AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY
NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
GWENDA SHERIDAN

Photographer: Rhonda Hamilton March 2020

Interviewee:	**GWENDA SHERIDAN**
Interviewer:	Jean Elder
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Note:

This transcript has gone through a careful review by the interviewee and should be considered the authorised version of the interview.

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This is an interview with Gwenda Sheridan, who is being interviewed for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection.

Gwenda is speaking about her extensive research as a landscape heritage planner into Tasmania's unique cultural landscapes as well as histories of some of our oldest gardens and their plantings.

The interview is taking place on 30 March 2021 in Hobart, Tasmania. The interviewer is Jean Elder.

[JE] Now Gwenda, as I mentioned can you please tell me – we're starting from the beginning, your name and full date of birth?

[GS] Well thank you very much for a start. And I'm Gwenda Margaret Sheridan, and 1943.

So you've got a birthday coming up. And where were you born?

As far as I'm aware I was born in Roseville which is a suburb of Sydney, on Sydney's North Shore. And so that's where I was born. Then came to live with the family in Gordon further up the North Shore and lived there basically until – well when I left home the second time it was to go up and work at the University of New England, and so I was there [in Gordon] for pretty much a little more than two decades of my life.

And those early years, were you parents gardeners? What influenced you?

I grew up in the Council of Ku-ring-gai and Ku-ring-gai was known as a very green sort of place. There were a lot of plantings, plots of land were quite large at that stage. My parents had probably the quarter acre, a bit more than the quarter acre. My grandparents had a larger one than that. Both started gardens.

I'd have to say it was probably more my mother and my grandmother because then the menfolk grew the vegetables [and mowed lawns] and the women grew the flowers. And my mother was particularly keen on seeds so I was introduced to this sort of thing by the time I could put my fingers in the dirt. (Laughs) So that's what I was doing.

We actually lived very close to my mother's parents, they were only about four or five houses down the street, or up the street, whichever way you went. And so I was often in that garden too.

Did you have your own special plot in your grandmother's garden?

No, not in my grandmother's garden, but I had a plot in my own garden, and it was a little bit sad. It was quite a bit later we had a pussy-cat of course, and the pussy-cat was run over. So where the pussy-cat was buried was my little plot.

A memorial.

Yes.

And school days, what do you remember of school days?

Very strict; very different to what happens now. In the first few years there you were with the boys, but by the time we got to grade three in primary school we were separated. The boys were in another part of the school and we were in the [girl's part]. I think it was probably quite a big school for its time, Gordon Public School.

And no, I don't know that I remember very many of the teachers in terms of anything to do with gardening, but they were very strict and you did what you were told. (Laughs) Which was probably quite difficult for me.

So how would you describe yourself growing up?

Oh I've thought a little bit about that. I actually wrote off to one of my friends in America just yesterday and said – he's male – and I said, "If you've ever read Enid Blyton books" – which were very much in vogue at that time; there was an Anne in *The Famous Five* books and then there was Georgina who was always called George, and she was the tom-boy. So I identified with George, not with Anne. (Laughs)

Right, that says a lot.

And then you went on to, after being dux of Gordon Public School, we see on the record and winning a Commonwealth scholarship, you went on to study geography and history.

[The Commonwealth Scholarship was awarded at the end of high school]. That was Hornsby Girls' High School, again very strict, and so we travelled up from Gordon. There was a group of us that travelled up [by train] from Gordon.

And yes I think for high school years I would have to remember Mrs Ralph, she was incredible because Hornsby was strict not only in your conduct and things like that, but also in the subject streams that you could take. And so having gone up there as dux I probably could have gone into class 1A, but instead of that, being me I chose, "Please can I do music and art?" Music had been always part of my life from the age of about seven and [because] those higher classes studied Latin and German, I was [in a lower class]. And so I couldn't do history and geography which I wanted to do. By the time I got to year four at high school then I could do geography and history.

What happened then was at the end of year [four] there was only three of us I think, or four of us, who had been told that no we wouldn't be going to university because we didn't have a maths and we didn't have a science. So I had to drop history and take up five years of biology in a single year, and it was Mrs Ralph who stayed back after school and I did the [practical] work with her.

Isn't that one teacher so important? So that a made a difference between you getting into university?

Oh very much so – I got an A in [biology] at the end of that. And then I got First Class Honours in geography, and I think I was number 12 in New South Wales.

A wonderful influence, yes. You must have been passionate about the subject as well?

I was. I was always passionate about the ones that I did, yes.

So then you went on into geography and history at university?

[Yes I did geography and then I also took history at Sydney University as well]. I majored in geography, majored in history, went on with the geography to do a fourth year in Honours. [You had to do – in order to gain the undergraduate Honours – that as a research year], which was done.

And so after that the first thing I did was go off out to teach, because I'd always thought I wanted to teach. I went into secondary school, and discovered about seven months later I didn't want to teach in secondary school. (Laughs) So I came back to the head of the department [whom] I knew very well and I said, you know I didn't quite know what to do. And he said – this is how easy jobs were then – he said, "Oh there's three jobs there for you." And I said, "Really?" And he said, "Yes, you can write to Monash, or Newcastle or the University of New England."

I wrote to all three and New England rang up first and said, "I'll meet you at the airport." And just like that, I got the job at New England [as a junior academic, fulltime]. (Laughing)

7:58 Wonderful. And you were there how long?

