

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS BRANCH



Photo: Dr Stephen Utick

Interviewee:	DR STEPHEN UTICK
Interviewer:	LAUREL CHEETHAM & LYN BARRETT
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INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEPHEN UTICK
OF CAMELLIA ARK AUSTRALIA
ON 3rd DECEMBER 2020

This is an oral interview with Dr. Stephen Utick, co-founder of Camellia Ark Australia, which aims to conserve Australia's rarest camellias, and Chair of the International Camellia Society's Committee for Historic Camellia Conservation.

Dr. Utick will be speaking with Laurel Cheetham and Lyn Barrett for the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS).

Stephen, do you understand that the AGHS owns copyright in the interview material, but that disclosure will be subject to any disclosure restrictions you impose in completing the form of consent?

Yes I do.

Thank you very much. May we have your permission to make a transcript of the recording please?

Yes you may.

Thank you. We'd like to reassure you that neither the tapes nor any transcripts produced from them will be released without your authority.

For the tape this is the voice of Laurel Cheetham, Interviewer.
For the tape this is the voice of Lyn Barrett, Interviewer.

For the tape this is the voice of Dr. Stephen Utick, Interviewee.

Stephen's voice will be in *italics* within this transcript.

Dr. Stephen Utick, on behalf of the AGHS we would like to thank you for agreeing to this interview. It is so important to capture your story and your work with camellias, especially heritage camellias. We are going to emphasise in this particular interview the Apoliu Declaration and you are going to tell us about that.

Thank you very much.

This interview is taking place on 3rd December, 2020 at 16 Harley Street, Bowral, commencing at 11.43 a.m.

Stephen, we're required to start with some biographical details. [Laughter] Can you tell us please where you were born?

I was born in the inner-city suburb of Marrickville, Sydney at the Bethesda Salvation Army Hospital on 18th August, 1953.

Do you have any siblings?

Yes, I do. I have two sisters. One is my sister Marie who lives in Katoomba and is about 12 years older than me and the other one, my sister Anita, who lives in Campbelltown and is about 10 years older than me. I was born a bit late in my family.

Where did you spend your childhood and go to school?

OK, the earliest part of my childhood was spent in Earlwood, where we lived in Prince Edward Avenue. I went to De La Salle Marrickville, and then later to De La Salle College, Earlwood. Then in the early 1960s, after we moved to Sutherland Shire, I went to De La Salle Caringbah and finally De La Salle, Cronulla. The significant part of family life was our move from Earlwood to the Sutherland Shire, to our new home in Matson Crescent, Miranda. This new property was significant in our appreciation of gardens because of what we found there when we arrived prior to my father commissioning an architect to design our new home.

You might like to tell us about that?

Yes, when we arrived at this property, we discovered an extraordinary overgrown garden site. A previous owner bar one, an elderly gentleman, had created this magnificent garden landscape. There were these caverns of reinforced cement and a lot of features. For example, it had little running streams and birdbaths all over this property and of course we had to clear most of it to build the family home. Apparently, this garden and the home next door (the property had been subdivided), had once been during the 1940s a wonderful showplace garden, and it was a shame to have to tear most of the old features up. My parents did develop a suburban garden there themselves and essentially as my father moved towards retirement, my mother urged him to do some other things. Eventually my parents became members of what was then the St. George & Sutherland Azalea & Camellia Society. What is interesting is that later, after a breakup of that society, my father became one of the founders of what was then The St. George & Sutherland Camellia Society, which then became, a few years later, an affiliate of The Australian Camellia Research Society.

One of the wonderful things I remember were some of the camellia shows we put on at what was then, a recently opened Miranda Fair. These were wonderful events and I remember being involved at a very early age, putting up displays of camellias, including later some rare camellia species.

I also remember talented camellia growers such as Bill Hooper, who was a grower and retailer of miniature camellias in Bexley North. Another important person was a retired engineer, who had been a fighter pilot in WWII, by the name of Jack Greentree, who played a very important role in later camellia promotions. Jack was a marvellous plants person, interested in azalea and camellia breeding and growing, and his generosity was one of things which inspired our family as well, as he played an important role later when we came to the development of the E.G. Waterhouse National Camellia Gardens in Caringbah which was just at the end of Matson Crescent.

As time went on, what happened which is relevant to our interest in camellias, was that in the late 1960s Sutherland Shire was preparing for the Bicentenary of Captain Cook's arrival at Kurnell (which is located in the Shire). It's interesting to note how

little was made of the recent 250th Anniversary of and why that was not celebrated. But it was a different world in the Australia in the 1960s. Jack Greentree encouraged my father Eric Utick to go on the Council's Horticultural Committee and my father was actually elected President of the Horticultural Committee during 1968, in the lead up to the planning of celebrations to be held in 1970.

This step was quite important because it was the route that my father could begin to build the E.G. Waterhouse National Camellia Gardens, of which he would ultimately become its Honorary Director. So, when the time came, we put forward to Council this idea to turn then rundown reserve at the eastern end of Matson crescent down the way from Kareena Park for this project. A little bit later we approached the Australian Camellia Research Society to have a name the gardens in honour of Professor Waterhouse.

That garden has grown mainly because it does have community support. It previously had a management advisory committee which operated until 2013, but its operations were limited not only in terms of what could be added but also the resources the Council would provide. That garden in 2014 became an International Camellia Society Garden of Excellence. We have five of these in Australia now, but this was the first one in New South Wales and fortunately my mother was still alive when we actually got that accreditation.

