



# AGHS Queensland Branch Newsletter

October 2021

## Chair's Report on recent Queensland branch activities:

**Mother's Day Visit to Waitara, Clayfield,  
Tour of Mackay Region,  
Qld Branch AGM and 40th Anniversary  
Celebration, and AGHS 21st Annual  
Conference (held virtually)**



### Mother's Day visit

Over 20 AGHS members and friends enjoyed Morning Tea and a most informative talk by Peter Starkey (see left) from the Queensland Camellia Society at the home and garden of members Kathy Marchant and Jim Butler, Waitara, Clayfield.

Waitara is a magnificent colonial home surrounded by a well-maintained garden planted with many mature camellia varieties, demonstrating how well they grow and flower in south east Queensland.

The generosity of owners offering their gardens for members to enjoy is most appreciated.



### AGHS QUEENSLAND BRANCH COMMITTEE CONTACTS

**Chair:** Ann Wegener  
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## Mackay Trip

The trip to the Mackay region in July was very successful, especially the launch of our Greenmount Homestead project. For some, it was a first visit to the region. New member, Judy Ferrier has prepared an excellent report for this newsletter. A small excess of funds from the tour costs will assist in keeping our branch liquid.



## AGM

The AGM in August was attended by 15 members. Afternoon tea and an Anniversary cake was served by the Miegunyah House team, and our guide for the day informed us about the Bowens, Queensland's first governor and his wife.

Glenn Cooke (with interjections by others!), took us down memory lane with an informative and entertaining account of the establishment and historical activities of the Qld branch of AGHS. Long-term members of the Branch were thanked for their ongoing interest. Founding members of the Queensland Branch, Glenn is shown above with Wendy Lees cutting the cake.

Member Catherine Brouwer had, sometime ago, prepared a conservation plan for a section of the garden at Miegunyah. Being in attendance, Catherine was able to renew contact and hopefully her previous plans can be reviewed and instigated. Catherine is a wonderful advocate for our AGHS work; she also prepared the Greenmount homestead garden conservation plan some years ago.



Our branch treasurer, Elizabeth Teed



No election of Officers occurred as the existing Committee indicated their willingness to remain in their current positions. Two additional members have indicated they would like to be involved in the planning of a National Conference in 2023 proposed to be held in Ipswich, Queensland.

I thank all committee members for their contributions to running of our Branch.

To Lois, our secretary, who always sends a beautiful handwritten thank you card to those we visit, a special thank you.

## National Conference

Several Queensland members registered for the virtual conference arranged by the Sydney conference committee and held on 10 and 11 September. The lecture content was interesting and informative. It is hoped that the cancelled visits and Blue Mountains Tour will be held around March 2022. A downside for some attendees was sound and visual quality was, at times poor. This related to the internet capabilities of the location of either the lecturer or the listener. From my location, interference was minor and did not detract greatly.

The Sydney conference organisers are to be congratulated for never, ever giving up!

**Ann Wegener**



## Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers 2021 – Laurel Bank Park

This drone photo of this year's themed garden at Laurel Bank Park in Toowoomba best reveals the amazing work of the gardeners, including AGHS member Chris Bluefields, who had a hand in the design of the garden beds. The gardeners decide the theme every year and it is kept secret until a few weeks before the Carnival.

## Nindooinbah Homestead

It was a perfect day in April for the AGHS visit to Nindooinbah Homestead, in the Scenic Rim near Beaudesert. We were welcomed by owners Kaye and Euan Murdoch in the very charming woolshed shown right, and Euan gave a brief but informative talk about the extensive work they have carried out on the property over the past 15 years or so. Apart from their involvement in the cattle industry and research in cattle breeding, thousands of trees have been planted, and the garden surrounding the house looked absolutely tip-top the day we visited.



We enjoyed a BYO picnic lunch in the grounds, finding shady nooks to relax and enjoy the surrounds. The Japanese tea house shown right and below is a focal point of interest after wending your way around the eastern side of the house – this sits on a lagoon below the house and overlooking the Albert River, with a view to the hills across the river.



