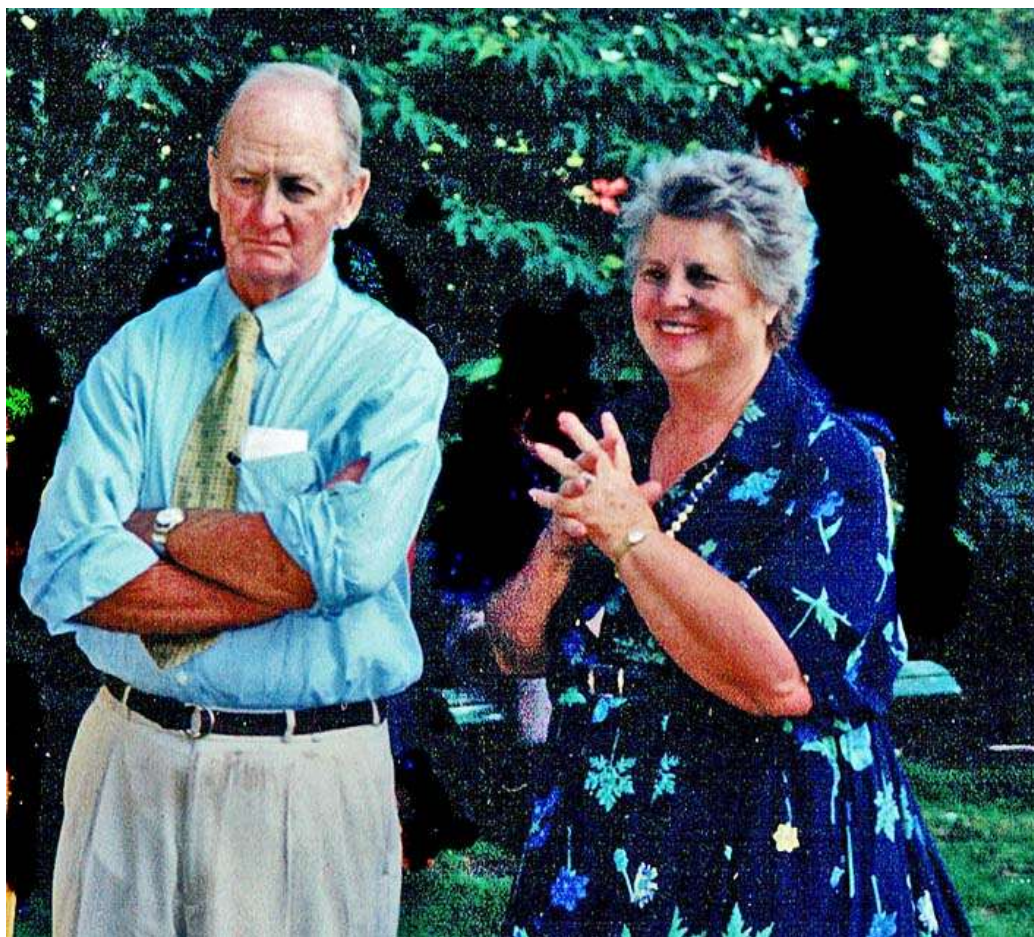


# AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NORTHERN NSW BRANCH



Photograph supplied by Kerrie Crothers

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| Interviewees:        | BOB AND KERRIE CROTHERS  |
| Interviewer:         | LIZ CHAPPELL WITH JENNY SLOMAN   |
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**This is an oral interview with Bob and Kerrie Crothers at Rosecroft, Glen Innes. Bob and Kerrie will be speaking with Liz Chappell and Jenny Sloman for the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) of the Northern NSW Branch. Interview took place on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> December [2017].**

01.28

**So, can we perhaps start talking about Rangers Valley first, to begin at the beginning. I know you didn't grow up there Bob but you came there as a young man.**

Bob: In 1952 we came to Rangers Valley, yes. There was no garden much in those days.

Kerrie: Yes, in the homestead there was a very significant Victorian garden with star and moon shaped beds in the lawn and dahlias and some roses, rose arches and fountains made out of rendering down tubs from when they used to kill the wethers and render them down for tallow back in the 1880s or something and all up the top where the dam is now there is still a big pile of wood where one of the tanks must have been and that's where they would have killed them because that was almost the centre of the.

**Where the actual Rangers Valley dam is now?**

(from this point, Kerrie is speaking unless otherwise stated)

Yes, at the top of where the dam is now.

**On the northern end of the property then?**

Yes, that's right. Well it was sort of nearly the centre because after that then the returned soldier blocks were all up there and that sold off, in '52 that was divided.

