took me there, and the gardens were so lavish, and so beautiful and exotic and sort of dripping in frangipanis and tropical plants, but used in such interesting ways.

I find that very interesting, that cold-climate gardening is so very different to that. But whenever I travel and he is doing galleries and I'm doing gardens and he loves to come and see the gardens with me. So, I'll go and visit a garden in winter, with pleasure, just to see a different garden. It just does open your eyes, and even going through Beijing with him, just watching how, it's fascinating how they don't clip their buxus, they just let it grow quite wild and it looks interesting.

Wow, that's fascinating.

So, you always see different interpretations.

We have a cockatoo problem at the moment. [sound of birds in the background] I think it's because of the fires.

Oh, they're all displaced. That's corellas isn't it? The whole of Bowral is affected. That's not white cockies, that's corellas.

I didn't know that.

The corellas haven't got the crest.

I know, but I thought that noise was the cockies.

I think you'll find they're corellas, especially in the flock like that.

They were just at the golf course in the middle of Kangaloon Road. They've always got guns going off to get rid of them but we're getting them down in Burradoo now.

I love them with their funny grey eye-shadow.

You can have them.

Alright, coming back to Hopewood House, it has such an interesting history. What do you know of that history, of the story?

A house like this should come with a manual, shouldn't it? But it doesn't, and I'm very conscious of the history of the house, or that it has such a history and one day I would love to sit down and get it together properly and write it, and hopefully I got years to do that. Really these years that we've been here, since 2012, have been settling in and I think it really took, I could safely say, five years before we got the house in order, and the garden. I made a terrible mistake very early on. We'd been here not a month and I thought, 'I must cut down that dead pine tree out the front because it's upsetting the other pine trees'. You know, it'd been struck by lightning and I just thought if I can get rid of it, they'll have room to breathe, and so I rang up the tree guys and they came in and cut it down and a cockatoo stood on the balcony all day and screeched at me, hung upside down screeching at me. I just felt so bad and I realised I must've taken away his home, his grandparents' home and his whole family. I just felt so bad, and that's why you see so many dead trees around here now. So, I just make them safe, and leave them.

So, I think you can make a lot of mistakes coming in and doing things too quickly and I did a few things like that. But I don't regret, I try to, because with Myles's eyes...I brought Myles Baldwin back in and said, 'What do you think we should do? I want to take out this hedge'. We did a lot of that sort of thing to take it back to the Victorian garden, to simplify it and clean it up a bit.

Well, I can tell the garden is your priority, the house will always be here to get to.

Yes, I would like to just wander out there and not come back, you know, just leave me out there.

So, your knowledge of the history of this wonderful house, has that influenced your approach to the garden at all?

Yes, absolutely, I sort of feel that the garden has really evolved not quite in sympathy with the house and has been sort of modernised. I say to Tim it's had its frippery added, which it really didn't need. And the more I look at it the more it is parkland and the beautiful old trees. A lot of the under plantings are so unnecessary and take away from the architecture, and take away from the simplicity of Victorian gardens.

Although having said that, I know some of them got so complicated and the more money they had. But a garden has to be sustainable nowadays, and I would love it to be simple parkland.

Yes, and it's important, the house's architecture in that landscape, it needs to complement.

Exactly, and not argue with it.

Is there any reference material still on the property? Have you got any relics, catalogues?
No, but Barry Anstee has so much reference material and he will make that available. He took all the files and he has extensive files on Hopewood. I could certainly put you in touch, and he's been saying he's going to, he keeps saying we must get together, but he's busy.

Time takes over. We're always mindful of that.

So, could you tell me some of your experiences of working in the garden? For example, what is your normal routine, a normal day in the garden – is there normal?

I know I thought that was such a ... I just wish there was normal. Probably now, you know, last year was the first time we got into a little bit of a routine in the house, you know, the ironing goes out on a Tuesday. I guess also, because I'm running Tim's life, what aspects he's not running.

Yes, part of your job...