The history of Nindooinbah is well documented at <https://www.nindooinbah.com.au/category/homestead/>

The story of Margaret de Burgh Persse Hockey, who married artist Patrick Hockey in 1983, is especially fascinating; more information can be found at

<https://www.thecultureconcept.com/memories-of-nindooinbah-and-a-wonderful-spirit-margaret-de-burgh-persse-hockey-o-a-m>

## AGHS Tour to Mackay, July 2021

The AGHS Qld Branch celebrated the 40th year since its Australian inception by offering grants to restore heritage gardens or associated projects within each state. The Greenmount Historical Homestead (circa 1908, shown right) was successful in securing these funds for Queensland. The property is located near Mackay and a group of Queensland members, and a couple from Canberra, travelled north to view the opening of the new arbour. The old structure had graced the entrance to the circular driveway of the homestead and the replacement was a faithful replica of the original structure. The photo here shows AGHS Qld representative, Ann Wegener, together with the Lord Mayor of Mackay, Greg Williamson, who officiated at the opening, planting two *Pandorea jasminoides* vines to trail over the gateway.

The property was gifted to the council in 1983 by Tom and Dorothy Cook, son and daughter-in-law of the original owners, Albert and Vida Cook. Vida was an avid gardener and often hosted charity garden parties. She was noted for the spectacular calladiums and arum lillies that she grew in the fernery (pictured below). Mature palms and milky pines still provide shade across the lawns as does the enormous mango tree that was planted in the 1930s. Beneath this tree on the side lawn, afternoon tea was served, and the 'Gathering' shown here felt reminiscent of a bygone era, when polite society enjoyed refreshments in the setting of a tended garden.

The front circular garden has been replanted with gerberas, a hardy staple that would have provided cut flowers for the house. Similarly, gardenias and acalyphas have been reinstated at the edge of the lawns, another favourite choice of the period. While hanging baskets of asparagus fern are still present in the fernery, some selections have been replaced, notably the cat's claw creeper (*Macfadyena unguis-cati*) that had originally been planted over the arbour gateway. Time has shown that many exotic inclusions of older gardens are now considered to be noxious weeds.



Around this event, the opportunity was taken to explore different horticultural venues within the Mackay region and these were greatly enjoyed by our small party. As Mackay is one of Queensland's 'Great Sugar Towns', a trip to a farm and mill was arranged. Geoff Denman invited us to his property, Fryerne, shown below, which has been in his family since 1886.



Although its original focus was live-stock and fodder crop production, the farm now only grows sugarcane. The property has river frontage and adjoins a ford that allows the Pioneer River to be crossed at low tide. Geoff and his daughter Hayley, an environmental scientist, have spent some years

restoring the riparian vegetation along the banks of the river to reintroduce native flora and fauna. Such diversity was great to see amidst the monotony of acre after acre of sugarcane with its 'arrowing' flower shoots dominating the vista of the flat plain. Geoff spent some time explaining the process of growing cane – the fields operating in rotation with the successive ratoon crops and the spelling of some paddocks, often planted with legumes to enrich the soil.

This introduction to the sugar industry was supported by a visit to the Sarina Sugar Shed, an information centre that showcases most aspects of the production, refining and marketing of the final product. A guide explained the process of growing the crop, emphasising the natural requirements for a good yield of sugar – a large diurnal range of temperature to maximise the amount of sugar, ample water and sunshine, and flat level fields. The