**Yes, I know where you are talking about there.**

Yes and there was a lot of paving stones, granite stone.

**Did the Campbells do it? Who did it?**

Well I think they must have, yes, and before that perhaps, which could have only been an ornamental lake over from the stables which was built by Chinese with wheelbarrows.

**Is that the one in front of, you know behind the manager's house or between the manager's house?**

No, you know where the hayshed is, down where the stables are, down on the flat. No, the old shearers quarters, not the shearers quarters that we used for the pony camp, no the really old shearers quarters.

**Down further nearer to the river?**

Yes, well Cam Creek really, you see Cam Creek and the Severn River join just below the house and that's where the water was pumped there, right up to the woolshed and then gravitated back down again.

**So the early garden had a good water supply?**

Yes, yes, it would have, yes.

**So Bloxsoles may well have had Chinese gardeners?**

Yes, they probably did because the Campbell brothers took it over in about 1892 I think after the, there was a crash in the.

**That was in the 1890s?**

Yes, and so it was, I suppose they went broke and the bank took it over for about three or four years I think and then sold it to the Campbell brothers who then, so they were the end of the century and they built sort of the billiard room and improved the homestead and that other big front wing and that was built in 1907.

**So the original homestead faced the river?**

I think it would have, yes.

**And it had that very curved stone path that's there. Stone path with very distinct camber.**

Yes, and it would probably have been four main rooms and then detached kitchen and then there was a huge red oven and then all the sort of the dairy room and all that sort of thing.

**So they were all there when you first came to Rangers Valley?**

Virtually, well not all of it because Mr Crothers had made it more modern with the inside toilet and things after 1952 and of course that was still very much war rationing for building supplies and things.

**Oh yes, there wasn't anything available, very little choice.**

Yes, yes, that's right. So, and he made that curved verandah out the front as well. Well when you say it faced the river, it probably didn't, it probably faced more to the east, to the stables, it was both, because you can sort of see from that curved verandah and what is now that courtyard there was a sort of an entrance there that came into the original rooms.

**Was the garden as big?**

Well it was, certainly when we came, I think it would have been, yes. You know it just amused me to see these moon and star shaped beds.

**Well you see the old photographs of Saumarez were like that. I think there was a heart shape, a diamond shape, all cut with a spade into the lawn and they were sort of the fashion then, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century then, Victorian times?**

Definitely Victorian, yes.

**Were they edged in brick?**

No, just cut with a spade.

**There was, when they had the exhibition of old gardens here, some six or eight years ago, there was a painting that I believe Barry Gray lent? It was Barry Gray?**

Yes, that's right.

**And that was of Rangers Valley probably in the Campbell's time.**

Yes, definitely Campbell's time. It couldn't be copied because it had a bevelled glass in the frame.

**That was going to be my very next question, if you had a copy.**

Yes, no.

**You would have to take it all to pieces then.**

And Barry didn't want that of course. I suppose he'd still have it.

**I might get in touch with him because there are people who can then digitise it. Steve Wright, I've taken photographs in glass to him and he's photographed them through the glass.**

Well it might have been 10 years ago and I mean things have come a long way since then.

**So that is fairly representative I guess of the garden in the 1930s/1940s?**

Definitely, yes, yes, well even 1920s. As I say the Campbells would have spent their money on enlarging the house in 1907 and we just know that because above the billiard room up in the ceiling there was 1907 chalked into the some of the beams up there. And I mean in those days it would have been a considerable amount of money that they would have had to spend to build that billiard room and the other wing which we used as a bedroom and now they use as the dining room.

**So you came there to live, you were still a single chap at that stage Bob with your parents?**

Bob: 1952, yes.

**And your mother was a keen gardener?**

Bob: Very keen, yes.

**So can you think back to some of the imprint that she put onto the garden at Rangers Valley?**

Bob: Not really, Liz, we were just so busy doing everything outside other than the gardens. No I can't, can you?

Kerrie: Well old Billy, he was the groom, he used to look after the stallion and things but he was also the gardener and he was always up before daylight and he had an old cattle dog that used to pull the hose around so the hose was always wrapped up with rags and things where the dog had, he used to pull it around after old Billy. But Mrs Crothers she would have put in a fair few roses I think and keen on the annuals. She had a lot of annuals and things. I don't think structurally she probably did much so. The Mrs Crothers, when she came into Glenrule and then after that they moved back up to where you know, the Mackay's the manager, and she and, well our mentor really by then was old Wilf and Cec Funnell.