You know, just picking up all those odds and ends and then there are the weddings.

So that's a different day altogether, like an open day, compared to a normal gardening day, when you can shut the gate?

Exactly, and well, getting the garden ready for a wedding just involves so much mowing and blowing, that we're not gardening, we're preening the place the whole time. This has been a lovely break over Christmas, even though we have no water, there are no weddings and I can get out in the garden, and I think I can get out in the garden and I get a phone call, and off I go.

In another direction?

So, there is no normal day and it's so frustrating, I find it particularly frustrating. But now, I actually garden without gloves so that I can answer the phone quickly and get on with it, rather than have to take off the gloves. So, frustrating having to peel off the gloves, 'Yes, how can I help you?'

You need a minion!

So, can you describe any changes you've made to the garden?

I have taken out a lot of buxus hedges which some people may regard as sacrilegious, but they were there for no particular reason and we took out probably 40 tons of agapanthus which lined the driveway, like they do going up to Milton Park. They do look lovely but, it was just one more task. Every summer I had to dead-head them, I had to take them to the

tip, and they are such a pest when they escape, and their roots. They are a haven for snakes up the driveway.

I always discuss everything with Tim because he's always the visual guy, doesn't know one end of a plant from another, but he can tell you what he thinks will look good.

[Interruption of interview and there is a jump in the recording at this point]

14:49

We undertook a lot of tree work to try to restore the old magnificence. We took out the dead wood. So really, it's been a preservation of the gardens, about their inherent beauty and their history actually. So, anything that came along in the Anstee's time, even though they took the gardens in such an extraordinary way, has probably, a lot of it has been taken out and I said to Barry, you know I apologise for doing this. He said, 'Look I understand, you have to do this. I've often wondered how sustainable the gardens can be or how one would manage them. And I said, 'Well, that's exactly what you have to look at and in fact the whole bottom section of the garden goes on. It is only 10 or 11 acres, but there are paths and rockeries and he had big water features going right through the gardens. All that was taken out by the time I got here.

And that would have been put in by the Hordern's? By Barry.

And he put rills in – he built a sort of Hampton Court type garden that required a King to maintain it. And in fact this man who came along yesterday with his wife Terry, and I've just forgotten his name, said to me, 'At the time we were building it for Mr. Anstee we didn't know how one was going to be able to afford to run it, with all the pumps and water features.

And so, you're making adaptation if you like for the changing climate and bearing that in mind.

And loving natives in a lot of places, and Hopewood is a lovely mixture of European and native. You've got the big gums, I know people say they are terrible, but they're so beautiful. We can't go taking out all the gums, you know koalas, and in fact there have been koalas here because one of the big gums down the back has the scratchings.

Well they can complement each other.

I think they can

You have to consider the animals here too, you have to provide their habitat. So, you're now more sustainable with the wake-up call we've been given.

This summer I was on that track, I mean this has been a summer to break a gardener's heart and I feel it hasn't rained here at Hopewood for 2 years. It's rained at Colo Vale, it's rained everywhere but Bowral. My neighbour and I were discussing this particular part, we're in like this rain shadow. It can be raining in town and we're not getting it here. My daughter keeps bees here and I've been feeding them sugar syrup all through the winter, and we're actually now feeding them sugar syrup in the summer because it's so dry and there is so little for them. And that's been another reason to make the garden so sustainable and not use chemicals. As we've cut back the chemical use, we've noticed the plethora of insects coming back in. We're not alone, we've got a ladybug plague this year, literally a plague.

I haven't this year, but I have had. Two years ago, they all came down the fire, literally, and I'm not talking one or two, I'm talking hundreds. We'd sit having bets on them going up the wall behind the television. But not the good ones, the bad ones. So, I sympathise with you.

These are the good ones actually, so maybe lack of chemicals.

Oh, definitely.

So, your favourite area of working in the garden would be where, and why? That might bring us to looking at the photos, to talk about individual areas that you've particularly identified with, or named or enjoy working in that have become special to you.