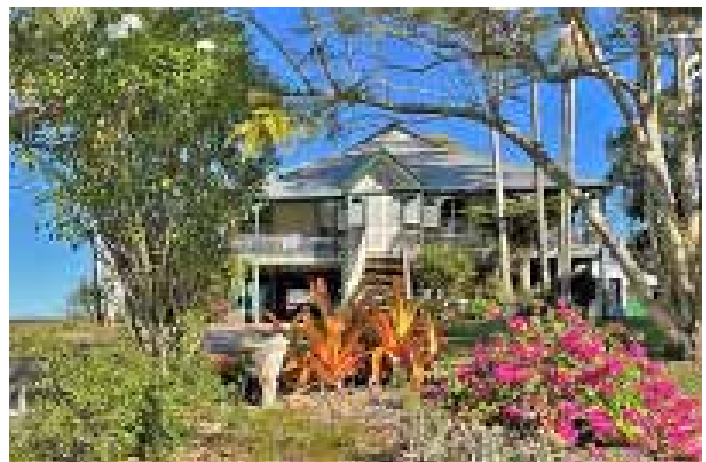


Mackay region ticks all the boxes. There was a collection of antique farm machinery that was evidence of the ingenuity of the early farmers. The heavy manual work was progressively reduced by each additional invention until today most of the work is done by sophisticated harvesters. Once inside the shed, which is a small-scale model of a mill, the process of refining the cane was demonstrated.

We also visited the decommissioned Pleystowe Mill. It ceased operation in 2008 when within the Mackay region the number of mills was rationalised and production went to fewer larger concerns. The mill still stands surrounded by its compound of workers' cottages and offers a glimpse of what life on such a property was like for the early twentieth century workers.



In the past Mackay boasted its own school of arts, and during World War II funds were raised to plant an avenue of mangoes (shown right) along Eungella Rd near the mill to honour the local servicemen. Within the bounds of the mill itself, some large trees remain. There are milky pines (*Alstonia scholaris*) with their milky sap and dark glossy green leaves, and the cabbage tree palm (*Livistona australis*) that grows to 25 metres, with leaves on a two-metre-long petiole plaited together in the shape of a fan.

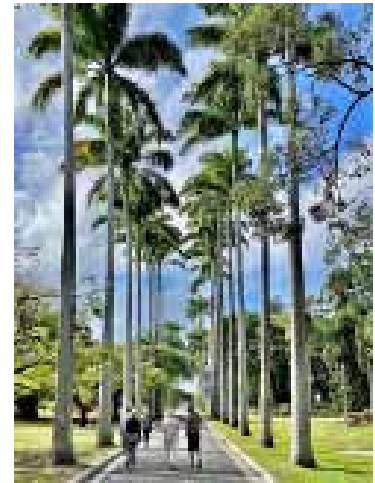


The houses themselves are modest wooden workers cottages of the Queensland style with the manager's residence (see right) commanding the best position – on an elevated site overlooking the Pioneer River.

One other agricultural venture was to a wagyu beef property 100 kilometres west of Mackay. This area was noticeably drier, and the gardens of the homestead had been shaded by planting large spreading trees near the house. Hardy and colourful understory plants such as impatiens, nasturtiums and agapanthus circled the base of the trees, adding a softening touch. An interesting windbreak has been constructed like a 'gabion wall', but with the internal material comprised of tightly packed down dried leaves (rather than rock) between the two walls of wire mesh. At nearby Nebo, the riverbank has been replanted and developed into a pleasant picnic area, but the most impressive feature in the town is the tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica*) shown right, planted in 1897 and now listed with the National Trust. This tropical old-world tree is often referred to as the 'Indian Date Palm'. It is a truly majestic specimen.



Our foray into urban gardens covered both public and private properties. We visited both the Mackay Botanical Gardens and Queens Park in East Mackay. While both are run by the Council, their landscape design and selection of plants differ. Queens Park exemplifies the heritage and horticulture of a past era. It is a time capsule of Victorian urban parks, featuring rotundas, sporting ovals and memorial drives of single species plantings. Royal palms (*Roystonea regia*) – see pictured right – line the main boulevard, and specialised botanic collections are housed separately for the public to enjoy. The Ken Burgess Orchid House offers a wonderful exhibition of some of the council’s 7000 orchids. Flowering specimens of phalaenopsis, cymbidiums, cattleyas and vandas are crowded together to present their spectacular blooms in a clever but quirky manner.



At the Mackay Regional Botanical Gardens, volunteer Maya Harrison guided us through some of the 51 hectares of specialised plantings. The Gardens feature separate zones where plants are selected according to different themes. There is the Maltese Garden with its plantings of desert rose (*Adenium Sp.*) and plumbago (*Plumbago auriculata*) behind the distinctive golden arches. The Mackay region has the largest Maltese population in a regional centre outside of Malta. There is also the Japanese Garden, a tribute to its sister city Matsuura, on Kyushu Island in Japan.