I wasn't there very long. I really enjoyed it because it was in the country. I'm really a country kind of person, I don't know where that comes from. But it was great.

What happened after that, in the November of that second year [in Armidale] my father died very suddenly – just like that. I came back to Sydney to be with my mother. And then I didn't know what I was going to do as a job, and Sydney University just gave me the same sort of position back [that I had] at the University of New England.

Oh great.

I worked at Sydney [University] then for a number of years both full-time and part-time.

So what year was this roughly?

We're back in – that'll give my age away. (Laughs) I started in Sydney in '67 and so I was in Sydney '67 through to '71 as full-time, but in '71 that's when health problems began to emerge. I was pregnant, and so put into hospital at about 32 weeks because I had pre-eclampsia. And yes then I worked part-time, but just went one day a week and one night a week.

And by then you would be – one of your teachers had been – or does that come a bit later? Doing the research under Dennis Jeans.

What happened when I came back to Sydney was that George Dury was very definite and I wanted to go on with –

George Dury the –

The head of the Geography Department there. He wanted his [junior staff] to enrol in a higher degree, and I could have enrolled in a PhD. I didn't enrol in a PhD, enrolled in the Master's Honours instead. Didn't have a clue what I was going to do.

I decided to switch across to the other side [of the discipline]. I'd always been on what you might call the 'natural environment' side, so geology and soils and geomorphology etc. This was what my geography training had been in. Then I switched across and decided that I'd work under Dennis Jeans to do cultural, social history, geography – because I had the history Major.

So that was really quite a shift in direction.

Well it was a big shift.

Which then really influenced the rest of your career.

It did because then I decided to give myself an enormously hard project at this point in time. Remember we had [legislated for] National Parks and they came in, I think your Tasmanian one came in here in 1970, the New South Wales one came in 1967. So I

decided that I was going to do a cultural social heritage landscape [research] thesis on Kosciusko National Park, which was then considered to be one of the more complex parks in terms of who was using it and what was happening and all that sort of [research].

So you've always tackled the hard projects Gwenda!

Well I went into, at that stage what was called recreation planning, and certainly it wasn't very well known in Australia at all. But it was known overseas. It's very current now to what is happening here in Tasmania where we're seeing tourism you know wanting to jump ahead in leaps and bounds and all that sort of thing. But there's actually no management of how that tourism occurs, where overseas they were already into that [type of planning as] a structural and management [issue in the 1970s].

We'll come back a little more to talk about your work, but I want to come back a little – yes we haven't described the gardens early on, and then I want to talk about when you first visited Tasmania.

But the early gardens, just so we can have it for the record, that influenced you as a child that you saw.

12:22 I think the three were the gardens that we had at home, that was you know my parents' place, and that was – they were all fairly modest, except the grandparents' garden was very large. I will send you a photograph that I have of the way in which the back part of their garden, which was quite unusual, it actually had a very formal designed section, and I used to like that.

But then the gardens were modest compared to gardens we see today. We had crazy paving paths, we had lawns, we had roses and we had flowers. I remember we had – oh mother had a very large nursery, she must have been always keen on ferns, so they built a very large nursery. And I was always helping from the earliest time.

We had trees down the back, so the front garden was just flowers and the lawn part and down the back we had vegies. We had a mulberry tree, [lemon tree] and we had a nectarine tree. And we still had gum trees on that [land], I think every house just about that I've lived in has had gum trees. Eucalypt trees.

These ones on the northern shore, North Shore of Sydney?

Yes.

And the garden?

And the garden of my grandparents, it was I think – I'll send you a couple of those photos. They were very, very keen gardeners. I think grandma was a very keen flower grower, and there were always beautiful flowers in her garden so you could name numbers of plants.

[This was the kind of stylised section in the back garden. It had formal parts] and it was quite large and so you had some crepe myrtles on either side of the trees there, but it was very organised and ordered. Grandad didn't have eucalypt trees, he wasn't going to have them because they filled up the gutters, so there were no eucalypt trees at all. (Laughs)

So you experienced a variety, some very different styles of gardens.

Yes. And the grandparents owned the house at that stage, I think the Blackheath [house] is still there, right up in the higher part of the Blue Mountains. A lot of my childhood and holidays were spent [bush]walking and that's where I think I grew to like tree-ferns. The house [in the Blue Mountains] had tree-ferns.

It was quite a modest house, I can send you a photo of it. But it was [built] on quite a slope. What I remember from that garden was the pussy-willow tree down the bottom and the lilacs, [rhododendrons] and there was a very big Japanese maple which I used to sit in. And there was a hedge, which I was given the chief job of always pruning. (Laughs) So I was gardening and looking around and always interested.

But I think the things I liked most were the [bush]walks where you went down, and they were quite magical to a child because there were always tree-ferns and other ferns, and there was running water and waterfalls. These glades, they were really quite wonderful places. And very enclosed in a way, you know you'd walk down lots of slippery steps and things like that. But yes, wonderful spaces.

So there began your love of natural landscapes.

I think I mentioned about looking over the [high suspension] bridge when I walked home from school but [the Blackheath walks] were even more magical I think because you were in amongst [the greenery].