There's an interesting background story about the site and I was so pleased finally to put the story up at the Waterhouse Gardens on the information signage there. Kareena Park itself was once known as the Matson Pleasure Grounds prior to World War One. The history of the Matson Pleasure Grounds fascinated my father. Fred Matson had emigrated from Finland during the 19th century and his family's boat-building business became among the most famous in New South Wales and was situated on the Port Hacking waterways. At the beginning of the twentieth century, their dream was also to create a pleasure grounds, a very Victorian style of attraction. At that site, where the camellia gardens are now located, well over 100 years ago in 1903, the Matson Pleasure Grounds were set up. Of course, dad heard all these local stories and these inspired him to put in his efforts to create something like this with the support of Sutherland Shire Council, the Camellia Society, other garden clubs and Caringbah Rotary.

My mother also, for the record, provided the major inspiration for the gardens, as she was a passionate gardener herself, So it was a family commitment, egged on by her in particular. As a result, we were most successful in getting that garden accepted by Council and established.

The story of the E. G, Waterhouse Camellia Gardens at Caringbah in Sutherland Shire is important in my own grounding in camellias and camellia collections. We got donated a fabulous collection of camellias by the late Walter Hazelwood, who was an important nurseryman in the promotion of camellias in Australia. Along with Professor Waterhouse he was the one most responsible for generating the re-interest after World War II in camellias in NSW. I remember planting many of them myself along with other volunteers and showing people around the various specimens I met people like Tom Savage who later became a President of the International Camellia Society and also

developed the first global Camellia Register. And of course, the famous Professor Waterhouse himself who I also met as a teenager.

At a very formative age then, I had access to these fabulous plants and learned stories about them from all over the world. As time went by and I grew older, I actually used to do guided tours around these Camellia Gardens and tell the stories such as of the Tsubaki of Japan. With the support of the Japanese Camellia Society, we obtained a further influx of rare plants. This was quite important in my formation in camellia culture, as it was a unique and wonderful experience. What I did discover was that I had an eidetic memory for identifying camellia flower cultivars which actually stood me in good stead, because when the time came for me from about 2012 to 2014, to prepare the Waterhouse Camellia Gardens at Caringbah to become an ICS Garden of Excellence, I had to identify the 400 camellias in 18 months.

I did it, it was a big job, but I wouldn't have been able to do that without that eidetic memory. My father had died in about 2010, but before he died he asked me to take on the volunteer role at the Waterhouse Camellia Gardens. I actually served on the committee for many years with some periods in absentia, but Sutherland Council changed its approach to community management committees like that operating at there. I felt as if we'd done enough with the international award achieved and opportunity for further volunteer work limited. However, I realised that because of my knowledge of these plants, that it was important to salvage what I could of this marvellous collection of Camellias. So, in about 2012 as a project, we established the Camellia Ark project with Parker's Camellias at Glenorie, which was part of the Waterhouse Gardens, which later on in 2016 served as the prototype for Camellia Ark Australia.

These things are important to my formation. and in essence it was a very unique background. I mean to say I had my own professional career in Canberra. Over time as I approached retirement, the matter of these camellia plants, the value of such collections, and their significance weighed on me and so I sought to preserve these collections for Australia, because nobody else would or could.

13:00

It's in your DNA isn't it?

Yes, but my philosophy is this, I've been very fortunate, I've had a good job in the Commonwealth Public Service. I benefit from the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme which is an unbelievable one compared with comparable superannuation in today's world. In return, this is the one thing uniquely that I could do to contribute back to Australia, because I'm the only one who knows all this stuff. Of course, the International Camellia Society (ICS) comes next. I rose up through that organisation leading up to preparation for the Apoliu Declaration. We had a number of people in Australia who were interested in historic camellias, like Jim Powell, a very great horticulturalist, botanists Tony Curry and George Orel from the species point of view, who pressed the idea of historic camellia conservation. There was also a great deal of interest in this, particularly in Europe, southern USA and Japan. Another aspect was the growing interest by China as well over that period, which I'll come to as another story. In 2017, the informal Historic Camellias Group set up by the ICS had

a seminar in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and it was hosted by ICS member Florence Crowder, who is very much interested in historic gardens and their camellias in Louisiana. There were many talks on historic camellias at that seminar in Baton Rouge and the Chinese President of the ICS, Guan Kaiyun mentioned the fact that he thought that this group should become a formal ICS committee. I said that's a good idea, and then he asked me would I like to become the first chair of this committee. I knew why I had been asked, because I was collecting all this global historical data and stories on historic camellias. Hardly any of them had been published before. So, I said yes and the following year, 2018, there was a formal vote by the International Camellia Society, to establish the committee and a few months later they accepted me as Chairman. There was one objection to my becoming Chair. This was that I didn't know enough about the high culture of Europe, which I found a bit deprecating because actually I had studied much European history and philosophy at university. Europeans feel very strongly about these things and many historic camellia trees are located on grand aristocratic estates. Sometimes there is an element of snobbery in all of this particularly in relation to European attitudes to Australians, they think perhaps we're basically 'hicks' from the bush. They don't understand the richness of our own heritage. But that attitude was soon dissipated, because effectively I utilised my bureaucratic skills in being able to bring this committee together from all the various national groups. An important prelude to the Apoliu Declaration was what happened at the first meeting of this ICS Committee for Historic Camellia Conservation held in Nantes, in March 2018. I gave my opening speech and address in French. The meeting table was crowded, there were more people attending that meeting than attended the ICS board meeting at Nantes. I got a huge Chinese delegation attending. At that first meeting, we went around the table and some in the Chinese delegation became more and more edgy, not understanding the decision-making process. I pointed out at the meeting the first thing to do was, because we had so many cultures around the table, we had to make sure that everybody owned the process of this historical activity, because the cultures are all so different.