The central feature of the gardens is the extensive lagoon shown right, which supports a variety of waterfowl. In 1998, landscape architect Laurie Smith was engaged to create a master plan for the entire site. He was inspired to use the natural features of the region as templates for the various garden precincts. The headwaters of the Pioneer River at Finch Hatton are reflected in the leaping jet fountain, and the Alexandra palms (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*) and scaly tree ferns (*Cyathea cooperi*) found in this section are common to the rainforests in this area.



The Leichhardt tree (*Nauclea orientalis*) is significant historically and is pictured here. This tree has distinctive yellow flowers that form as spiked baubles, later maturing into a large soft fruit.



At the entrance of the Gardens is an iconic Whitsunday bottle tree (*Brachychiton compactus*). It develops its shape as it ages, and the thickening of its waist appears once it is five to eight years old. Nearby is the Eungella Cloud Garden, hosting king ferns with fronds extending to seven metres, mature epiphytes and a fence covered in *Hoya australis* (the common waxflower). Hedges and specific host plants support many butterflies, including the green spotted triangle (*Graphium agamemnon*), whose host plant is the zig-zag vine (*Melodorum leichhardtii*) the Ulysses swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio ulysses*), whose host plants include *Melicope elleryana* and *M. rubra*, and the ‘Four o’clock moth’ (*Dysphania numana*), which feeds on corkybark (*Carallia brachiata*), euodia (*Melicope elleryana*) and lychee (*Litchi chinensis*), to name a few. It also has the intriguing habit of standing up straight when it is a caterpillar, pretending to be a flower in order to deter predators.



Throughout the garden there are interesting trees that are suited to a park setting rather than a domestic garden. The cheese fruit tree or giant morinda (*Morinda atrifolia*) is an attractive evergreen small tree with sweetly fragrant flowers, but the overpowering aroma of the ripe fruit is a deterrent to backyard selection. The Burdekin plum (*Pleiogynium timorense*) is a hardy tree that offers a large fleshy fruit from the female tree that, while tart, can be used for preserves. This tree tends to 'buttress' and therefore can become too big in a domestic plot.



Our group was also privileged to visit several private gardens in the Mackay region. The property of John and Jenny Elliott in Dumbleton, shown right, commands expansive views from its elevated position. An adult treehouse has been built near the main house, with mature palms and umbrella trees puncturing its deck and providing a green canopy. This affords shade from the tropical sun, and the elevation of the platform ensures it captures cooling breezes. It was very relaxing to gaze back to the house across the colourful slopes planted with tropical understorey, such as the varied coleuses, towards glowing fires lit in the braziers on the verandahs of the house and within the gardens. It was winter in the Tropics!



Bill and Julie Boyd's property at Nindaroo also has a panoramic view. It is built on 32 acres atop a rainforest-swathed ridge where the native vegetation has been largely undisturbed. The house was constructed in 2002, complies with cyclone rating requirements and operates exclusively on rainwater. The steep surrounds close to the house have been tiered and mass planted with clumps of monstera and native grasses such as lomandra. To guard against strong winds Bill and Julie's collection of potted plants on the verandah were all sitting on small trolleys so that they could be wheeled to protection if need be. The view was breathtaking, with Reliance Creek snaking its way to the ocean across the wide, and very flat, coastal plain.



Jill and Bill Hasker's homestead, Illohra, enjoys a bucolic outlook over their property. The land was initially cleared for cane but later converted to pasture, initially for dairying, but more recently, for beef cattle. It has a wonderful balance between a sprawling garden replete with pool, tennis court and flowering shrubs overlooking rolling hills that are lushly green in the middle to far distance. With a horse trained by a drone to come to the fence – it is a children's paradise!