I need a map. I may have a copy of a new one, which a dear friend Suma is water-colouring to make pretty. He's an artist and he's water-colouring it.

I'd love to say that there is one area that is special to work in and I think that this has been a year that defies description. You just try to keep things alive as best you can everywhere, and with the water, we run out of bore water.

[Interruption of interview at 20:33]

I've got an exciting project or idea that I want to do and so as I was saying, this season has just been one that breaks any gardener's heart and ambitiously or stupidly, I decided that beer hops would make a lovely cover and look beautiful for brides down a walk that the Anstees had planted roses on, but there was too much shade and the roses just didn't flower. I used to call it the 'possum sushi train' and the possums would jump along each pillar and eat the roses. So, we got rid of the roses I planted the hops and we kept them going for 3 years. But this year I had to ration the water, they're so water-hungry and I hadn't realised. So only last week I went down with Roundup and I got rid of the hops. So, I'm thinking clematis Montana, it's half sun half shade and I'm thinking that will give a beautiful look. There are 13 pillars, 26 pillars, so it will look lovely, that's what I'm hoping. One's always dreaming in the garden and dreaming how it will look.

OK, that sounds absolutely wonderful.

That's just one area. There's something going on in all the areas. You know, I planted lawns on an old croquet lawn here at no. 10 on the map. I planted the croquet lawn, brought that back to lawn at the beginning of this spring, but that fell by the wayside with water rationing I had to say, 'I'm going to let you die. Even though we're on a bore it doesn't pump fast enough. We're putting in a bigger pump, but you have to wait.

It's trial and error to a certain extent, and you have to go with what you're dealt.

Yes.

OK, and have you preserved any historic areas for the sake of history, that were here?

The only historic areas of the garden are the big trees.

Oh, so the Pavilion? I've not been to the Pavilion?

There are no historic plantings around there. There's no old trees around there, which is very sad and all the trees in the orchard have gone, no fruit trees left and that's become parkland between the back of the house and the wedding lawn area.

So really, it is just the old trees, and there are a lot of old eucalypts here as you drive up the driveway and old conifers around the house, these two old conifers here. As you get in here there are beautiful oaks and linden trees that would have to be at least 100 years old and down here there are some lovely old maples that would have to be 100 years old. Very sadly one has died this year, and of all the trees to die, I just didn't see it dying.

Almost overnight?

Yes, I went out and it was half dead and I spoke to the Arborist and he said, 'Look, don't take it out, it might come back come Spring. Don't cut it back it'll stress it too much'.

Yes, we will match those areas with some photos.

So, do you have any plans to retain the heritage?

Yes, I'll just take you back to this photo. I like to think it is probably when the house was built. I would say the house had been not long built and someone who worked for me, a girl called Ella Taviano, found it on Facebook as she was going through the archives, and I thought 'How lovely, a young girl to be going through the archives and she found that and sent it to me. It was before they put the verandahs on Hopewood and it was before, and I've got a few more that I'm going to dig up. The trees were very small and are now towering, these very big trees. To me, the clothes, it doesn't look so much like Lebbeus Hordern's time, more the Osbornes. I wrote to Moana Throsby, who's married to Paddy Throsby, because it was an Osborne-Throsby house, to see if there was any chance she could recognise a forebear, but she said No.

This was when the house had a brick face and the lovely old shutters. Tim feels they rather ruined Hopewood putting the big porte cochere on and the big verandah, from the beautiful simple Victorian house it was.

Well, not that simple, but the shutters are rather lovely.

OK, well, before we conclude, are there any things about your gardening experience that I haven't talked to you about, that you might feel it's necessary to add?