Anyway, that worked out and at the conclusion of the meeting several Chinese delegates, made an offer I couldn't refuse, to host the next meeting in Guangdong, China which would be in 2019. There wasn't much response around the table, but to our secretary Tony Curry and myself this sounded like a good idea, ultimately none objected. There were 2 important people involved in this offer, apart from the President, Guan Kaiyun, who is a senior Chinese horticultural scientist and a member of the Chinese Academy of Science. One was the highly placed Professor Gao Jiyin, who had been a major promoter of camellia horticulture in Guangdong Province, particularly with his work on the hybridisation using *Camellia azalea*. The other who became my alter-ego was Hou Wenqing, a Foshan businessman who was prepared to spend any amount of money to do what he wanted to do, which we'll talk about a little bit later. Thanks to Wenqing's efforts essentially, the subsequent meeting and international conference was held in Conghua which is a spa resort town in Guangdong Province. He paid for everything, apart from the air fares. He was very nervous about getting people together, but I was able to bring together the various nationalities, a lot from Europe and particularly from Italy. There is a very strong relationship between Italy and China as we know for various reasons and that's another story. However, we needed this meeting to establish and develop the Apoliu Declaration. We worked on a draft of it with various amendments for the best part of

8 months. It was a lot of work. I arrived in Guangdong Province China on 15 October 2019. Between the 18th and 19th October 2019, the ICS committee met in the town of Conghua in Guangdong Province, thanks to the generosity of this marvellous host Hou Wenqing. Now, this was significant - it involved 60 participants including core committee members. Half of these were from China which was interesting, and the rest came from across the world including Australia, Spain, the U.K., Italy, Germany, Japan, the Benelux countries and Vietnam. Conspicuously missing was the United States of America, which is another story indeed.

France wasn't there, was there a reason for that?

20:05

French delegates couldn't come. It depends on who's available. We had no shortage of people though, so it was very good. So, we had core global expertise, particularly from the Chinese side in terms of historic trees and forest trees.

Now the forest trees are an important part of the story because this is where we preserve these ancient botanical specimens. Camellia trees are old, but not as old as various pines which can be over 4,000 years old, but they are still old, about 1,000 years with a few even older. The significant thing is the cultural impact of these trees, and this is where the other story about China comes in quite importantly. It provided the wherewithal for much Chinese support of the Declaration. They were interested in preserving the forest trees of course but Professor Gao had encouraged many people, particularly in Guangdong Province to take an even greater interest in this. Now Guangdong Province is the home of much of the new wealth of China with a great deal of interest in gardens effectively. I'll talk in another segment of the Qinghui Garden of the Ming Dynasty. We've also got a movie of that as well which is quite extraordinary, and this was the site of the first presentations of an award under the the Apoliu Declaration. The Chinese were changing their attitude to embrace camellia conservation, but more importantly the world was coming together to develop a framework for the conservation of ancient and historic camellia trees.

*I'll briefly just mention the forest trees because they were quite important factor in galvanising the Kunming Institute of Botany to support this. This is one of the main reasons why it got traction because they wanted standards to preserve the historic forest trees, particularly as villages across China also wanted to value these things, they didn't want to destroy them. From a biological perspective, it's a very important part of protecting biodiversity in camellias too, particularly with the *Camellia reticulatas* in Yunnan Province.*

Anyway, that camellia forest tree framework was essentially half of the Apoliu Declaration. What is interesting from a Garden History Society perspective was that the second half focused on historic ornamental camellia trees. So, we also developed a framework for the conservation of historic camellia trees. Now this was the first framework for conservation of historic ornamental trees, either in gardens or sites or just out in the field. This is significant for garden history because we start to see an ornamental garden tree as a historic object. It is interesting to note the recent reaction from China about acquiring back the statues that were stolen in 1860 from the Sack of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing. These were garden statuary, so this is now

grafted into their DNA that such garden things were valuable, and so they now as interested in the cultural dimension as the West is. And Japan also had a traditional interest of their various cultural icons such as camellias.

What we developed in the context of this framework were a number of elements. First of all, we not only had to designate what these significant trees were, but also to provided reporting standards for these trees, which I will come to after I deal with the actual specifications. Now basically the first thing in terms of designating a specification for an ornamental plant is to list what constitutes a significant historic ornamental camellia tree.

24:50

This framework of the Apoliu Declaration is important because it fleshes out aspects of what it is and the concepts could be used in the conservation of historic ornamental plants of any kind anywhere around the world. It is not just relevant to camellias.

The interesting thing why camellias are historic objects is that first of all, they are centenarian sentinels, most of them will live for 100 years or more. You will get trees which will live up to 1,000 years in the forests of Yunnan, but most of our garden trees will live up to a hundred years old at least. That's pretty old in the life of any garden, so basically it marks the passage of time. But there's something else, like many trees that can be planted by historic personages, you can get a native plant that's been planted. In this case it's a living antique. It's a simple concept, but it needs to be drummed in. Ornamental plants are living antiques – Why? Because they are the product of the nursery and garden world of a different era.

We have been focusing a lot on historical landscapes, but not about the things in that landscape. It's like having a home where you're talking about the grounds but you're not talking about the furniture or anything within it. The gardens around these estates are just as important as the old piano and the chaise lounge, because they were very specialised items, they weren't things that anybody could obtain in times gone by. Essentially, they were prized acquisitions and of course when they came to the West, Australia was one of the first countries to get camellias, thanks to Lady Brisbane and the English East India Company, which made sure that the Colony of New South Wales got these beautiful plants from China.

China was a major focus at that time because of the issue of the Opium Wars and all the rest of it, and because of this issue, this domination of China and which now we are actually reaping some of the dividends of down the track.

This is an important thing and it has an impact for Australia because these plants, including tea, came to New South Wales as early probably, as 1821, but the first official date is 1823 when they are planted in the Royal Sydney Botanical Gardens. And, of course, having that early history, and the interest of a lot of the NSW colonial establishment, started off a major historical trajectory, whereby these camellias and interest in them had a life of their own.