12.30

**The growers of begonias, spring begonias?**

Yes, that's right, well Cec he really was a gardeners' gardener. And he, as you say, grew the begonias and poppy plants, Col McIntosh out at Clarevaux used to buy the poppies and you would see tiny little bits of greenery and roots like this because he had a heated seed bed and he'd really get them going before he put them in and Col used to put them in by the 100s.

**He used to do the most amazing displays at the show with his exhibits.**

Yes, well you see he had a glasshouse, all heated with hot water.

**So he was the gardener out there?**

Well Cec wasn't, Wilf his brother was but Cec sort of advised. They grew up in England, in Surrey I think and they, well Cec used to tell me his father was a gardener in one of the big gardens, I can't tell you which one in England and he used to, just for fun, used to go round the hedgerows and graft roses into the briar hedges. You can imagine that can't you.

**What an asset to have for your first garden.**

Well he was my mentor really, learnt me books and things so he knew a lot. And then his daughter Cecily was an accountant and she moved over to, so anyhow she would have had everything of his. And he lived in Glasson Street on that dog leg going in Glasson Street and that's where the glasshouse was.

**So with his help and advice, what imprint could you feel you left on that garden at the homestead?**

Well I was going on to say Mrs Crothers moved up to the manager's cottage and she and Wilf would have put all the peach trees, all the hedge things and then I don't know that I really did a lot. We put in a big arch for no reason at all.

**The stone one?**

No, all that stone work was there and that pond which Mr Crothers was always terrified the kids would fall into and drown so he had this ugly big cover put over the top of it. I don't think it's there now. And all the levelling and things and all that.

So the landscaping was all done before, by the Campbells or the Bloxsomes?

Yes, so, and then I don't know.

**Did you make new paths or anything like that?**

Not really, no.

**So the access remained basically the same?**

Yes, definitely. So you know there wasn't a lot of input into it. I can remember we had the Governor General's wife come one day and I was a very young bride, didn't know what to do, took them around the garden and she said oh this must be, whether it was the autumn or the spring I can't remember but anyhow, this must have been the other season garden because she reckoned there wasn't, she would have been used to really top gardens. [laughs]

**Flowering all the year, yes. And of course you were new to this climate Kerrie?**

No, no, I came from Armidale.

**Oh right, I don't know why I had you placed at Gunnedah.**

**No, my family both mother and father were in Armidale for several generations. Had to get out of there so my mother said [laughs]**

**Didn't go very far.**

No, and my sister went to Inverell [laughs] so anyway.

**So Kerrie were those trees big trees?**

The elm trees? Well there again yes they were.

**So they are very old then?**

Well yes they would have to have been, oh well, well before the turn of the century and they would have been all watered I reckon by horse and cart dray to get them going. And they did quite good. But when we were there the longiform beetle got into them, yes so I can remember Mrs Lowrey she tried to say something about it but she said there's really nothing you can do because they were too big. Well I suppose in those days there might not have been injectable. It would just have to have been a, you know, she said the only thing you can do is cover them and cover the ground. Well that for a full-sized tree. But they're still going.

**Yes, they are. These are traditional English elms? The ones that sucker like crazy?**

Yes, although well they do sucker but they're not as bad as some of them. So whether it was a good strain or what, yes, and I suppose the stock were in there a fair bit so they would have kept the suckers down fairly well.

**I think they could well of being the foundation stock for a lot of the other elms around Dundee and Rangers Valley, around the old homestead.**

Well possibly.

**I mean our elms are probably some of the oldest and like most of the people around Dundee we weren't like Owen Croft's forebears who came out with the luxury of bringing things like that on the ship. So they would have been gleaned from cuttings.**

Yes, yes, well that's right. And you see Rangers Valley went up to Dundee in those days.

**It did yes and a lot of the people who worked at Rangers Valley then settled at Dundee.**

Yes that's right. So, um I don't know. To me they're a slightly different elm to what they are at Stonehenge. I don't think they would have been, because the Stonehenge ones are sort of slightly rounder.

**Yes, they're not as, more of a pyramid, a much taller tree.**

Well I don't know. But they're not as, well, maybe where they are, the soil.

**It's tough to get things growing up there.**

Yes, yes and it is definitely several degrees warmer out there than it is down in that little cross tunnel where it stays colder.

**Although there's palm trees across in Rangers Valley. Would they have been from late Victorian times?**

Yes, definitely I mean that went with the times, yes. And there were some lovely big crab apples, Eleyi crab apple I remember but I don't think it's still there.

**And some of those very Victorian shrubs? I think there's an eleagnus and a mahonia?**

Yes.

**Yes, we were looking at them last time out there because they were flowering. We'd never seen anything quite like that. There's not many mahonias around.**

Yes, and I can remember there being an Akebia, the chocolate vine, because there was quite a few Torulosas I suppose they were but pine trees going down that access to the river so it was sort of fairly shaded and it was doing well there.