At Airlie Beach we visited Teena and Trevor Draper's garden (shown right), which cascades down a steep hill with nautical inclusions cleverly recycled throughout. Trevor's original dinghy is now a water feature, and an old aluminium communication disc has been planted with succulents and hung suspended over the pond, thus affording some shade for the fish. Old hawsers have been used to supplement rock verges with retained pebbled contour paths on the steep block where large marine rope had been coiled at stepping distance to avoid slipping.



A fat, final larval instar of a Cairns birdwing butterfly (*Ornithoptera euphorion*) – see right – had denuded its host tagala vine (*Aristolochia accuminata*) as it prepared to wander off and pupate nearby. Teena plants as many of these vines as possible as the butterflies are voracious feeders. This was the epitome of a dense, chaotic, colourful tropical garden. It is a wonderful tribute to Teena and Trevor's devotion and energy to have developed this tropical paradise, but even more so, to resurrect the garden after the terrible destruction that was wreaked by Cyclone Debbie in 2017.



We visited the garden of Adriaan and Denise Vanderlugt, who are both visual artists, on the outskirts of Proserpine. Their work is inspired by the natural environment that surrounds their residence and they are committed to rewilding, where only minimal interference is employed on the land.

Their bush garden is interspersed with Adriaan's sculptures, and possibly the most imposing is the trio of pelicans carved from a single block of white Chillagoe marble at their front entrance (shown right). Denise's medium is textiles, with a long bow to book binding and collage, using nature as her subject and source of materials to create her pieces. It is an art studio within a garden, lovingly tended to retain its natural appeal. In Adriaan's open airy work shed (originally a local school building, shifted and modified for his purposes), a marsupial mouse nested quite happily in a drawer in a wooden chest that held his tools, while one drawer down, coiled up tightly, was a brown tree snake. The garden has been terraced beautifully with drystone walls, all designed and laid by Adriaan. All plantings are indigenous and selected to attract wildlife by providing shelter or food for them.



Included in our tour was a quick guided walk around Mackay itself. Nick McDougall, a local resident with a strong interest in art deco buildings, showed us some of the main examples of this architecture in the city. Mackay prospered during the period 1925 to 1940, which coincided with this fashion for designing buildings, that featured aerodynamic sleekness and modernity of style. Mackay has also managed to conserve several of these buildings with only small alterations or reversible modifications done to them.



The Australian Hotel is an impressive example of ‘Cruise Liner’ art deco. It was built in the 1940s, and its architect, Edwin Orchard employed many features of this style – streamlined horizontal lines with rounded corners and nautical elements such as rounded porthole windows. Another building designed by Orchard was the T & G Insurance Office on the Maltese corner. Its brickwork is typical of this period. The main walls are comprised of bricks made from a dark clay that are smooth and slightly glossy. These are highlighted using dark red matt bricks, recessed in bands in the parapet. Such detail with brick work copied the fashion that was the rage in Sydney apartments being built at that time.



Another architect of note during this period was Harold Marsh Brown, who is attributed with designing over one third of the buildings in the town centre. One was the town council building (1935) in Wood St. Its façade is divided into three sections and within the top section of each panel is a glazed terracotta tile featuring a nautilus shell, sugar cane and palm fronds – the symbols of the district! A parapet is used to hide the flat lines of the roof.



To round off the walk our group finished at the WH Paxton and Co offices and warehouse, built on timber wharves constructed directly out over the river. It was the base for the large mercantile firm that was integral to the trade of the area handling such cargo as flour, tea, tobacco, coal and sugar. It is a rare example of an old timber warehouse on the waterfront and is an integral part of Mackay’s history. Today it serves as the forum for a monthly night market and an art and entertainment space.



The Queensland AGHS tour to Mackay was a showcase of diverse landscapes. All the gardens offered a kaleidoscope of tropical colour, and there was both heritage buildings and modern art to enjoy. Also, there was the opportunity to visit agricultural and pastoral properties and gain an insight into their work and lifestyle. The Mackay region offers a rich heritage, encompassing both the built and natural environments – tropical, friendly and charming in a relaxed but engaging way. A town and its surrounds that is quintessentially Queensland in character.



**Judy Ferrier**



Banyan fig tree, Queens Park, Mackay