And then coming to Tasmania, you first visited –

I first visited Tasmania in 1970 with Bert [my husband], but my mother [and father] had been to Tasmania on [their] honeymoon. My Dad and grandparents had been to Tasmania on an apple boat when they were off to England, Europe and the United States. So I think all of that – and I've still got a wonderful friend who lives in Denver now, and she used to talk about Tasmania.

So yes, we came to Tasmania in 1970. Bushwalked. We came with another couple who now live in Vancouver. We walked the northern part of the Overland Track. And because we only had the one car, [we] then came south [and walked quite a large part of it from that direction]. We were walking at the time when there were no boats along Lake St. Clair; you had to walk along it. (Laughs) And it was

very misty – and there were lots of tree roots – a misty kind of wonderful day to walk on our trip here.

So that was over a two or three week period?

We were over here for a month, I think, yes. So we saw – that was the first time I'd actually seen The Hazards. We camped there on the Freycinet Peninsula and then watched while [the high granite hills] all went sort of pink at night. I think I just fell in love with the Tasmanian landscape because there were so many different types of what we would now call cultural landscapes [the lights, colours, etc].[1]

17:55 Everything was different. But it was all here in this little bundle, this little island. And coming from somewhere – you know I'd been out [and about]; I'd travelled most of New South Wales and other parts of Australia but I'd never seen anything with so many different types of landscapes [in such a small space] all in there together. And of course I didn't know very much about them then.

So then it took sixteen years before you actually decided to move, what family life over –

Well that was the family life here you see, and my former husband, we're still on quite good terms. I got to a point after sixteen years, where I just didn't want to live in a city like Sydney any more. I just wanted to go to – that's where the Julia Baird that I mentioned to Rhonda comes in, and the book *Phosphorescence*. And I haven't read it, but a friend of mine had written something about what Julia said, and it was this that just went straight [into my brain] which – if I can find it here. The title of the book is *Phosphorescence*, then it's: *on awe, wonder & things that sustain you when the world goes dark*. And the friend noted that Julia had referred to a nature deficit disorder and that we need more green. And I couldn't agree more – and it just went in like that and I thought most of my life has probably been trying to find

More green.

more green.

So it really struck a chord?

It really struck a chord.

So coming back to Sydney, in some ways that was the lack of green perhaps that – and other, leaving, wanting to leave Sydney and move to Tassie in 1986 [1987]?

Ah, it wasn't – it was wanting to move out of Sydney at that stage, and I would have happily moved up to the Blue Mountains I think at that stage, which was a source of green to me. And so it finally got around to, "I think I might go to Tasmania," which was [quite] difficult I think for the children. And so I went to the green, I went to Walden

as I explained and that was my green. It was green everywhere. (Laughs)

And how did you come to choose Lebrina, your Walden?

Because at that stage I had a friend who was living in Lebrina and who said, "You must come down and see this house." When we stop I'll show you the pictures of what the house was like to start with, and that particular garden.

So that was an enormous challenge because things needed doing up, it was this old farmhouse. It was probably Georgian, or it had been Georgian, and various people had changed it.

It had quite a good beginning to a garden which I built on. It had some wonderful [old fruit tree varieties], it had basalt soils which were the best soils I've ever gardened with. It had its own little stream if you can think about how wonderful that was, so I had a little pond and then later on I put in quite a big dam. But this little stream ran [and gurgled], and it was the stream and the greenness, and just being out there in the middle of [the country]. Lebrina at one point had obviously been a tiny little village.

In fact curiously back in time when the railways began, and the railway actually went from Launceston to Scottsdale, there was a place called Denison Gorge. So Denison Gorge could be walked down from Lebrina along the rail track, and there you found another station siding. The siding was still there and the actual name.

[When the railway ran] people used to come out and have their picnics at Denison Gorge, which probably became – I've actually got a postcard of it – [quite well known as a picnic place]. And so even amongst what was totally natural vegetation, you had the bluebells, you had the daffodils. (Laughs)

And did you –

You had things like that planted [by the picnic folk].

And so yes, there were huge big cherry plum trees in the [Lebrina] garden, [a lovely old apple tree – many apple trees, apricot tree, plum trees etc]. There was – we started a vegetable garden – my second daughter helped me with that, she was very good with that. And we grew, and I grew – I've got pictures that I can send you – it got to be a very pretty flower garden in parts.

Another major garden for you.

Another major garden. (Laughs) It started like that one there. Anyway, I just went on planting so, yes.

And work-wise, how did you manage when you moved to Tassie, this gorgeous place?

23:36 At first it was difficult. After a year I was offered a job in Launceston City Council which is where I went as a planner. Having done some of this sort of work, I'd worked with John Toon in Sydney [in 1986] at Sydney University in architecture and planning. But that was in research, that actually taught me what I really wanted to do, which was doing research on heritage; this related to place, related too if you like, to gardens and [more widely] to landscape.

And so it was a composite of what subsequently I did do in Tasmania, but in the beginning it was just ordinary development planning. I think I did 400 DAs in one year. (Laughs)

And then later on I did some work for the State Library of Tasmania and –

Based out of Launceston or?

Yes, in Launceston. And also with the Education Department, I had a job, another research job for a year with the [UTAS] Education Department. Actually looking at school retention rates, which was very interesting.

Mm, given Tasmania's not terribly good history in that regard.