B: They were old American elms?

K: No, they're English, sorry. These [at Rosecroft] here could be American elms, or Canadian or something. These aren't the same here.

**And then from the old homestead you lived in the other homestead on Rangers Valley for a period of time?**

Well we lived, when we were married in '58, we lived for what 18, 20 years there and then we went down to Armidale for a couple of years and then came back to what is now the manager's cottage that Mr and Mrs Crothers had lived, well it was built as a manager's cottage and then they sort of extended it.

**Kerrie, you didn't build it then? It wasn't built for you and Bob?**



No, no, it was built for a manager and then Mr Crothers decided that he would move back from in town, back out there and then he went down to Bendooley down at Bowral after that. So moved around.

**What about the garden at the manager's cottage?**

Well I'm saying that's where Mrs Crothers, that's Mrs Crothers really did that. So I've only ever really inherited gardens. I've never created them.

20.29

**Well I've given you credit for a number of things in the second homestead, there in the manager's cottage, like the rose arbour around to the east, would it be? The very tall rose arbour. And there was a yew at the front door I thought only somebody who knew their plants would plant a yew.**

Oh, right. Oh yes, ok.

**So you claim credit for those?**

Yes I claim credit for those. And well I was going on to say down at the big house we were given some wrought iron posts, four posts that came from Melbourne, or [indistinguishable]? Bob, where did those posts come from that we made that big arch down there.

B: Melbourne

K: Yes, I didn't know what to do with them and it was too high to put roses up so we ended up putting Virginia creeper over them. It was going nowhere really, didn't know what to do with them.

**Well there's a photograph of the homestead too, I guess that would be about 1960s where one of those front gables is quite covered in the creeper.**

Oh yes, well it was.

**That was the Virginia creeper too?**

Yes, and it was. There's two things called Virginia creeper isn't there? So that would have been the not good one, I mean the one with all the claws.

**I think we've got quite a few things at home that came from Rangers Valley garden. That would be one. [both laugh]**

Yes. And you were saying that you keep your windows open and that's about it.

**I've also seen photographs of that time where there's a splendid lot of dahlias. Whether that was Mrs Crothers time or your time? Where you came in through, and it looked as if the gate posts had been moved in that photograph, I will show you later. That the garden might have been made a little bit either larger or smaller.**

Well not long before we left the valley in '80 or whatever it was we did sort of redo the fence line to what it is now.

**That would be it, because I remember standing there with Helen looking at them and saying oh it looks to have not been in quite the same place.**

Well there was a road that used to, from the shed right around the fence, and that fence was orange Triumph roses and dahlias, always, and then we decided that it wasn't a good idea to have that road going past the house, you either came in one way or came in the other and then sort of brought the tennis more into the garden. Well Mr Crothers would have put the tennis court in and because they had a lot of tennis when they first came here, I mean that was the main entertainment. So it was nice having those elm trees to sit under but we then sort of then bought them into the garden.

**So you pushed the fence out a little more? A few metres anyway?**

No, we completely took the fence away.

**Oh right, yes that's right of course. And have you had some momentous family occasions there? Have your daughters been married in the garden?**

Yes, well Kim was married up at the manager's house in about '81 I suppose. No it wouldn't have been. No, I can't remember the date. And then Susie was married there not that long before we left. She had the marquee on the tennis court. So, oh yes, we always had Guy Fawkes with the all kids from the district, that was a big thing and then of course all the pony camp things we had and Christmas parties and things there.

**Because Rangers Valley would have had a much larger staff then than it has in recent years, apart from the feedlot?**

Oh, well, I think most places did, but nothing to the extent it would have had back at the turn of the century because just about everybody in Glen Innes either worked there or their mother or father did. And they all had a claim to it which was great, I mean it was a great introduction.

**It would have provided employment for a lot of people. It's interesting you should say that because I've just been getting some information from a couple of the Glen Innes people, Beverley Warlters, her relatives worked out at the Valley. And then you start going around and you discover somebody's uncle or aunt or grandparent.**

Yes, well see all the Dousts and um, Bob who were the other big family? The Dousts were the bookkeepers, and then the Greys.

B: And the Dawsons.

K: And the Dawsons, yes, that's right. Well you know they were all big families.

**Did they work over a period of generations?**

Yes, I think so, well at least two generations anyway. I don't know, some of the parties and things, well my 21<sup>st</sup> party I remember was sort of there and um Mrs Smeaton did the catering and a lot of the ladies that you see all worked for Mrs Smeaton and they all, well as I say it was a great introduction because they all knew me because of the you know and you feel you had a, well I can still see and they were all Mrs to me.