Now, as important historical objects in the garden history of Australia, because with the early products like those of Sir William Macarthur and Michael Guilfoyle, we

actually start to get Australian camellias being developed, sold and distributed to gardens around the colonies of Australia in the 19th Century.

*Many of these trees are now living with us, they are over 130, 140, 150 years old and they are part of the legacy of Australia. They are also part of something else, they are part of a wider global biodiversity of which these specimens are remnants and relics. If we know one thing about Australian plant collectors, it is that they have been assiduous collectors - and what they did, they went everywhere and got so many rare and interesting things and shipped them back to Australia, including from southeast Asia in the late 20th century, a number of these specimens ended up in significant collections and such, and this why there is a domestic historical interest and also a global historical interest. A feature of these historic ornamental trees is not just that they are historic features of the gardens but are globally historic as well. And as cloned cultivars they can be the same thing essentially as the original selected cutting material taken in say London nursery of the 1830s. As they are clones, they are not essentially any different from the source material. This is the importance of understanding such plants as historical objects, namely that this historical relevance is not to just the plant history of locality or the nation, but in some cases their **global** history, simply as the they spread across the globe.*

The camellia plants that you see for example at Vacluse House, are quite interesting for that reason, there you see Chandleri, it's a very early 1830s camellia cultivar from London. Sometimes these cultivars have long disappeared from their home regions or home countries. What drew our attention to this earlier on had been the work of a Belgian International Camellia Society member, by the name of Marc de Coninck, who had been asked by the Royal Court of Belgium to recover the lost camellias that had been part of the Royal Collection in Belgium acquired during the 19th centuries, much of which was wrecked in World War I. He was able to acquire certain Belgian varieties from gardens in Australia. So, having a historical object like this is not only of importance for local gardens, it is potentially important global horticultural conservation – and particularly as we head into a world of increasing lost biodiversity, and such things are the bottom of the pile of priority in terms of preservation. So, effectively to have a system where you are recognising historical ornamental trees, it's not just about saying, 'oh, that's a beautiful old thing', it is important in terms of preservation and conservation as well.

Let's go to the Specifications of the Preservation of Significant Historic Ornamental Camellia Trees. These specifications are relevant to generic historic ornamental trees per se in many cases.

31:05

Now, because not all the information is always available, we designated that certain, at least 2 criteria amongst this, must be met.

First the tree specimen must be clearly identified as a species or cultivar level. So, what that means is you've got to have the tree classified as to its known species. In most cases it would be Camellia japonica or sasanqua or something like that. The cultivar level indication is possible at most times, but sometimes for very old trees we

don't have enough information at the cultivar level.. In any case, I'll come to these criteria next.

Have you got any questions?

Is that because they are seedlings?

Some are seedlings. Some of these were very early collections from China and Japan. One of the interesting cases are among the historic camellias in Europe. Unfortunately, a few years ago we lost what were called the Campa Bello camellias. These were old camellias located on an aristocratic estate in Portugal, thought to be some of the oldest camellias in Europe. They were just single red camellias – a simple japonica seedling which probably came from Japan. They thought they were several hundred years old, unfortunately a storm blew them down. They didn't have a cultivar name. Some of these early collected camellias were simply like that. Later on, because we have cultivar names and then you come to a producer or horticultural person, which is very important element to the garden history, so you get that?

To reach the specification of an individual historic ornamental camellia tree at least two of these following criteria would be required. Now, the first of these is 'be greater than 100 years old of a unique and/or original specimen of a cultivar and species', right? 'Or of a lesser age when taking into account the exceptional age of the plant'. What we have to take into account here is that ornamental plants sometimes have different life spans as we know, some can live to 100 years, others don't. So here we recognise, first of all a generality that being of an age over 100 years old is significant, and effectively, of a lesser age, where a cultivar only has a limited time frame, many hybrids may be in this category.

The next criteria is that, 'historicity must where possible be supported by documentation of any kind'. The documentation may be a nursery listing, a listing in a garden or some other feature that is around that verifies it, a report or something like that. This criterion is also important: 'represent a special planting marking an historical event, or planted by a special person'. Of course, this can not only apply to ornamental plants but to native and other plants as well - this has been a well-known criteria for identifying an historical tree.

Now, this is something else, 'be the original mother plant of a significant horticultural camellia cultivar'. This is interesting, when you come to the original mother plant you are talking about nursery sites and that, these are perhaps the original trees. An example of that was a beautiful cultivar which we actually at least collected scions of, a camellia in an old Beecroft nursery site called Marguerite Enid, which I featured in a recent Camellia Ark Discovery Journal and this was the only surviving mother plant of it. That tree has been now transported out for propagation. Essentially, a tree like that is highly significant because it's the source of original material from a horticultural perspective when you're dealing with clones that's highly significant. The issue of clones is important here because this framework does recognise the importance of preserving such clones

It can also 'represent an important complement within an historic collection including those of nurseries' and I'll come to collections in a minute, so basically it's something represented in the ornamental tree specimen which adds an additional piece of information about a core collection.

Now this is most interesting, and particularly in an Asian context. 'Be of special religious or cultural significance within the context of a temple, shrine, religious site, memorial (including cemeteries) and monuments'. The reason being, here in Australia you might think of places like Rookwood Cemetery where historic ornamental trees might be, but in Asia it's much more because in China you have the ancient temples and in Japan you've got the ancient shrines and in many cases camellias feature very prominently in religious sites like that. Such sites contain of a different kind significant tree and we were very privileged to pick up much of the information relating to this which hasn't been recorded in the West. This is ancient history going back thousands of years here, so effectively very important. What we're doing, we're marking out a historic camellia contained within those sites.