It wasn't then, it was only about 30% going on after year ten, I remember that. I was assigned to do areas like Georgetown, Deloraine, and then I did the Launceston College as well. Yes.

So this was in early 90s or late 80s?

Yes, you're in the 90s. And then it was really my eldest daughter, and she said, "Mum you can't stay here by yourself." By that time the girls had come down here to university. I was having health problems – the plague of my life – and so I decided that I'd move down here.

And that's when I bought into Kingston Beach. And started another garden! (Laughter) So all these gardens in a way, they've really been flowers first, vegies second. I did grow quite a few vegies to start with.

in Kingston Beach?

Yes, that was in [a road overlooking the golf course]. And I realised that all the houses that I'd had in my adult life I'd always been looking out over. I didn't want to be just somewhere [in a street]; I had to look over something. [The northern Sydney suburban house] looked out over the bush. That was really interesting when I thought about it.

That's the Sydney house?

Yes. The Lebrina house looked out over the whole of Lebrina towards Mt Arthur. The Kingston Beach house looked out again over

the other side of the hills. And so there was always this greenery that was there.

The landscape.

With a view somewhere. (Laughs)

With a view, yes. A room with a view.

A room with a view.

That really has so much influenced your work, those experiences?

I have to say, I need to say so many thank-yous – one especially to Stuart Read, and he probably knows that – but also to Brendan Lennard. Because when I came down here I made some kind of decision, "I know I'm not going to work the way I have been working, I just want to do heritage, landscape and planning." And so I joined the National Trust and I was immediately put on to a committee which they used to have then. The committee was of course [male, architects, etc and responsible for looking at Section 60 heritage properties or their environs re the then Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993].

So that's where I met Brendan Lennard from Hobart City Council. And quite quickly Brendan offered me a job, he said, "Go and do Ferntree [foothills of Mount Wellington], we want Ferntree done." And I went and did Ferntree. And then it just went on and on from there.

When you say 'did Ferntree', describe to me what –

Well I had to look at the landscape of Ferntree and the planning, heritage and the gardens. I'd look at the gardens. But it was [fascinating work]. Ferntree came out in two volumes and it's there.[2]

And from then I went on, the Hobart City Council gave me numerous work. I did the Queen's Domain in the same way. That was probably the first landscape conservation management plan that I'd worked on in [association] with Austral Archaeology. I was the person responsible for that LCMP. Hobart City Council subsequently published our work.

And it was interesting because Rob Valentine [then Lord Mayor] – we gave talks afterwards when we'd finished the whole project. [Ian [Terry] – I forget his name at the minute – he did the actual social history and I did the landscape history. And Rob said, "Oh now I know the difference between this and that." (Laughs) So that was good.

And yes, I just was given work by local councils. Sometimes private people approached me, that's how the Heritage Mile [was actioned] later on. [This comprised] the heritage properties of Woodburn,

Oakwood, and then the two in the middle. And so they didn't want to have subdivision behind them.

Where are we talking here?

We're talking about [Marlbrook and Wybra Hall][3]

On the Midland Highway?

just north of Pontville.

Oh right, yes.

North of Pontville on the left hand side.

Mary Darcy's house.

Yes, that was one, and so the four of them in a row. And that was actually [arbitrated] before the Resource Planning and Development Commission and they gave us a tick. So that was quite – that was 2006.

So that limited the development that could be behind –

They couldn't have it.

Quite an achievement. A win.

It was a win, it was a win that one. And I guess the Hobart Queen's Domain is a real win too because the [Council] asked me to do further work in 2009, so I built on the work that I'd done earlier. And so now the whole Queen's Domain [the land area that is] under the auspices of the Hobart City Council, is a cultural landscape basically. They call it something else: Historic Cultural Heritage Precinct or something like that. But that's what it is. Yes.

I'm thinking back to the Stroebel interview where she describes your role in Tasmania as a cultural landscape crusader.[4] How do you respond to that? Do you –

(Laughs) Well I wish my crusades were a little bit more acceptable let's say to the governments that are in charge, because that will be a sadness when [I'm no longer here]. [Tasmania] has this amazing [set of] landscapes that I've researched across the decades for a long time. And you would like to see something coming out the other end.

So very recently – this is really going off gardens – very recently in November of last year I decided I was going to get involved in Westbury. Now you people probably would know Westbury really well, and I thought, "Oh no they can't do this to Westbury, it's an historic village, [a small] town." [This concerned the Tasmanian Planning Commissions' Local Provision Schedule for Meander Valley Council; Westbury only a small part of that. Entally House was included in this LPS matter as well].

32:21 And this is a problem which you might want me to elaborate on a little later about what [is now called] the Tasmanian Planning Scheme – and then what follows from that – [is happening] in Tasmania.

I prepared [several well argued researched] documents for that. And I actually drove up to Westbury beforehand and had a look at what I could have a look at, and came back and then started to do some [landscape] history of that town. And then I went to talk to the Commission, the Tasmanian Planning Commission, but I couldn't because we had Covid and my [internet] system in there won't take Microsoft Edge. And so I was forced to actually have a tele-conference, and for me personally tele-conferences don't work. And yeah, so.

In a nutshell what was your argument, or what was your point of view about Westbury? What was your concern?