**That was the generation wasn't it. It's only the last generation that's been the first name generation really isn't it.**

It is, yes, it is.

**Was the garden a very integral part of these social occasions? You know was there a big flurry to get the garden in tip top order?**

Yes, yes, but I think it was always able to be kept up then because we did have old Billy the gardener.

**And you had water.**

**And we always had water. Yes the river, you know, cursing the pump to having to run down and back, backwards and forwards and turn the, well it was a windmill so when the tank overflowed somebody had to go down and turn it off. So yes because you didn't want a flood everywhere. Because I said a lot of it went up to the woolshed and came back down again but also there was the high tank which is probably still there but that's the one that used to overflow and cause a bog everywhere. Go into the machinery shed. But they had, when I first went there, there was huge chook yard and they had ducks and turkeys and everything and it was a real.**

**Sort of self-contained then really?**

**Well I don't know about self-contained but I think that whoever was the gardener or looked after that was very keen on his poultry. And it really was, because I liked chooks and things in those days and I was fascinated by the extent of the chook yard.**

**I remember going to Dundee Primary School in the '50s there was always a fairly big contingent of children whose fathers worked on**

**Rangers Valley. There was a whole string of those little cottages, some of which are still there.**

Yes, well that's down where I was talking about where this artificial lake that the Chinese, it was down past there and it would have been put there I'm sure because it was viewable from the house. It would have been a focus from the house because you really couldn't see any of the water of the river much. I don't know that you could see any of the water from the river from the house. That lake was, well there were a lot of silver poplars and things all round it and no willows which was good.

**Which was good because they were planted all the way up the river. And it does show a tremendous amount of gardening foresight back then to have just put in an ornamental water feature because most people would grow up with things that had to be practical.**

Yes, that's right. Well they probably pumped into it I would say.

**So is there anything we haven't asked you about either of the gardens at Rangers Valley, that you felt was significant or that you and Bob really imprinted on?**

**(Jenny) Were there plants? Any particular plants that you were particularly interested in growing and succeeded in growing, against all odds, or anything like that?**

Oh, probably not.

31.26

B: Of course the polocrosse was another great thing.

K: Yes, the polocrosse.

**That was a great social occasion.**

B: Yes it was.

**In the '50s and '60s.**

Yes they had a few sales and things out there.

**So, it was otherwise a house that was accustomed to entertaining?**

Yes, well Mr Crothers was a great entertainer and we inherited that too.

**And the beautiful, big gracious rooms in which to do it.**

Yes, I mean we had, well it is now a bedroom but one area that was the bar that was off the billiard room, well it could tell a few pre-marriage stories and polocrosse stories and things.

**(Jenny) I've heard all the polocrosse stories.**

Yes, well Peter's father was very much into those.

**(Jenny) Yes, he was but I've heard them from Sandra and Don (Macansh) too. It was obviously a really lovely time in their lives.**

Yes, well you know Bob and John were great mates. He was a great admirer of his.

**Well that brings you onto here [Rosecroft, Glen Innes] then where you could move with all your required gardening skills.**

Yes, well there again it was an inherited garden. I mean I didn't have to do a lot really. We pushed the fences out. I'm trying to think whether we did push many of the fences out at the Valley but yes, I suppose I did a little bit. Here we did push the fences out considerably but now you wish you could bring them back in again.

**Now I don't know a lot about the history of Rosecroft. Could you just give me a potted history?**

I'm trying to think because Eve Chappell gave me the name that took this up, it's always been 50 acres, hasn't changed.

*33.27 end of original tape 1*

**Was it Mike Digby's parents who built the house?**

In '31, yes but there would have been a dwelling here before. We took over on 28 February 1991.

**The house was built by Gerald Digby?**

Yes, in '31 and the elm trees would have been planted then because we have photo somewhere of the elm trees with little stakes on them and things. And they're not English elms, we think Canadian elms and don't sucker but seed very, very freely and come up everywhere.

**So really the framework of large trees, I can remember coming here at your very first open garden which was about 1995? [probably 1993]**

What did I say, we took over in about 1991 so it probably would have been, yes. And we had pushed the fences out by then and there was a row of ordinary *Pinus insignis* with the elms on one side of the drive and the pine trees on the other and as it happened it's to the north because I always felt that the north was this way, whereas it's much more around that way. I'm still disorientated.

### **So that's east?**

East is there so north is out there.