Sorry, you were asking me about the history, and keeping the history, and I think that's probably the most important thing and not cutting down trees and I was even wondering about taking borders off the end of the house because they're not good for the house anyway. It's just about how much can one tackle at one time and because there's so much disruption to the garden ripping up things, but there are plans afoot to take down more hedging. I'm negotiating with my husband, who looks out and says, 'But I love that laurel hedge'. And I say, 'No, you don't, you actually don't. You're used to seeing it there. Imagine a row of oak-leaf hydrangeas instead, which are actually behind it. So, what's happened is, we've got layers and layers of things that were planted in the Anstees' time, and perhaps were not suited. And they've been allowed to grow into each other, and now it's time for a chainsaw.

Choose your moment.

I'm choosing my moment, I said to him, 'It's booked for April, you've got time to think about it and negotiate with me, OK?'

OK, on behalf of the Australian Garden History Society I'd like to thank you for agreeing to this interview. Wonderful.

Well, it's been so lovely to meet you.

And you.

Formal Interview concludes: 28 minutes 05 seconds

28:13

A WALK THROUGH THE GARDENS AT HOPEWOOD WITH JANET STORRIER

So, this southern side of the property has these beautiful old trees, that were planted with great thought, the elm tree, the old oak and the linden and there is a beautiful story, a fable about a linden and an oak, that I'll give you. It's a European fable and I can't help thinking that they must've known this fable, because they've planted them together. It's such a lovely story about a frog that turns into a prince.

Oh, OK, I haven't heard that.

I'll dig it up.

This is the laurel hedge that's up for negotiation. I've said I'll keep that, but it's got the oak leaf struggling on the other side and I'm going to, I thought, intersperse oak leaves on the upper level. It just makes sense, doesn't it?

Absolutely.

I can now say that you've said so.

[difficult to hear the conversation with more than two speaking]

I'm very partial to oak leaves because they've got 4 seasons and they go that beautiful red, and they don't go like ordinary hydrangeas.

Like this one, it needs so much trimming and then I'll take it up into there. This can peek up into there. This is like a barrier here.

And there's a lovely double one you can get. Have you seen that?

So, there's Martha at Welby, she'll be able to tell you. She's a very good gardener and works on a few heritage properties here in a consultation way. She also works at Welby as well with the children.

And so, a double?

I know she bought them for Sue Hand and put them in. So when the flower opens it's got two heads. It's quite lovely. And really white.

How beautiful.

And then it goes that green colour, which is gorgeous.

*OK, well what I'll do is intersperse them in between.
In between the ordinary ones.*

They might be a little bit lower, and so they might actually fill in.

And give more interest.

I really don't like to monoplant, I like to mix it up a little bit more naturally.

They'll look gorgeous, and they're low maintenance. They will need water.

I've got water there, but the laurel takes it all.

[recording interrupted at this point]

31:37

31:44

So, these old conifers, I've got photos which I will dig up, of when they were small and I think it's so interesting that they're still here. They take all the water from the soil, it's so hard to keep the grass going, but they're so lovely. And so, someone really planned this eastern side of the house so beautifully, and in the olden days they would have arrived in the carriageway and then swept around to the verandahs to go into the ballroom and so these plantings were really important. That's why I think Lebbeus probably planted those palm trees.

They were international type things weren't they? To bring something exotic from a warm climate and plant it in here.

*And he planted one more on that lawn at the same time and they're the only 3 big palms we have here, which is a shame because we love them. I was talking to someone about making a brace for that one, but I had someone here recently who said he doesn't think it's necessary, he doesn't think it will fall over. I'm worried it's going to fall over in a wind. These hydrangeas *aperfica*, for years I've been telling people it's a *viburnum*.*

No, it's an evergreen.

Well, it does lose its leaves but it's really tough and it doesn't lose all of them.

Has Les seen them?

No, Les hasn't been here yet.

He'll take cuttings for you for that.

I have, they grow so well. I said to him to take any cuttings. Here are some cuttings.

I love the peniculatas as well. They're very slow this year in this garden, why do you think that would be?

I don't know, maybe the heat.

I've planted a lot of peniculatas, because to me they just go in the garden and they're tough. It's got to be tough for Australian conditions hasn't it? ... And here, I used to tell people it was a rondalecia plant, it looked so much like it and I'd come from Sydney, but it's a burkwoodii – viburnum burkwoodii. I was thinking this should really come off, but I'm not going to do that, to bring them down a bit.