Here is another interesting criterion - 'has had literary and cultural impact, e.g. depiction in books, poems or cinema or other media, or referenced by some famous writer, novelist or poet'. Certainly, in China and other countries like that, this is particularly important, one of the examples here would be the camellias of old Dali for which poetry was written in the Ming Dynasty about these beautiful flowers, so you've got this ancient to middle ages history really, and as you go back in time you get certain historical events or activities involving camellias that have made that possible.

So, these specifications, we said that if they can meet at least two of these criteria then they would qualify for an award.

How many criteria actually are there?

There's seven in all, there's the age, the historicity supported by documentation, special planting for a historic event or planted by a special person, a mother plant of a significant camellia cultivar, a complement to a historical collection, of special religious or cultural significance or have literary or cultural impact. So these which can come from all over the world, are the various elements which feed into this suite of specifications for an individual historic or middle camellia tree.

But, may I say, essentially nearly all of these you could just adapt for a specification to an any individual historic ornamental tree. As such trees are ornamental, they can possess cultural impact aspects as possessed by the camellia. The award is specially crafted and applies a same set of specifications as for forest trees, it's recognising an historical object within a historic garden setting.

With the Japanese and the Chinese, we all understand and know the Japanese honour age, particularly within their trees, they'll do anything to keep it, prop it up etc. Is it the same philosophy in China with these ancient trees?

It is in Western China and for reasons of the cultural significance of the minority people of Northern Yunnan, particularly the Bai and Yi minorities. It has become culturally sensitive now to the Chinese. During the past decade, Australians have most

privileged to see particularly at ICS Congresses many great historic camellia stories particularly in Western China you have a number of significant ancient religious symbolism. This includes the fascinating animist story of the Mishi or the God of Garden. The camellia is the only plant which is still worshipped as a god in that region. It's a garden god. The gods of garden are not something which has been featured in the West before, yet it is something which is quite extraordinary. Camellia flowers feature prominently in much Asian religious aesthetic particularly through contemplation, meditation - the next important development occurred in Daoism and Buddhism. For these religions, meditation flowers are quite important and of course, as we know, the lotus is the most important meditation flower within Buddhism. The lotus won't grow in Northern Yunnan, but the camellia reticulatas are out there. This region is where you get to the story of the ancient kingdoms of Nanzhao and Dali. They were conquered by Genghis Khan later on and incorporated into China but this is another great story. Ethnobotanical stories of camellia are studied by the Kunming Botanical Institute, and through them ICS members were most privileged to visit shrines and attend rituals.

Ancient Yunnan was the site of some of the greatest stories in garden history involving religious practices which have continued for 2,000 years and it's not been properly appreciated by the West yet. It even became political, particularly during China's Great Cultural Revolution. The current fracture between China and the West means that we may not get access to such horticultural information again for a long period. Even before 2020, Americans were for example becoming reluctant to visit China due to growing cultural and political tensions. This is why the stories we have to tell are important to get on record before they are lost, in the sense of capturing this period of ancient garden history, which I suspect the AGHS may have an interest.

Back to the Declaration, we have specifications, but there's another level as well - that is historic collections – or 'collections of Historic Ornamental Trees'. Here we are looking at less than 50 specimens basically. This is important because there are collections within gardens which are highly significant although here we're looking too at individual trees which comprise such collections. 'Each specimen within the collection must be listed and meet the criteria for an individual Historic Ornamental Camellia Tree'. So rather than giving out 50 awards for 50 individual trees you have a designated collection. I'll explain why this is relevant important to the Southern Highlands region in a minute.

Any one of those individuals must reach two of those criteria I noted previously in order to do it. They then can 'represent an important complement within an historic collection'. There may be for example a tree in such a collection that fits a pattern which just provides enough information to make a whole collection understandable from an historic perspective.

Anyway, where are these collections located? They are located 'within or across a temple, shrine, religious sites, historic sites and monuments, within a historic estate, or separate locations across a district province or local government jurisdiction within an individual country'. With respect to regions for example, there are camellias planted right across the province of Galicia on the Atlantic coast of Spain in historic estates or Pazos. It is quite clear that these collections can be seen as belonging to a whole regional identity - so you develop a route or a trail to feature such specimens. It is

better to treat those significant provincial tree specimens as part of a wider trail rather than scattered individual trees. It makes the whole scattered community of trees more comprehensible.

Can you give us some examples in Australia?

Well, potentially, an example for a regional collection would be the camellias of the Southern Highlands. You already have examples of individual trees such as the Camellia 'Aspasia Macarthur' in the main street of Berrima. That's a very old tree. On its own it's OK, why not make it part of a regional trail network, where you see a series of trees, and what I pointed out that potentiality when I did write a letter to the Wingecarribee Shire Council about this matter. I wrote that there's a potential here to really make something of these historical trees in the Shire because it's not just that you have one in a particular location, you can also see a succession of them that blends into a whole. Obviously, that would include Retford because that contains a camellia collection within an historic estate. But when you're looking at these as individual odd and sods trees across the countryside, they don't have the impact of presenting them as part of a whole, and this is where the value for locations like the Southern Highlands is potentially very good for this, so it's valuing these things as part of a wider heritage landscape. So, you could include within a wider framework, things like the Station Street camellias, etc., linking in broader perspectives. If you're looking at a place like Retford Park, it could be viewed as a historic discrete estate as there are a number of camellias there which would warrant that, or it could be encompassed in a wider regional one.

Another important estate is Government House in Sydney. It's an estate where I was able to examine because of the early plantings of some very old European camellias, this is clearly something within its own jurisdiction, separate from the Botanical Gardens, even though there is some overlap historically. It's also within the historic context of an historic estate. And such designations of historic collections are adding value to the historical estates I should add.

Now with respect to the approach of including locations across a district and local government region, I got that idea from having a look at historical promotion of this kind that was going on in the Deputacion Pontevedra in Galicia Province in Spain. They are doing a lot of work promoting these camellias in this way. Such camellias were planted in the 19th Century at various Pazos, parks and historic landscapes.