### **So north is this way? I would have thought north was there.**

I still feel it is, yes. It fools me but they had had it by then, there was about I suppose 7 or 8 of them so cutting them down was a major job. And you can't get rid of the pine tree stump because the roots have buttressed up a bit and so that's why we built the little stone wall and we took the dirt from where we put the underground tanks in and filled in behind, and covered the stumps. And the stumps are still very intact there after all this time, what's that 30, 40 years.

**I wish I had asked you because I asked somebody else when we cut down our pine driveway and they said three or four years and they will rot out. And of course they didn't so we ended up getting a stump grinder in to get rid of them.**

Which you can do these days but in those days you couldn't. But we put that access through to the meadow or whatever you like to call it, a golf course and there was one stump in that and it was still very much intact and that would have been a good 20 years. So it just shows you how with, I suppose it's the rosin in them and things. And we had roses, because of the Rosecroft I thought but anyhow roses and I don't get along all that well. I have tried to put some roses but anyhow I had a lovely bank of Ferdi there but they were only a once in the season and then they were very thorny so I pulled them out and made the mistake of putting in a *Choisya* hedge. But it's never really flowered and it still needs cutting but we have a lot of trouble with broadleaf and the privet up the paddock. The birds bring it in everywhere and all in that hedge there's a lot of the privet that gets cut along with the hedge. And so that stone work, because I love a dry-stone wall, there's nothing better for a garden and that's what I tried to do out at the Valley, was do a haha fence which there again didn't really work but would have been nice. And then, well the front fence was just here where these gardens are there and it was the traditional, you know, Susie Ross, said the worst thing you can have is a Dorothy Perkins rose and fishpond in the middle of the house. So that's what was here, a Dorothy Perkins rose.

**And a turning circle for the drive and a pond in the middle. That was when you had your first open garden I think that was here.**

Yes, well it wouldn't have had the turning circle, it just would have come into the lawn. Anyhow she sort of suggested that we take that away and give the house somewhere to sit down on properly. And the pond always leaked anyway so that was the end of that. And then we had the problem of trying to marry up the two beds and that didn't work so I thought well right we'll go the completely different. So, we bought in some of the granite rocks, they were meant to be little pine trees. They don't stay little, they say one foot in ten years but anyhow that was what that was meant to be.

**So, the tree line further out, that's all grown since you and Bob moved here and planted them?**

Yes, well, yes, the fence line you mean?

**Yes.**

Oh yes, that was all in the paddock and then what they called the five acres was sort of the next one. Well there must be I don't know how many hundred trees in that now.

**This is the golf course?**

Yes, coming down, yes.

**It's beautiful now isn't it?**

It is, yes.

**Tell us a little bit more about that. Was that a collection of favourites or really just a random selection?**

Well it was favourites but I would never do it again because I think you want to have groups of trees and you know I would sort of see one and think that's lovely and you would go around. That's the best way of knowing what will grow is go around and pick what you like that's in the area. But you want to put in a group of at least 7 or 9, you just don't want to put one of each. But the oaks have done, from Guyra, she went overseas and got all the oaks.

**Not Pam Yeoman?**

No, who was the McKay [park in Guyra] gardener?

**Not Jackson, Robyn Jackson?**

No, before her, she died and lived right out onto the eastern side.

**Noeline Miller?**

Noeline Miller, I'm sorry. She'd gone over, and her daughter, and collected a whole lot of oaks from America and brought the seeds back<sup>i</sup> and she gave me quite a few and I found the oaks have really loved it.

**And you grew them from seed?**

Yes, I did. So, it's the willow oak and some of the red oaks and things and so they've done really well. I wish that there was just a collection of oaks out there, with perhaps a few maples to go with it but I suppose in a way, that's what there is.

**It looks very beautiful.**

When we came in it was very much of an underground stream so I sort of planted the willows there thinking they'd suck up the water but that was a mistake and then we put the axis of golden elms in but they've come good. They're what 25, 30 years later.

**It's a wonderful asset now for any of us to see what will do well.**

43.15

Yes, well Susie Ross she suggested quite a lot of stuff, mainly up at the top but that was one of each and I'm surprised that Susie thought that way. She was very keen on Zelkovas, well I can't see that they've got any merit at all. I think because in those days the Dutch elm disease was getting the elms in England and that was supposed to be the substitute for the elms.

**But they have very interesting bark don't they the Zelkovas?**

Well I'm not close enough to mine to look at that.

**Robyn Jackson's got them where you can actually see them from the sitting room.**

Yes, well the most interesting bark is the crepe myrtle I think.

**Does it do well here for you?**

Yes, it's done ok. I haven't made a big feature of them but there are a couple in the garden. And the old part of the garden, which would have been, the old cottage I don't know it's real history but I imagine it would have been built in about the 1840s because it's not on stumps, it's on bedlogs. The doors are tiny.