Well, they go really well with pruning.

A hard prune in the Spring after flowering?

We've had such weird weather – Rick might be able to advise you actually. I'd get Rick out. I'm no expert, you know a hundred times more than I do.

We must organise for Rick to come out.

I'll just give you his contact details and you choose to organise whatever, and he'd be more than happy to.

I don't know what these are.

Yes, I've got them in the conservatory at home.

Inside?

Yes, it's an inside thing. My husband knows.

It's not a bangalow?

No, no, it's one of the traveller's palms, but not in the traditional way. I'll ask John, I'll send it to him. He loves palms.

Yes, so does my husband.

When we came up here, of course I said, 'You can't bring any palms John, because they're not going to survive'. He persevered and persevered until he got some.

In the conservatory?

Yes, and then he puts it out in the rain.

That goes down into no-man's land. I'm just thinking which way we'll go, probably down into the Fernery?

OK, here are some of Terry's husband's walls.

[recording interrupted at 37:01]

37:11

This is like a Victorian garden, a sort of 'look at all my plants'.

I think this is ...

Yes, a crows nest, very hard to grow up here, you've got a camellia.

A beautiful old gum, which actually has a whole lot of rosellas in it in the Spring. I can hear the little babies up there calling their mother.

It's like a Victorian fernery, a palm court.

Well I call it the Fernery and I'm busy ripping out agapanthus. A beautiful old traveller's palm I've got here, and the flowering ginger and I've actually put in blue ginger but it's struggling because I haven't been back down here to water it.

They're all struggling because of water.

I've got to get in here and fertilise the soil. For some reason the soil is really poor in here, and no matter how much fertiliser I pump in it ends up looking like this. I've really got to mulch as well.

And compost?

I just said to the gutter cleaner man, 'Where do you put all your stuff? He said, I deliver so much to Bowral Sand and Soil, and they don't pay me, would you like some?' I said, 'Would I like some?' So, he's going to drop some off every week.

Even the old-fashioned way, where you used to dig a hole and put it in, and let the worms find out where it is.

You mean throw it on there?

Well, dig the hole and fill it up, and cover it so you don't get flies on it, and see if it starts to build up. Because I think it needs compost.

Oh, definitely, just a bit of organic life doesn't do it, does it?

No, because it won't hold the water.

That's exactly right. I watered down here a week ago and it just looks like I haven't been down here.

Oh, this looks very exotic.

Yes, tree ferns. We've lost so many tree ferns this year, in the outer parts where I just can't water.

Which is it?

I thought that little camellia there, it's so beautiful.

A beautiful red flower. I've got photos.

It's a beautiful old tree.

And a beautiful old quince behind there, it's struggling.

Probably not getting enough sun?

When we cut that hedge down we'll see.

What kind of vine is that?

I put that in. It is, it's like a Boston ivy. I took it off the Pavilion building, I just wanted to cover the ugly fireplace. It's some sort of Boston ivy, a different cultivar.

It's a real micro-climate isn't it?

It is, in fact I put rondalecias in here that I don't think would grow elsewhere. I've lost a lot in here, but I've just divided up the birds of paradise and they seem to be happy. I think I'll move the azaleas out of here and sort of carry on more with the fernery thing.

Yes, beautiful.

*There's my rondalecia plant, struggling a bit.
And there's this beautiful old walnut.*

That stone is of some significance and I have no idea.

It's got a hole in it.

What does that mean? You're welcome to walk in to it.

I don't know, I was wondering if there was a piece...

I'm always wondering if I'm going to meet a snake in here.

I wonder if they were on top of each other and they've fallen.

Actually, you're quite right. That was on top of that. I think you're right. I'm wondering if it's got a hollow underneath it. When Hunter's here, who is my incredibly ...

Oh, look, here we go, it's got Aboriginal carvings.