The concern about Westbury is – it's a very large concern because all of the historic towns would be facing exactly the same thing; [modern urban development, smaller lots, even strata titling and infill into their towns, their places. Where is Heritage Tasmania?]. So if the owners decide that they would like to [subdivide] their property and then they make their planning application [to the local council], then ultimately it [may well happen. The community may have trouble trying to stop it]. The local council [may want it; this depends on the council. The place or the town starts to change, there is more urban, modern, development]. In a place like Westbury, green spaces [become less, the sense of openness of those spaces changes, gardens and trees are lost, the historicity of what was, is eroded].

And actually two ladies, two very lovely ladies, had heard what I was doing and contacted me you see. And so they were part of this; [some of the] community that didn't want what was going to happen happen.

So your concern is it will destroy some of our historic –

It will destroy the historicity of the town, it's what I call the 'death by a thousand cuts.' And so you start off here and it might be just quite gradual, take South Hobart for example. To me South Hobart is a very early historic suburb and it has wonderful gardens. Whether they're tiny little [garden patches] along the pavement in the front of the [property], or [larger areas] – their gardens are very characteristic of the age of this suburb.

And once you start to get [subdivision, strata titling as it now is allowed, and further subdivision, the modern urban development starts to change the heritage patina of the historicity of the place. Gardens disappear, the number of new modern block patterns

increase, the use of very modern designs and house materials, change what is visibly seen]. “Okay we’ll have four units in here.” And in they go. And so this is the problem.

The landscape goes. We might explore that later, but I’m coming to more positive, what are the best examples of cultural landscapes we have?

I think we have wonderful [rural] estate landscapes here, wonderful estate, colonial landscapes here. Particularly in the north, particularly the area if you like, but bounded by Deloraine, Westbury, move across to Launceston, and then come south, Perth, all the way down to where Mona Vale is. That whole area of Tasmania in there was developed in a certain particular way.

And so the two properties that I did do – which was Woolmers and Brickendon – you see Brickendon is still owner occupied basically, you know private owners, and Woolmers is a Trust. But once such properties go into being in corporate ownership the big question mark is, “What are they going to do with the historic house, historic garden and trees?”

And will they do, what Stuart told me they call it on the mainland, ‘strand it?’ So you divide off the historic house and you don’t give it very much land. Then [the greater part of what was a rural estate, with its own land use, cultural history has been severed. That to me is a huge land use, landscape change where, if we’re going to change ownership from centuries of private owners to corporate owners, what happens to the historic house?].

Is that a possibility with Woolmers now as a Trust?

I don’t know now about Woolmers. It’s a Trust and it has kept itself as a Trust. Ah, but you’ve got people that – the problem that I knew about years back was that Tasmanian farmers were getting older and so you know what happens then. I see that as a very big problem.

And that kind of landscape – [for example] I can take you down to Huntingfield, which I did privately for a [client]. Huntingfield is just south of Kingston, it’s part of greater Kingston now, a small land area the name taken from the original house which still stands. That was the very first [land grant to] James Baynton and it extended way down to the Northwest Bay and then right up into parts of what is now Kingston. [Progressive subdivision across time saw that historic ‘once’ farm stranded on one side (a road, semi commercial/light industrial zone) and on another side the ‘garden’ suburb of Huntingfield].

[The ability to be able to subdivide on this land in this way can be traced curiously back to a time when – who was the Prime Minister? I think it was Gough Whitlam. It goes back].

The chap that I was doing the work for knew that particular history; lands being acquired by government back there in – was it the 1970s, I think it was, or even earlier – and so the [Tasmanian] government owned [a significant rural area of that former estate land].

And now they want to develop that for affordable housing and everything else. But if I showed you the planning for that you would just be horrified. [The latest proposed subdivision is for 470 lots on 34 ha]. This is how [Tasmania is] doing this sort of work, or this sort of development without understanding about heritage.

So the whole talk here today is, "How do we incorporate heritage into planning" where it isn't at present. You could say, "Well that's not so." [But then I would say to you "Oh a single site comes up for assessment, that requires Heritage Tasmania approval". But that might not happen until well into the planning process. Heritage Tasmania needs to be there at the beginning of the process in my view].

So it's too little too late?

It's too little too late.

Not embedded in the whole –

[Especially if the proposed development is large, complex and convoluted. Heritage and planning operate like separate entities when there ought to be close integration].

So what would you like me to talk about now?

Well we could perhaps talk a little more about your work in terms of heritage trees and church grounds and private gardens.

Well the other thing that you – I mean we have amazing archives here in many ways, once you start to dig into them.

40:12 I'll just take Cambria as an example of that. I don't think I've ever seen an archive that's as rich in what you can find about it from day one as is the Meredith archive, because the family wrote endless letters to one another and the endless letters have been kept. And then you start to put things together like the maps [and property plans that are very relevant. It becomes possible to build a much larger picture of what was going on with that property. There are digitised newspapers of course]. What was the design of that property?

You could actually have – and I've never seen this before in all the work I've done – you have a number of diaries, there are four. I read [three] and the diaries are charting every single day of what work was done, who was doing it, where they doing it on the property. It's quite frankly astounding. And so it would be perhaps to try to teach

people that [what is possible now, given a huge amount of information], the archives are there and we have to learn how to use them [to build up the composite picture of a place, its landscape(s), its historicity].