**Is it slab?**

No it's not slab but I don't know what you call it but it's a sort of slab with a cleat put over the top. And then it's lined with tar paper. And I think the Waters put in some sort of electricity but I think if anybody had seen it they would probably have been electrocuted on sight. [all laugh]

**But it's wonderful that it survived so many changes.**

Yes, well there was a big *Macrocarpa* over the top of it and it came down. I mean it's got a 7 foot girth, we cut it down and gallons of water just came out of it so it was just amazing that it had lasted as long as it did. And when big branches came down they missed the cottage, they took the fence, they took the driveway but right over the top of the cottage and they missed that which was great.



**So, if it was built on bed logs it may not have had an iron roof either. Was it shingled or bark? Or perhaps it's been replaced?**

Well it would have been replaced and I can't say what it would have been but I think it would have had to have been bark. I don't think it would have been shingled because I don't think it would have been that flash.

**So that's the oldest part of the garden Kerrie. Apart from the now departed *Macrocarpa* what else came from that stage?**

Well there's a big, I call it the pom-pom tree but it's a pink flowering peach which is different from most. There is a Kurrajong there which I think the possums probably eat once a year and but at least the Kurrajong could grow. Big old Wisteria which the archway fell down last year, it's not as old as the one out at Deepwater Station but it's still there. What else is around there? Well those, Mexicana and what's the other one, and there's a very big one at Brandon but they would have been Mrs Digby's day those ones but there's one up there that's older than that.

**So looking at the glossy leaf just here? They're an unusual leaf aren't they? Does it get a berry?**

Yes, a red berry and a white smelly flower.

**One of the old photinias?**

No, you've got the photinia hedge. No.

**We'll have a look later. Is it sort of a *Cratageus*?**

*Cratageus*, yes, one of the *Cratageus*. There is a *Cratageus Mexicana* isn't there?

**Does it smell ghastly?**

No.

**There's one at Glen Leigh, just straight out from the kitchen/living room with enormous big berries on it.**

Well you wouldn't say enormous big berries, you know they are about this size and hanging in lovely bunches, these two are red and then there's the yellow one on the other side. I sort of did have them identified but I think they are.

It's not a [indistinct] type thing?

No, there is a very big one at just over the sort of the glass house-y part of Brandon.

**Yes, I do know, it's sort of between there and the stable building.**

Yes, and we've never really worked out what they are.

**So that's taken us around that direction.**

We put the dam in when we first came because it's not on town water and to have put us on town water would have been the same cost as putting the dam and all our neighbours coming from where the town water ended which is on the curve of Cramsie Crescent would all have had to have paid rates on it and we reckoned it wasn't the way to win friends and influence people. So we don't bother pumping out of the dam anymore but that helped to start the garden. It was a real struggle with water to start because we had to pipe up right around the perimeters trying to put the natives and things in to get them going to start with.

**You've got a whole native area down there haven't you?**

We did have but it didn't ever work the way I wanted it to. And the blinking box elder, the seedlings of those all sort of come through it. The thought was great.

**So you liked experimenting anyway, to a degree?**

Yes I suppose so but it was a sort of, it just happened. I'm not a good gardener because I'm not a plant gardener because I don't keep records, not like you do which I wish I had and things and you buy something or people give you something and you walk around with it for ages and you think now where will I put it instead of well I want something there and this is the spot for it and then you go and buy it.

**It's interesting with the natives though Kerrie because a lot of people particularly when they're starting out gardening assume that's going to be the easiest thing because they're indigenous plants. What would be your ruminations on that?**

Well because this is New England there's not a lot of natives that are garden attractive that will grow in this climate and area, particularly not on the real granite country. When you get that real sandy granite country things will take off but this heavier soil they won't and even though it's nice to want to attract the little birds and things they'll come to the English, I like to think that you can mix the two though, there's probably a native as well as an exotic that would fit the same area. But I think that it's much easier and quicker to grow exotics than it is to try and battle with the natives.

**My sentiments exactly.**

I mean, I think that people who do have success with a native garden are on very coarse granite and probably for those first couple of years have a very reliable water supply.

**(Jenny)The only thing that I've ever seen around here with that really grows with success is native bottle brushes. They seem to grow.**

Well then you've got to keep on top of them and prune them nicely but there again I think they're more for the granite country. But I've got some bottle brushes that have done not too badly. Because I love the little birds and I've got a whole flock of little red brow ones now. I thought I was going to have a garden full of everything. And a flight of goldfinches. Now look at those 2 rabbits out there.

**That's the trouble isn't it, that's what you need a cat for.**

I had a dog that was trying to eat them too.