Seriously? Are you being serious?

Yes, you can see the pattern. There.

Oh, my God.

[recording interrupted at 42:12]

42:15

These are blackbutts, similar to the two I have on my nature strip. They're shedding their bark early because of the drought. Look at the height, they're stunning.

There are some beautiful old eucalypts down through here.

Do you know anything about this hedge?

They refer to it as the old windbreak of the property, the conifers, and this is where the two are growing into one another. So that was the orchard on the other side of it. And in fact this is all that remains of the orchard, those poor old mulberry trees struggling there and I've added the modern day orchard. We've got the Fuji, I put in 2 Fuji which do fruit, and a persimmon. I can't think of the other one.

A euonymous was another old-fashioned tree that they used to plant wasn't it?

They usually kept it as a hedge didn't they?

Did they? Cause that's just there like that, I'm wondering if there were more? Why this was planted here as a windbreak, I don't know because the prevailing wind is actually from there, north. I mean we occasionally get a norwester don't we?

It's right at the top of the hill, so I'm wondering if it was a focal point for coming home in the dark watching out for the tree line across the top of the hill?

How clever of you. Because if we look down there, there is a most beautiful view down. And so, in the old days when you didn't have street lighting and all the rest in those days. It's dark and you're looking for silhouettes in the sky to direct you home. I know that's why farmers always have a big tree that you can see from anywhere where you are. It might be something like that.

If we walk over here you can see more of the beautiful old trees.

I'm only guessing, I'm making it up.

It sounds incredibly plausible.

[a section of the recording is not transcribed]

These gums would not have been nearly as big would they?

So, this would have been something different in the landscape.
I don't know, just a thought.

So, these are the brick piers that that man built for when I'll do the clematis. It's such a mess down here, as we get further away from the house, it's a maintenance question. Before a wedding we've got to go through and tidy all this up. That's only happened since yesterday all that bark. That's the gum tree that I think the koalas had scratchings on, I'll just show you.

It was on here, but it's peeled off. I took a photo of the koala scratchings, you know they ask you to report them. I sent it into the Council but this was a few years ago. Would that just shed off with the bark? It could.

It doesn't look very well inside does it?

So many of the gums here, we shouldn't be standing on them, and we lost a massive one down there and they're still coming to cut it up. But there were these beautiful old gums.

How many acres have you got here?

10 or 11.

Beautiful, gosh, there's an awful lot of garden here, isn't there.

I've actually just come through with Roundup which I do when it gets out of hand and then in the Autumn I'll improve the soil and work out what we'll do. I had this as a vegetable garden in a good season, but it's just where you can divert your resources really.

Well you are just going to have to wait until the drought passes, you can't do everything.

That's exactly right. Actually, I was just looking, it looks like we've lost all those silver birches there.

Well, not necessarily, they'll lose all their leaves and then get new buds. That's what mine did. I've only got three, and they're babies, but I thought Oh, they're dying. I think anything that's deciduous is dropping its leaves. We'll have to wait until next Spring to see what happens.

All through there, all the tree ferns died. Such a shame, and old tree ferns.

They're hardy, I wouldn't remove them.

I won't pull anything out, I'll wait until Spring.

And this conifer hedge, the Leylandi, was put round by the Anstees and in a way it sort of hides the lovely vistas. It's such a shame as there is such a pretty view through there, but anyway.

To take them out now would be such a ...

Isn't it surprising that they've all survived?

I know, I actually wouldn't mind if some died.

They're probably overplanted.

Just listen to it all, that's what's so lovely.

This sign, 'Water and Children Don't Mix'?

The previous owners put that there because there are ponds and things down there.

What type of catmint is that?

That's Six Hill's Giant and that's your Perovskia again. I just pulled out all the roses here. I go 'Life's too short, you know, we're going to lose them next. I love Perovskia, and I'm just going with more of what works and that's what this garden is becoming.

Have you been to Lambley?

He's got his dry garden hasn't he? And has had for years?