And then we're still learning how to use them because you see libraries, like the National Library, in the last twelve months or so, [have] changed the way they were doing things. So then you have to learn it again. Talks I gave back ten years ago are now defunct of course. It's a constant learning process of digging, digging out the material and then putting it together.

So using your example of Cambria, people just see now a rather run-down property.

Yes.

There's a few remarkable trees but the gardens are gone and it's been neglected.

Yes.

And without that historical archive people don't have any concept of its value.

I think if you go back and see, it was all of the gardens that I've come across like the Brickendon gardens or the Woolmers gardens, all those estate gardens – and Stuart has been so wonderful in there because he can just name off the trees [and plants]. I'm always learning. And [all the gardens] are different, every one of them is different.

[Stuart] came with me to Cambria and we climbed up the hill [January 2019]. But the garden in Cambria was never what you – it was never an ordered garden I don't think in the sense that I could put a label on it. If it had to be anything at all to me it is going to be Picturesque. Whereas Heritage Tasmania has now just presented it as Gardenesque. Well I'd have to disagree there.

But anyway at the rear of that property, in the beginning – and it was very early, 1822 they started planting vegetables, they started planting flowers, they started planting. That was [very much] Mary Meredith. And they went on planting, and so by the time a few more decades had gone past they had four orchards. So there [were huge] orchards there. [Now] you see the odd tree here and there. There was on old apple tree Stuart and I saw, [a very old pear tree], a couple of very old mulberries. You come down [towards the second terrace] to the walnuts which are down at a slightly lower [level]. There are the nut groves there as well. And that was most interesting because I think [at least a part of that lower terrace level][5] was always called Arcadia, which had a particular meaning.[6] [There was a Bower, again very unusual].

But basically a lot of the trees want [considerable] attention, even those at the front. What was called the 'rondelle' in the actual [proposed heritage development] material was a circular previous carriage entry/exit to the front of the house. I'm sure you've seen in Tasmanian historic estates those circular [patterns] re the front entrance. The carriage came in and the people were dropped off or picked up, and the carriage went on again.

I suspect that the [remaining] trees – which are quite unusual, I suspect that they were planted probably by John Meredith and about 1860, 1870, something like that. They probably will look even sadder now because you see they required water, and they haven't had any water. [John Meredith had put in a water system].

But yes [there was] the shrubbery [which still contains a line of oaks]. There was the very odd – it is a very odd driveway but then everybody's driveway that I've seen is different. [Cambria had many of those parts of the estate as espoused by Loudon, but some were missing].

So that's the kind of challenge that faces us, Cambria's an example isn't it, of that –

Cambria is symbolic of what could happen to estate properties in Tasmania if we don't [begin to engage with area assessment, as against site assessment, in planning. I think we all have to – that is all heritage related organisations come together in Tasmania – even nationally, to make the heritage case in this country. Australian Heritage, Garden History Society, ICOMOS, everyone]. "Please, please write to the Commission and say what you want to say about this property." Because it is to me symbolic, "Oh yes well let them go" and then ultimately, "Oh dear, well we have demolish it because it's not being looked after."

And I was going to ask you a little more about your thoughts of the Australian Garden History. And they did write

Yes they did write.

to the Commission. We have to keep –

46:18 But you'll have to write again and when it comes up, and I can let them know. Lynne will probably know. But when it comes up again please – you know the more people that write the more – and you see I [have been] also trying to get some of the people in ICOMOS to write as well. But it's hard to write when you don't know quite what to write.

The problem is that Tasmania's heritage, [this is my personal view, disappeared in all but name, from about 2006. This was when the Productivity [Commission][7] wrote what they wrote]. And it was clear that the then [Federal] government – it was not going to continue to

look after its national heritage in the way that it had. So we see from the [time] of Whitlam [that heritage interest had been on the increase, both at the organisational and community level, the 1970s, 1980s etc. From 1996 it began to change]. And when we arrived at 2006 and the Commonwealth said, “No. No, we’ll pass all that back to the states.”

So in Tasmania you see you had a transition from two seven [2007] to two twelve [2012], [for the crossover to occur]. But the particular government then were not – I don’t know whether they didn’t want heritage or what, but you see that’s when it fell in a heap. And then now it’s been translated back to the local government [from 2014]. Local government’s okay they have, you know Hobart City Council, Launceston City Council, they’re big governments.

But little governments, of which most of the regional ones are, they don’t have the staff. I think out of 29 governments now [there would be around] 24 who don’t have heritage officers. Something like that. I don’t know, I might be wrong. But it won’t be very many. [And then those heritage officers may be part time, of different heritage abilities] but I’m sure you won’t find that they’re people who understand landscapes.[8] (Laughs) So this is very complex when we start to get –

Dig down.

Dig down and get the threads.

So coming back to the Australian Garden History Society, you’ve written many articles for the journals which is terrific. Did you come down to the 1986 conference? You certainly gave the keynote speaker at –

Two ten [2010].

Two ten.

No I didn’t. [Sitting for long periods on ordinary chairs, or in a bus, and or standing for periods of time is difficult for me now. A back and right leg that no longer work].

I think we might just take a brief break if that’s okay.

(Recording ends)

(Recording restarts)

This is the continuation of the interview with Gwenda Sheridan.