So, can you talk about the awards?

Yes, I certainly will. This is the other thing that we do under the Apoliu Declaration. We have Awards for historic significant historic ornamental trees. In order to achieve this award, they have to meet these criteria. Basically, we have this in place already, and essentially awards are given out for an individual historical camellia tree and also for a historic collection.

Now, Australia has already received one of each of these awards, the reason being that they are significant.

46:18

One of the first awards for an historic, individual, ornamental, significant tree came to a specimen of a Camellia japonica 'Cassandra' which is the best remaining specimen of Camellia japonica 'Cassandra' was developed by Sir William Macarthur in 1848. It's the finest remaining specimen and is about 70 years old.

Where is it?

It's in Lisgar Gardens in Hornsby, which also becomes our latest ICS Camellia Garden of Excellence. It's such a beautiful specimen, so indicative, that I felt it deserved to be marked and so therefore it's an individual tree in a garden site.

And is that one of a collection of camellias inside Lisgar Gardens?

It is but it is the most significant ornamental tree because of its links back to NSW garden history. You don't have to have the original plant, but it's the best remaining specimen of this type of plant. And in the criteria we list the historic reasons why this tree was recognised, and in NSW history in this case is that it is one of the first cultivars of Sir William Macarthur, it's NSW cultural heritage, and so therefore it is important.

Also significant is the fact that it is part of a wider planting celebrating N.S.W. garden heritage - it's part of the nineteenth century garden history. There was something else. The camellia was actually featured on a postage stamp in Portugal, a historical camellia and I had something to do with that. Let me say just this, there are a number of elements that you can look at in order to build up this portfolio of reasons why it's a significant historical camellia tree.

And what about the collection?

That collection is at Eryldene, which is at Macintosh Street, Gordon, once owned by Prof. Waterhouse. What we selected here was a special collection and I had one of the ICS committee members from Germany come out to participate. First of all, they were Waterhouse camellia cultivars, developed by Prof. Waterhouse, and the remainder and planted by him at Eryldene. While Eryldene has a lot of camellias the most significant these are the most significant ones were plants. Why Professor Waterhouse was important in this context was his leadership role in popularising camellias in Australia. He was the first President of the International Camellia Society. So, there are a number of interesting criteria there. We selected about half a dozen plants that we felt fulfilled these criteria..

Point one, they were Waterhouse cultivars of six specimens either in a pot or in the ground. They had also been planted by Professor Waterhouse. Point two the Waterhouse camellia cultivars were also important in popularising horticulture in 1960s Australia. So, this collection had this wider aspect, but there was more. Point three – this was a collection of the first President of the International Camellia Society. So, you've got this additional historical element there. So, all these bits and pieces come into play in determining the historical significance of eth collection. You've got the fact that this collection is significant, not only who did it but their significance. There are some very rare items included such as an extremely rare hybrid called Lady's

Maid?? for example. All these features enhance the historical significance of the collection.

The wonderful thing about both those awards is that they relate to different eras in the history of horticulture in New South Wales. In the case of the Cassandra, the award recognizes that early colonial period of 1848 onwards. Cassandra is one of the horticultural treasures of New South Wales; it was very special even back then and it still survives. What I'm trying to say is that through such awards, I'm trying to raise the awareness of the plant as an historic object in its own right.

What about the Waratah camellia at Camden Park, would that be?

Yes, it would be, however there's also a white Waratah camellia at Vaucluse House. The waratah camellia at Camden Park would rate as an individual historic tree, Anemiflora. Why, because it's what we believe to be the oldest surviving individual plant in Australia of camellia dating back perhaps to the late 1830s. I mean it's not absolutely proven, but there's all the evidence to suggest that it is. I have spoken to the gardener about that, it is one that does deserve such an award. Some extra information from the Stanham Macarthur family is called for and there would be no problem at all in it eventually receiving this award, but before embarking on it I would need to negotiate with the family to see whether they want to proceed in this direction or not. You do get an international certificate and we have the process in train. I have presented a certificate to Eryldene but not yet to Lisgar Gardens at Hornsby where I'm hoping it will be presented when they get their certificate for International Gardens of Excellence. They do have a Camellia Gala Festival in about July of every year. If they do that next year hopefully these things will come to pass; due to COVID-19 everything has been closed right now and we haven't been able to do anything like that. Hopefully that we will all catch up.

The idea is raising the bar on interest in all these plants as historical objects. As I say if you look at other garden ornamentals there might be other plants that fit this bill - but nobody has developed a framework yet to cover these.

Now the other thing I need to speak about is the specifications for recording data on such camellia trees. The specifications for the plants are what we try to encourage to be recorded for historical record. Specification criteria are used both for the forest trees as well as the ornamental trees because they are in essence the same biota with, the morphology etc are pretty much the same. This was subject to long debate and deliberation, and 12 data points which are recommended in recording the measurement of these trees.

The first is taxonomy which is the species or cultivar name, obviously and cultivar name is obviously important.

Place: where it is located, longitude and latitude and surroundings such as soil, water and light.

Ownership: who owns it, whether it's private or public.

Estimates of Age: Documented with photos, pictures, bibliographic citation, forestry reports and ecological studies or other reliable documents to justify the age estimate. This is where you come to empirical data or primary or secondary resources, whatever is available there.

Do they do the DNA there?

This is a fairly controversial area, whether the DNA will get you down to cultivar level or not. I don't know and I don't think the question has been resolved. Some people say you can't do it, others say you can. All I have to say is we are not up to a standard to determine whether that is the case at this point in time with analysis.

I am going to have to interrupt. Laurel Cheetham is leaving the interview.

Thank you Laurel.

55:18

Right well the next items we have are the size measurements (other than the trunk): Height, Record of Canopy and Crown Width Density. Obviously, these measurements are very important with forestry trees.