Yes, and I just love his plants, they always work, and I'm growing more of his dry garden stuff.

Well, I'm going to put it in here. So, this was buxus hedges in all sorts of um, and it was sacrilegious to pull them out, but the amount of time we spent here hedging. I'm putting in native grasses and I'm experimenting. Too much catmint, but I thought I'd carry on with what works in here.

It takes over, and I know at Oldbury with Ian Carroll, I said to him once, 'How do you have your catmint looking so great all the time?' My 6 are a giant mess. He said I just cut the tops off this side, this couple of months, three months, then I cut that side off the next couple of months and that way you've always got new growth.

Doesn't it look funny?

No, I've never noticed. That was Ian Carroll, Head Gardener at Oldbury. He said, we have people coming in all the time, so it's got to look good all the time. So that was the trick, and I've been doing that, and you don't really notice, because you're seeing the flower.

I've always cut that whole walk of it down there, and it flops on me, so thank you for that.

And there's a new dwarf one now too, which I think is better.

A dwarf Six Hill?

No, a dwarf Nepeta.

I haven't planted anything, and then I haven't put anything else in, and I'll think 'Oh, you'll do'. The bees love it.

There is this dwarf one, and it doesn't over-spread, it keeps a basal clump tighter to the ground, so have a little look, it's rather lovely. I don't mind the old Nepeta, because of the bees.

Oh, the bees love it.

Did you get any honey this year?

No.

We haven't. I said to John, 'We haven't extracted any honey'. We don't want to.

Well we're feeding ours sugar syrup. I love that plant, I've planted it and had to pull it out, the Neulanvecchia. It's such a great plant, for just covering things and the birds love it.

Just cascading.

This perennial border was sort of a perennial border – I came with a lot of cuttings, over time we've added to it hoping for a lush perennial border, maybe next year.

It's keeping its shape and its colour under terrible conditions. Look at the hydrangeas.

I inherited the hydrangeas and I don't know whether it's crazy to have them. They're pretty tough, if you get out late on a hot day and water them late I think they're OK.

Sometimes you think they're dead, then they get a bit of shade and they just come back. I cut mine right down to the ground and tried to leave a couple with the two little nodes that will keep them, and it's only taken a fortnight and I've got the green coming again. I won't get a full plant, they're not dead and they'll get through the season.

Look at these.

Aren't they beautiful, the concave paths, I love it, the pockmarks. This was the orchard and I just think let it go back to parkland.

I think that's a very wise decision.
To me it's the architecture in the landscape, that's really talking to each other.

I really wonder about the Maze. You want the parkland.

Can I just ask you too, because I value your opinion, that tree trunk, I didn't cut it right down because it makes such a mess and I said to Tim, I'll grow clematis and roses up it. I'm 2 years into it and I sort of look at it and think maybe I should've taken it down because it stops the symmetry of the hydrangeas.

Rick will probably agree with you, and say leave it there, because he's done exactly the same at Retford Park, but I'm just looking at the line of the hydrangeas and the amount of flowers you've got is incredible, it's beautiful. So, it does take your eye.

I never used to have much yellow but I work out what's working in the garden, and last year I took out a whole lot of the rudbeckias. This year I found at Moi Dart a giant rudbeckia, have you seen that? Like about this tall?

I did grow it once and didn't have great luck with it. But you might have, because mine wasn't sunny enough. The snails like it. Throw some coffee around it.

Does coffee work for snails?

Coffee granules, stick them out.

I stick them on gardenias in pots, the coffee grains, they love it.

I'll do that, I've got the granules in there, from all the people who drink coffee, so I'll keep them for the snails.

I've got some plants, hostas, they love hostas, but if you stick the grains on, it makes them dehydrated and they actually die of dehydration.

Yes, well if your heart's doing that.

These trees I love. Do you want to head up there? We're just heading up to the conifers in front of the Pavilion.

How old do you think that tortured willow would be?

I'm terrible at ageing trees and willows grow very quickly, but that would have to be 60 or 70 years old, don't you think?