Now Gwenda we were talking about the shortage of heritage officers across the state, and concerns about their input into planning decisions. What would your suggestion be for ways of dealing with

this shortage? How can we get more heritage viewpoints into our planning decisions?

I don't think that's going to be easy. I now don't really know the staff at Heritage Tasmania, perhaps only a few of them. I don't think anyone there is trained in landscape with a connection to planning. Such change may have to start at the university level when planners, historians, landscape architects, cultural landscape experts, architects, archaeologists etc are being educated, even at the undergraduate level. Stuart and I wrote briefly on that several years back in the AGHS Journal.[9] [History, planning and heritage landscape knowledge/appreciation/understanding has to become a composite of integrated, interconnected holistic disciplines].

So would the state government step up and actually give appropriate money for these sorts of things so that people could a) be trained, and b) then move into some of the very, very critical places in Tasmania that hold so much of the heritage?

Because Tasmania's heritage is right up there in the country, and often the councils are very, you know, they're quite small by comparison to say Launceston or Hobart. They simply don't have the funds.

Right. I'm going to move on now, just to talk about some of your amazing publications. And one that's been quite remarkable is your publication *The Launceston Horticultural Society,* the history of the Launceston Horticultural Society. Can you describe that? What were the benefits of writing that history?

I think I learned so much. I learned about how – I mean I think it was amazing in the beginning that we got a horticultural society. The first one in the nation in 1838. The gentlemen that were involved in that for often quite a long time, and then you see what they came up with, what they wanted to do, what their objectives were. And their objectives are here.

They wanted to acclimatise plants from England, they wanted to have experimental research which in 1838 in a penal colony was extraordinary. They wanted to preserve the pure seeds. And this was most interesting because it was also a time of [changes and creation] of what was happening to [urban] parks in the UK. [In Tasmania] they wanted to afford a healthful, useful recreation place for the inhabitants and to spread the taste of gardening. Now I think we still need to spread a love of gardening and what it means. And so the fifth one was a station where the most valuable, useful and ornamental plants of all kinds may be collected and distributed throughout the country. The government garden in the south, cannot be expected to provide everything. This was an amazing, you know set of –

So what it [Launceston Horticultural Society research] taught me was how you had various men who came together for quite a large period of time, organised, had meetings, and did collect plants. By 1841 we had the chap who became the Archdeacon here [in Hobart]. [Robert Rowland] Davies, he was originally up in Longford as the Anglican minister. He was absolutely into plants as you wouldn't believe. And you know plants were coming across from the other side of the world. This whole journey of plant dissemination – coming from whichever country it came from, then going out into Tasmanian gardens where you still find some of these trees [and plants]. And some of them are quite unusual. And there might be, might just be one garden here somewhere.

So this is what was happening in the north. And then of course we had the south as well, so we've had it in the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens [then the Royal Society's Gardens from 1845]. So between these two very early – I mean we had the first pinetum in the nation, stories coming out of that depending on which one you want to follow up. It was quite extraordinary that it's been done.

It really did document some very important early history.

Early [cultural landscape, plant, place, people] history.

A horticultural history.

A horticultural history, yes [but much more]. I mean you have, they grew apples, they did grow vines for wine. [It was the planting out of the gardens, which must be connected to the house, a composite of people, place, landscape history].

Oh it's great that you did that work.

I wanted to now talk about, you often used the phrase, and you have throughout this interview, the importance of people and place. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?

I'd very much like to talk about the fact that I think all our gardens are about life. [The natural environment hopefully is all around us. That contains life]. A very good writer, Christian Norbeg-Schultz, talked about the everyday life of the world and that *genius loci* has been with us for a very long time, and it means the spirit of place.[10] We can think about the First Nation's people and their song lines and their close connection to place and to country. I would love the Garden History Society to take up this idea of a re-connection for us back to place, and back to the life world. And I think that fits in with earlier what I said from Julia Baird and *Phosphorescence* and needing green.

It doesn't matter how small our lot is, [or if we don't own any land], we need to have some part of it as green where we can grow something. If we're not going to do it that way, if we're going to do it

so that – we might have one, two, three storeys or something of that nature with people you know living in those sorts of dwellings – then we have to have much greater emphasis on public open space.

And what that public open space is for, and whether we get community gardens in that public open space, whether we get public lots that people have by themselves that they know which lot is which. We just need to have this connection back to space because that's where the life is.

Mm, it's very important.

6:58 It's critical I think. As we're seeing the world become more urbanised, more centralised.

And another theme that's gone throughout your life has been the importance of music, and you make the links between music and landscape. Can you talk a little about that?

Well I was very fortunate, I started off from aged about seven to learn the piano, and that went on to the end of the journey, being awarded an A.Mus.A [Associate, Music Australia]. And music to me was always connected. It connected sound, it connected sound across space, it was integration, it was inter-connection – which I took into how I tried to do the work that I've done. So this is connected to that, is connected to the other and so on.

And it's very much connected to the person who's actually then – you know the composer wrote it centuries back perhaps, but we're still [needing] the interpreter who comes along and says, "Here is my interpretation." [And the listeners]. And this sort of thing becomes critical I think [when assessment is made, place, house, gardens suburb, rural land, country]. It might seem as a no, but to me it's all an inter-connection.

And it has obviously been a very important connection for you to make: the music and landscapes.

