

SUMMARY - LAINIE LAWSON OAM

INTERVIEW #1 12 NOVEMBER 2019

Lainie talks about her parents, Thomas Reed (the first Archbishop of the Diocese of Adelaide) and her mother Audrey, who grew up in the country and encouraged her interest gardening from an early age. Her mother liked colour and different plants; Lainie remembered summers spent running under the sprinkler and trees with triple grafts of plums and apples.

When Lainie's father was appointed Dean of Adelaide the family moved into the Deanery, covered in Virginia creeper and her consciousness of the impact of vegetation on buildings was alerted, as her talk to the Branch last year amplified. The Deanery where there was only a square of barren ground which her parents turned into a garden fine enough to be the location for her sister's wedding some years later.

When the family moved once more to Bishop's Court in Adelaide its garden of nearly two acres was run down, big and rambling. Her mother planted trees but also removed a huge palm tree from the circular bed in the middle of the carriage turning circle in the driveway and planted multicoloured hybrid tea roses.

At University Lainie did English literature and linguistics and has *stayed connected to the written and spoken word*. Her first job was working for Sun Books (begun by Max Harris, Geoffrey Dutton and Brian Stonier) travelling with a suitcase of books from bookshop to bookshop. Subsequently she worked for Geoffrey and Ninette Dutton, living in at their home at Anlaby Station about an hour north of Adelaide and this is where Lainie's *real interest in understanding about garden history began*.

Originally Anlaby had a huge garden with fourteen permanent gardeners but by the 1960s was overgrown and the curtilage had shrunk to just around the house - *the rest of it was very, very unloved*. The Duttons worked on parts of the garden but Lainie likened the process to *painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge* and they were also engaged in writing and lecturing while Ninette was also an enamellist artist.

Lainie describes the work with the Dutton family who were *great company, interesting conversation, interesting activities, and a gorgeous house to live in*, bringing her appreciation of interior furnishings and textiles. *It was a very old-fashioned kind of job, but with very modern people, living in a very old house in an old garden. So wonderful contradictions really*.

Within a year she married Richard Lawson and they lived at his family home, Padthaway Station. They lived in a *tiny, late 1840s stone cottage in the garden of the 1880s house ... across the orchard. And that's where I really did my own first gardening, and it was incredibly romantic, because the little cottage looked out onto a grove of Robinier faux-acacia and beneath them were planted thousands and thousands of bulbs. So in spring it was just gorgeous. In winter, it was dank and dark and drear and the cottage was very damp. And I was very cold*.

After three children the cottage was too small and Lainie describes moving to the big house where Richard's parents also lived. *Because Richard was a very precious only child so they were thrilled to have a family suddenly. They were not at all precious about the house*.

She describes Padthaway, its recent changing ownership. She describes changes to the garden her mother-in-law made when she moved in in the 1940s – changing the original garden design to a more contemporary look. She refers to an aerial photo of the garden and on the back was written "Miss Walling's copy". Edna Walling may have visited the property but there is no evidence of her working there, though Ellis Stones and his daughter spent some time building stone walls. Lainie's mother had planted a rose garden and on the tennis court standard roses were planted. After her parents-in-law moved to Adelaide Lainie removed all the roses and reinstated grass.

Lainie lived at Padthaway from about 1967 until 1980. Richard was President of the National Trust in Naracoorte and Lainie undertook some work cataloguing. They then moved to Canberra.

Lainie describes her work as a doctor's receptionist; her skills and housekeeping and its value to houses: *I am passionate about housekeeping and the history of housekeeping, and the importance of housekeeping in historic houses. I can laugh about, but I'm really very deadly serious about how important it is.* At the same time she became a volunteer for the National Trust at Lanyon Homestead and describes the role of guardian.

From that she was given the project of reinstating the fernery, loved the research and became a paid guide at Lanyon Homestead. She describes the relationship between the ACT government, which owned Lanyon Homestead, and the National Trust and the work of the Lanyon Restoration and Acquisitions Committee, developing the conservation plan by Phillip Cox and Howard Tanner (in late 1970s). She describes why this CMP was significant and research by other consultants which augmented the property's history: Pam Ray; Don Chambers; and Michael Lehaney's landscape plan for the ongoing conservation and development of the garden.