It's on a slope so it doesn't get much water. It's holding up incredibly well. It's an incredible tree isn't it?

I love the michelia cordatas behind, I've decided they're bombproof, and not invasive in this climate, so they're going all through here.

I saw them before and thought, that's marvellous.

Well, this was such a mess, this was just a yellow iris that had taken over in here and so we've decided we just want to feature the trees and bring everything a bit lower but having said that I've planted the hydrangea peniculatas but I thought that, the smokebush, and the hydrangea peniculatas, and the clematis Montana and the perovskia, which found its way here, I didn't invite it.

Right, it's doing its thing.

The heucheras I've added to put a bit of colour in.

Yes, good against 'white brides'.

Yes, and I love the plum and silver, and I've actually done heucheras and lamb's ears and I thought I'll get that ...

Yes, and if you find that the lamb's ears are too much maintenance, I notice you have one of those grey succulents round there – I'm replacing all my lamb's ears with the grey succulents, because they don't need any maintenance. I have a grey/green one with a burgundy margin. But there is a grey succulent as well.

It's not Cerastium Snow in Summer?

No, it's a succulent. I'll give you one.

Oh, hen and chicken, I love it.

It would just take off in amongst the burgundy. You know, with the lamb's ear, you have to cut it back because it gets all – I looked at mine the other day and thought, I'm not doing this again because there's too much labour.

I've put this down the very end actually, and it looks fantastic.

That's cotoneaster dammeri isn't it? It gets the tiny white flower. I've only got one.

We've literally just clipped it today, you can see the clippings.

I went to a garden at Robertson that had it all over, Skye Leckie's garden, she's got them as a hedge.

Has she got it? Whenever I go there it's lovely, she doesn't get out in it one bit.

It's only the Open Gardens visitors that get the benefit, the wanderers who get off a bus for an hour.

It's a very prolific spread isn't it. I hope mine doesn't do that, actually.

That's spread since we had to cut that tree down, with great sadness, but it was doing this. I thought, with weddings, we can't have it take out the toilet block.

You could make a nice sculpture with that.

Tim wanted the whole thing out, so it was a process of negotiation. I thought, no, it shows the history.

Yes, look at the girth of it.

Exactly.

There's one down your end of our street, Lyn, and I keep thinking you could get a sculptor to come and do an owl, or two owls.

I've seen wonderful faces on them.

I love these trees, a lot of people don't. Bill took out a lot of confers next door, and I know what he means, they're ratty.

But they tell the age.

So, this is Tim's. Tim won the Archibald in 2012 with this sculpture. I'm growing something around the base to make it look better, and his horse will go down that end.

Fabulous, it'll look beautiful, you've just got to get your plinth.

Yes, got to get the plinth made.

It's got to take the weight.

Exactly.

Cockatoos destroyed that Manchurian pear, they've ringbarked it. It's such an unhappy tree and beneath it is a beautiful gravestone to a horse that Tim had. We had it at Bathurst in the orchard, and we had a beautiful warmblood horse that we took in his last years, and he lived out his last years in this orchard, being ridden occasionally, living the life and very sadly, he died, as they all do.

So, he'd been used for dressage or something?

Yes, he'd actually been a champion dressage horse, and his owner got offered a huge amount of money to send him to Japan, and being such a horse lover, she said she couldn't do that to him.

I don't believe in the way the Japanese treat their horses.

Exactly, that's what she said, and so she came and gave him to us because she loved the idea of him staying with us.

What a marvellous thing.

There's an ancient Arabic saying: 'The breath of heaven is the wind between a horse's ears'. Isn't that the most beautiful saying? And it's true, isn't it?

Yes. A tiny flick will tell you what's going on in their brain. It's gorgeous isn't it.

What do you think? She's loving this tour, much more interesting than going around with brides.

Do you want to see inside the stables?

Yes, of course. Thankyou.

Complete Interview concludes: 1 hour 05 minutes 28 seconds