It's been a journey you see. The journey to where – I'm still making the connections in a way. The others made this new one when the green came to me and I thought every single, every single place that I kind of moved to it had to have this green. And then growing the flowers.

And yes, there was, sometimes there wasn't a great deal of order in my garden[s] which was why when I got to Cambria I said, "See there wasn't a great deal of order in their garden either." (Laughs) Probably except for their orchards.

Identified with that.

So perhaps the music/landscape, the future, would you ever contemplate writing another book? If you did what would be the material that you might use?

I think it would be trying to integrate the sorts of things we've talked about today in a way. The main thing that, or a main thing is I was never, even right back there from primary school to high school, I was deciding not to be limited by whatever that said you had to do, to doing it. (Laughs) I was always crossing a border somewhere to do something else.

And I've done that in my research, you see the research under Dennis [Jeans] took me right into all this, but he was the one who introduced it to me, took me right into phenomenology for example so there are books over there. And phenomenology is about, if you're looking at a tree we look at a tree – and I'd also like to put in there about *The Hidden Life of Trees* because you really discover a lot out of *The Hidden Life of Trees* which I read a few years ago now.

If you look at a tree –

You're looking at the tree and the tree has a whole symbolism behind it. What does it represent? And it represents so much to someone like me you see. So whether it's this species or that species or that bark or those leaves, it's telling me its story.

And it's much more than the tree that's presented.

It's much more than the tree. So there I was you know off into the philosophers as well. And as I said I'm jumping across the disciplines. (Laughs)

I think this is going to be a very interesting book.

Now tell me - what you want to tell me a bit about trees? You mentioned –

Oh I just said to you generally you had – so it was back to the estates again – they all have very old trees, most of them. And so they went in for conifers and deciduous trees which gives you a wonderful interplay you know between the seasons, and the colours and the shapes and so on. [Plant] hedges were very common in those [rural areas]. The driveways have their own unique patterns. The age of the tree – and I mentioned the *Magnolia grandiflora* at Redlands – and so I just love these trees that just tell their stories. (Laughter)

12:07 In Ferntree though we had some, *Abies* I think from memory, [most likely *Abies pinsapo* and or *Abies nordmanniana*] and their branches all came down to the ground. They were all coming down to the ground. And we've now paid quite a lot of dollars for the park to be upgraded, and they've cut all the bottom branches off. (Laughs) It

doesn't look the same. When you do this to a conifer it's difficult; [it isn't the same]. (Laughing)

Cut short.

Cut short. So I've got here, "Can we revitalise the enthusiasm for gardens?" Schools are doing this in Tasmania and that is so positive, I find that very positive because you see where mine came from, it came from aged about five when I'm sticking my fingers in the dirt. If you get the children involved in what you're doing and you give them a little plot, or they're growing something, or they see that magic seed. You know the seed that's got the whole life in it. This is where it all starts.

I think that's a really important point to make. And perhaps helps us with drawing our interview to conclusion, that we're beginning where we began, with the seeds. We're ending where we began.

But just before we finish, is there anything else about your life and work that you would like to add to the record?

Oh I'd just like to say there, I've got a little thing here about the heritage – when this plant dissemination was going on then churches were sent trees. So this is probably the influence of the Reverend Davies, or when he was the Archdeacon. [There are lists in the records] with the trees going out to the churches. So when you're wandering around churches in Tasmania (they're probably going to be conifers), if they're still there. And some of them will be quite unusual, if they're still there.

But you see there's the history of churches and trees, [a history of] estate houses and trees and gardens. We can follow this along a path. You've got historic suburbs, [towns, trees and gardens] so it doesn't really much matter which place you are looking at you'll get different patterns and they all, as far I'm concerned, what makes Tasmania what it is. It's a broader [evolved] landscape.

And I think on that note we'll bring the interview to a close. Thank you so much Gwenda.

Recording ends.

[1] *The companion to Tasmanian History*, University of Tasmania, Hobart 2005, see Cultural Landscapes p93-94

[2] For an overview see - Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings Vol 49 No 4 2002, 252-268 Gwenda Sheridan. *Landscape Meanings and Cultural Heritage of Fern Tree*

[3] *Historical Landscape Evidence to help determine the merits of the Proposed Heritage Precinct at Mangalore*: SOU 01/2006. Hearing before the Resource Planning and Development Commission 16 August 2006

[4] Australian Garden History Vol 24 No 1 2012 Mandy Stroebel. *A voice in the wilderness: Gwenda Sheridan, cultural landscape crusader*

[5] These are the riverine terraces built up across thousands of years

[6] Australian Planner Vol 41 No 2 2004 Gwenda Sheridan. *Is Arcadia under attack? Cultural landscapes and tree plantations in Tasmania.*

[7] Australian Government: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report No 37, 6 April 2006. *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places* 430 pp

[8] https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-02/Publication%202002%20-%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment%20guidance%20for%20England%20and%20Scotland.pdf - see Figure 1.1 p2

[9] Australian Garden History Vol 26 No 2 2014 Stuart Read and Gwenda Sheridan. *Challenges in conserving living heritage*

[10] Australian Planner Vol 36 No 4 1999 Gwenda Sheridan. *Interpreting the landscape. Genius loci, pattern languages, and a Tasmanian development proposal*