She describes the standards of maintenance and care during the 1980s and the different contemporary approach: *I just would love to see a little bit of a return to the documentary evidence, and a little bit less fanciful planting of things that might look nice today ... in an ideal world, we would have good curatorial oversight, but it's not an ideal world.*

Lainie was aware of the Society and ensured the ACT government had a corporate membership and attended conferences. She recognises the Society and the Australian Open Garden Scheme are complementary organisations, and describes the role of the Open Garden Scheme ... *there was this tremendous burgeoning of interest in gardens and gardening. The Garden History Society was right there at the right time because suddenly, gardens that had not been heard of or people weren't aware of the Garden History Society could pick up on and then become involved in maybe mapping the garden or just being aware of the garden.*

Lainie describes her work at Calthorpes' House and the restoration of the garden. Lainie found such pleasure walking with Dawn Calthorpe as she recalled the garden: *The more the garden became the garden of her childhood again, as we worked on it according to her instruction, the more she remembered. I just found that fascinating.* She cites the work of Richard Aitken, Nigel Lewis and particularly Richard Ratcliffe who assisted the property and highlighted Richard Ratcliffe's analytical, practical analysis of the garden. *I found that a wonderful process. We had Dawn's memories but then we had Richard Ratcliffe down on his hands and knees finding the edges of beds that were no longer there, without wonderful drone photographs or the tools that are available now, but just hands and knees and a good brain.*

Lainie discusses community reaction to the government purchasing Calthorpes' Houses. Like Lanyon Homestead the gardens at Calthorpes' House are maintained to a high standard according to 2019: *there's mulch everywhere, to conserve the moisture ... (and) all of the pruning worries me because shrubs in that side garden are now pruned into shapes.*

When Lainie worked at Lanyon Homestead she and Richard also lived there. ... (in) *one way annoying, and in another way quite satisfying thing was that any house that I live in, I garden and she gardened at Lanyon. They lived in a small workman's cottage on the banks of the Murrumbidgee and the garden consisted of one beautiful Quercus ilex Holm Oak in the back garden. She described her work creating the garden: I got a lot of satisfaction out of it, ... enjoyed my time, because it was the most glorious soil to work with, wonderful alluvial soil. And they were good years too, we had good rain, and so anything you planted just grew.*

Proximity to Lanyon was beneficial for Lainie's staff engagement and she describes reinstatement of the fernery. She returns to discussion of the importance of curators and how her experience helped: *I had lived in old houses, I knew a lot about housekeeping, I had a bit to do with gardening, and I had a brain in my head so I learnt a lot, and I learnt from other people. And there were wonderful people that one could learn from* (citing James Broadbent, Jesse Searle, Charles and Martha Campbell) which just meant that I just kept building up the layers.

Changes in practice she discussed in relation to Mugga-Mugga and the attitude of the owner, Sylvia Curley who, like Dawn Waterhouse (nee Calthorpe), and their memories of details about the house and garden were remarkable and invaluable in understanding the house.

AUDIO 2

Lainie discusses the Society's project reinstating the kitchen garden at Montague Island; difficulties accessing it and spending time working there. It was a project where compromise was inevitable and she discusses the rationale. The Branch's publications are important resources. She discusses the Society's conferences and highlights were Oliver Mayo's Genetics paper and Richard Stirzaker (water) at the 2016 Conference.

Lainie is a member of the National Trust's Collections Committee and Saumarez Committee. She described the focus of the Collections Committee and the Saumarez Rose Garden, a collection of roses which has become an attraction for Saumarez and (in line with the Burra Charter) is reversible.

INTERVIEW #2 – 3 JULY 2020

BY ZOOM

Second interview in the pandemic – Lainie speaking from her home on the land of the Ngarigo people in Nimmitabel. Lainie describes her early connection to the Society and recognised its relevance for the ACT Government to be aware of too and suggested the Museums Unit should become members.