Trunk Measurements: Circumference (not diameter of trunk(s) 1.3 metres above ground level for a single trunk tree or, for multiple trunk trees, ground level circumference (not diameter) of all the largest lateral branches. This is important, particularly when you come to garden shrubs and things, not just the trunk like a lollipop, they've got branches going out everywhere. This was the case with many old camellias as well. In fact, there are very few camellias that are not with multiple branches coming from the ground. This is subject to some discussion.

Internal Testing of Branch and Trunk Structure

Growth Vigour: including for trunk, leaf and flower.

Phytosanitary Report: this is basically reporting on the health of the plant.

Interest: natural, scientific, educational, monumental, ornamental and aesthetic value.

We have discussed a number of the above aspects before.

Historic significance (supported by documentation); and

Record of any literary and cultural impact.eg. depiction in books, poems, cinema or other media or referenced by some famous writer, novelist or poet.

Now basically this impacts interesting because there has been some growing awareness about this aspect of forest trees in Asia. Obviously, we haven't got to that in Australia. There are cases of trees which are in gardens which are noted by poets and such, it picks up all that. This is quite an important suite of items. The trunk measurements criterion took quite some time to sort out.

These reporting standards are used for ancient forest trees as well as the historical ornamental trees.

Stephen, we know that soil is quite important Do they do an actual study of the soil the camellia is in?

That's included in the data on place: surrounding soils, the generality of the soil. It doesn't have to include a soil sample, we're not being so proscriptive that you've got to include a soil sample, but soil detail would be one of the things we are encouraging It's not always possible to get all this kind of information. but we try and encourage as much as we possible to be recorded.

With the heritage camellias in Australia is there very much in the way of recorded information?

Except in the main Botanical Gardens and the ICS Camellia Gardens of Excellence, it's a bit light on. We do have some interesting individual specimens - I mean for example there is one beautiful 'Aspasia Macarthur', in the gold mining settlement, tiny village of Walhalla in Gippsland and fortunately we do have a record of a publican who planted it about 130 years ago. We obtained some of that information from historical documentation. In many cases, you have to rely upon other records, newspaper clippings etc. There are also down in Victoria, some other very interesting cases of these.

There is a historical Japanese cultivar located in a small Gippsland town, the name escapes me now, it'll come to me in a minute. We have a photograph of this tree, about the turn of the century, outside a police station, and the camellia is still growing there. The camellia is located in Mirboo North, that's it.

Many people won't know these isolated locations, but certainly such plantings of camellias taking place in the late 19th century.

As this colonial era is quite important for camellias, I should mention some periods.

First from the 1820s to 1830s, there is that very early decade of the early Camellia imports. During that time, you get cultivars originally sourced from China such as Anemoniflora and Alba Plena. You will see good examples of those cultivars at places like Vaucluse House and of course Camden Park with the later plantings in places like Sydney University. These very early imports and they still survive in heritage NSW sites.

The next period is what I call the Macarthur era of the 1840s and the Macarthur camellias. These such as Aspasia Macarthur, these were quite important as they are exported to the other States including Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. One of the interesting things at our Camellia Ark, we have members who do Troving of newspapers through our National Library. Included the fascinating things is early newspaper reports of camellias going back to the late 1830s onwards, for example we have camellias arriving in Launceston in this period. These are interesting findings. There is other historical detail which is now

coming to light helping us to flesh out more of an appreciation of why these camellias are here and at that particular point in time.

The next period is what I call the heyday of the nursery industry - Michael Guilfoyle's Exotic Nursery at Double Bay, the Shepherd's Darling Nursery, and Sheather's Camellia Grove nursery at Parramatta producing these long-standing cultivars as we wind our way through 1860s and 70s - they are sold all over New South Wales. You find these beautiful old Harriet Beecher Sheathers, but more importantly great hardy cultivars such as Great Eastern. Such cultivars can be found in rural properties across N.S.W. among other places.

Now there is another very important period as we come up to about 1880. Between 1860 and 1880 the NSW camellia cultivars are coming to the fore but there is a very important period following between 1880 and 1900, pre-Federation.

I call this period, the "Belle Epoque" of European camellias – an elegant period of style and high culture centred in France but also found in Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Here come the glorious formal doubles and other cultivars of nineteenth Europe. Now, who was acquiring these? They were being acquired by the gentry and landed gentry of Australian colonies, particularly here in New South Wales, including parts of the Southern Highlands.

Speaking of the Southern Highlands. I was amazed to find a beautiful old Italian white formal double camellia by the name of Planepetala, which has (I believe) disappeared in Italy, and yet we found it in Oldbury Farm. It just stunned me, while it was an old tree, it looked like a young one – but it had been chopped down. This was an old tree that had regrown, I couldn't recognise it at the time. Then all of a sudden, it came back to me after months of deliberation - because I'd been the only one in Australia who had actually seen this flower before, and noted it was Planapeptla. We now have a handful under propagation. This is quite informative because it shows you can have a date when this camellia was originally produced and later reached New South Wales, also have a date on the property and so this period of planting would have been between 1880 and 1900. Many valuable garden plants from Europe wound up in New South Wales, some from Japan, but particularly from Europe. These were high quality items developed at nurseries, from Belgium, France, Italy, earlier from London in the home country. I reiterate that these were mainly other European varieties, coming to colonial Australia and being planted in landed gentry gardens. And many of them are still there today.

Summerlees has got those beautiful Great Easterns.

The Great Easterns belong to a different period, because they're the early New South Wales ones of the 1860s. The garden treasures from overseas of the "Belle Epoque" come in very late in the nineteenth century but really embellish these gardens. Why they're important is because of their global significance, they are not just of national significance, they are of global significance because they represent the horticultural products of the 19th Century.