She recalled the Society's focus in the 1980s on garden history to which it's remained steadfast but its focus broadened to include publications and advocacy in garden. The size, images, good text and scale of the AGHS / ACT publications make them more accessible than giant conservation plans. Lainie was involved with the preparation of the original conservation plan for *Coolringdon* in 2003, is currently working on *Coolringdon* and has found the AGHS publication very useful.

In her address to the Branch AGM in 2018 Lainie referred to *the temptation to gild the lily* in garden restoration. Asked if that had changed during her career she believed today there is less attention to preserving integrity and *more inclination to please the public*. She spoke about the realities of compromise, funding and management and cited the Burra Charter's *less is so much better than more*.

Attending AGHS events with neighbours and friends is a *combination of pleasure and education* with a mix of engaging with like-minded and interesting people and rewards attendance and the two-hour trip each way.

She recalled the natural expansion into southern NSW / ACT of the Open Garden Scheme after its success in Victoria. Lainie was a member of the first board – great experience, met many knowledgeable gardeners and as a Selector for the scheme saw their gardens. She refers to the selection criteria, the success of Open Gardens in raising interest in gardens and garden history; and its legacy with more than a thousand gardens opened across the nation and *more people were attending open gardens than ... football matches*.

Lainie was then still living in Canberra and recalled the connections garden selectors made between friends who in turn persuaded others to become involved and open their gardens – in Canberra, ACT,

Yass, Boorowa. For AGHS and Open Gardens it was important to highlight a variety of public and private gardens and different scale.

Vigilance about Canberra and the vulnerability of Lake Burley Griffin are imperative and the AGHS is actively advocating. She cited the early government of the ACT which was concerned to preserve what was unique about Canberra – and referred to Brian Voce's film, *A Gardener's City: Canberra's Garden Heritage*.

Lainie recalled the style of Margaret Darling's chairmanship and Sue Ebury and their *very great involvement and knowledge and understanding*; and later Richard Heathcote, John Taylor and the novel approach today of sharing the chair with two younger people – Stuart Read and Bronwyn Blake – their deep knowledge of heritage and awareness of the need for advocacy and community involvement.

Dwindling membership remains a concern for the Society and Lainie recognises the importance of focusing on events, activities and publications to engage membership.

She highlights the strength of the ACT Branch Committee and a theme is their modesty, quietly working hard together, their efficiency, making decisions and providing good food at events: Sue Byrne; Nancy Clarke; Victor Crittenden; Max Bourke; Margie Bourke.

National Conferences organised by the Branch – recalling the strength of papers by Richard Stirzaker and Oliver Mayo.

Laine refers to the skilled analysis and layered investigation of historic details in photos and documentation by James Broadbent and Michael Lehany. Discussion about Peter Watts role in the Society, his ideas about the Endangered Houses Trust and his *legacy is a profound one*. Her work with Howard Tanner re Lanyon in the 1980s – and she discusses the new engagement with conservation and management plans and their use in guiding decisions, but now they've become part of an industry and oversized making them something not to be consulted and to be *used as a doorstep*. No longer fashionable is the CMP's engagement with interiors – instead the *focus is now on the wider landscape and the preservation of the natural environment is seen to be far more important ... a different balance and a different emphasis*.

Discussion of the Society and journal during Tim and Keva North's editorship, changing fashions – and comparison with the publication for Open Gardens Scheme which was designed to sit simply in the glove-box of a car.

40th Anniversary ... today it's more academic with the Journal and Studies ... but has remained the same in essence: *I think it's terribly important that not only individuals, but organizations and corporations are aware of garden history and its wider implications, and this can be done best through the things that the Garden History Society is so good at. Events, conferences, activities, lectures, publications. If they continue with those, I think the future is assured. If they were to drop any of those things, I think a compromise could be dangerous. And so more of the same would seem to me to be a good way to go.*

Lainie concludes the interview by describing her garden at Nimmitabel – what was there when she and Richard arrived and what changes they've made.