And they were probably safer from the First and Second World War in Australia than they were in Europe.

Exactly, and particularly fascinating in the case of the Belgian camellias. The Belgian Royal Glasshouses containing these camellias were destroyed in World War I actually but now they were able to get cuttings back of some those camellias from collections in Australia.

So effectively these things can be important historically internationally as well as nationally. But an important point is to see a living ornamental plant of some age and distinction to be of significant historical merit. You have to grasp that fact, because we've always been used to seeing that characteristic of an old grand piano in the corner or a work of art or painting. These things are very much in the same category. Why? Because in many cases we're dealing with cultivars which were regarded as garden works of art. Their selection involved just this, they had a status and also had ascetic value attached to them, of high value. So, in effect, like a work of art it has some historical merit. And also, like many of these other historical objects (for example an instrument) that something tells something about who the maker was. And where they came from. Well, these garden plants do exactly the same thing and that is why they are valuable historical objects because they open the door to the lost garden worlds of previous ages and so that's it.

We're also coming into an era where environmental and conservation concerns, about vanishing biodiversity are very critical. This is another important element because it involves the clones of plants used throughout human civilisation which may go back thousands of years, but there is not sufficient attention paid to the preservation of clones as historical objects. That applies not only to ornamental plants but commercial plants as well. People just dumping them in collections and so forth, but as I say...

These aren't at Bunnings.

No, we're not going to Bunnings on this occasion, although they do have some nice plants, but not these kinds of plants. What I'm saying is, this is where historical thinking comes in and I approach this from the point of view of historicity. What is the historical value of these objects? I've been fortunate enough to go around the world to have a look at these objects in various places and times, particularly in China and Japan and Spain I should add, and to see why these things were significant, and they were – often involving some very significant historical figures and of course there were many people, kings and emperors who loved this sort of thing as well as our N.S.W. colonial gentry.

The other important thing is too, that there's another historical context which has come to the fore with the Black Lives Matter, and the view that certain objects like statuary are powerful symbols of past oppression. Pertinently one of the statues that got pulled down was that of Leopold II in Antwerp. Leopold loved his camellias, but he certainly brutalised the Congolese. However, when you're dealing with garden plants such as the camellia, it is something that brings together the work of people, it's a craft, it's not built on a conquest, or some of the tragic instances that have divided us now and in the past. It's interesting because when we come to the China part of the story; in that it effectively recognises these as the trees of the people, and it's a very important part of traditional Chinese village culture. As well as the sacred sites and temples, you've

got the people valuing not so much the flowers but the seeds and food (teas for example) products in their own gardens.

So in effect these clones are important in the history of humanity because they represent a historical legacy, and that has not been properly recognised anywhere across the board when it comes to these particular plants. We have noted a greater interest around these things and the time is now to think about the heritage clones and the fact that these reside in so many gardens and historical gardens. This aspect should make this an element of great interest to gardener historians around the world.

Now do you want to have a break? Is there anything more to say about the Declaration?

1:08:18

Just some concluding remarks. The process began in January 2019 and by April it was being developed, so that when the committee met in Conghua in China on 18-19 October 2019, the draft protocol could be finalised. It was subsequently approved by the International Camellia Society in the first quarter of 2020 despite Covid-19 – it was via email communication so it all got passed, and of course we have some first awards being given and the award process will continue because, even though we can't meet in person, the committee can agree on certain specifications if enough information is required. So, despite that hiatus it gives us a chance to continue with it.

Is that an annual award, or is it bi-annual?

Neither, it's as they are presented by applicants. Under the Declaration we provide a limit to be dealt with in one year because of the work. We've been flooded with entries at this stage, for obvious reasons. Garden historians might look at this and see this has wider ramifications and I put it that it does, because essentially you can use this framework to look at individual ornamental plants in the garden in different ways. The awards last in perpetuity. Once again, they have it until the trees die, unlike the ICS camellia garden of excellence awards where they have to be reviewed after 10 years. So once you win the significant historic ornamental tree award, you have it for the rest of its life.

Would we be able to, as AGHS across the nation, would they know of a particular camellia and particular criteria, are they able to put forward . . .

You can submit straight to me as Chair of the ICS Committee for Historic Camellia Conservation, there are no problems at all, and this would be submitted to the Committee for subsequent consideration. The important thing is also to raise awareness, not just of the significance of one particular historic ornamental camellia tree, but the whole exercise to see the value of these kind of historic ornamental trees. That's the point of the awards and promoting awareness is actually one of the criteria of the awards. In conclusion, I briefly summarise the details of the awards as follows:

- 1. Must meet specification for Historic Ornamental Camellia Trees;*
- 2. Age has been supported by Standards of Measurement and Records;*

3. *Comprehensive report provided on Standards of Measurements and Records, with as much data as can reasonably be collected;*
4. *Quality photographs submitted of tree, foliage and flower (and desirably seed);*
5. *Details of Conservation Plan in Place; and*
6. *Promotional Strategy to relevant Horticultural and Heritage Associations.*

That final specification is most important, in that it raises the wider awareness of the whole exercise.

So, these are the things that help meet the criteria for the award. So, if those things are mostly met, there would be no objection to proceeding. The actual promotional strategy is quite important because it enables that it can save other historic trees. Do you know what I mean?

Absolutely.

Again this is the advantage of such an award. Also, I may repeat, the framework is relevant to other garden plants as well.

Well, thank you Stephen for that, it was fascinating. I think you've got a number of stories to tell us, and I can see a book in the future, that you could probably put together all of these stories. Thank you for today's session, I'm only saying session because I can see that there will be a lot more.

Indeed there will be.

Interview concludes: 1 hour 09 minutes 14 seconds

Please note that the interviewee Dr Stephen Utick, has made some editorial changes to the transcription to enable more clarity for the reader.