**We've been bereft of rabbits for about 5 years. There's a few little ones this year, we had the calicivirus through, very powerfully and we haven't seen a rabbit in the garden. The cat I've got now is 11 years old and I would say he really hasn't learnt to catch rabbits properly. He would have been bringing them home and showing them to you.**

I had Stuart Bold-Law here the other night but of course he got one but the others didn't turn up. They didn't get invited to the party.

**As we're looking out here we've got a lovely variety of foliage Kerrie. Is that deliberate?**

Yes, I think it is, unconsciously deliberate if you can call it that way. I'm told that these are the only old native gum trees that are in the gardens that somebody looked at. Most of the gum trees get cut down first. No old ones. But this one here that's actually in the garden, the others aren't, they're only in the eyesight of the garden, does lose its branches quite often and it's had a death sentence on it. We've had from about \$2,000 to \$10,000 to cut it down.

**But it's home to your lovely wisteria now.**

56.00

Well it is now which was probably a mistake as well. That's a white wisteria. The possums live in it, cockatoos nest in it, ducks nest in it, all sorts of, an echidna has a hole underneath. It's just, I'd hate to lose that. We had an open garden here and Robbie Dulhunty and Annabelle had a blanket picnic underneath it and the next day came out and there was this ginormous branch that had speared into where they were sitting. I never did tell them.

**Well this garden has been a host to many, many functions I think like that Kerrie.**

Even before we came here the Waters were very generous with having Rotary and things here and I think the Digbys probably were too.

**(Jenny) But you created that area out there where there were lovely concerts and singing.**

Well as I say the front fence went across the middle of where that garden is there and then where the driveway that was the end of the garden that way and before you get to the dam it's the end of the garden that way. So we certainly have pushed it out from there, as most people do in the country.

**When you can. You've quite changed I think the area under the elms out north west it would be, where I think the fountain is and a lot of buxus hedging.**

Well yes, I mean we put the fountain there. We had a little hedge around it at one stage and we had a garden around it at one stage but nothing ever worked so now it's just now the stone wall and that seems to work. The wind blows, if you have the fountain going all the time, even just a splash the wind takes the water and you've got to have a running tap into it to keep the water supply so that's why most fountains are turned off I think. This one we don't ever turn off.

**It sounds lovely too.**

Yes, but that's a mistake too because the berries and the leaves and the petals all fall into it. We cover it up when the berries are falling, it looks ugly but at least it keeps.

**Saves you having to scrape it all out which is a shocker of a job.**

Well we've done that a couple of times since we've been here.

**And you've had somebody do some beautiful stonework. That was all done in your time I think.**

Yes, well as I say I love the dry-stone walls and I think they're worth their weight in gold as far as landscaping is concerned.

**And you've opened this garden numerous times, probably too many to count. I think you were in the very first lot of gardens to open in this area with the Open Garden Scheme.**

Quite possibly. I'd have to check on that.

**What have you learnt from opening your own garden?**

Well I think meeting people who are like minded, people wanting to have a gift from here and me receiving a gift from them. Meeting and catching up with

friends that you didn't expect to be coming, people that you know quite well and you had no idea that they were going to be in the group that was here. That's always been an amazing thing I think. And having that goal to the date, to have your garden looking as good as you can get and I think that's probably the best thing that you can have.

### **A deadline?**

Yes.

**And of course being a sucker for punishment you were also heavily involved in the Open Garden Scheme when it was operative in this area, Kerrie, as a selector. Could you talk a little bit about that experience?**

Well there again it was very much a learning curve. You see what other people have done and you can incorporate a wee corner of theirs into your own. You meet very interesting people and learn where nurseries are through it. Probably I've always done that a bit because Mr and Mrs Crothers had a place down at Bowral and we used to go around their gardens which wasn't the Open Garden Scheme but was their own garden and that taught me a lot I think. You sort of don't realise that you are absorbing a design of gardens but you do when you sort of suddenly realise well that works because it frames or is an access to something or other or you know there's a view there. Oh well it got me into a lot of gardens that I never would have been able to or dreamt that I could and I just think it's a crying shame that they have folded up as a scheme but it serves them right because they didn't let us run the gardens the way we wanted for this area. I mean each area, I think the locals know their path much better than being told to follow something. And yet the Open Garden Scheme people that I met, even away from this area, were all very friendly, very co-operative people.

**And I think there was a great common interest and of course as they said right at the end we were the organisation that really opened peoples' eyes to the potential of visiting gardens. It's now been picked up of course by numerous organisations and charities.**

Yes, I think may have happened anyway. As I said the Bowral gardens were long before the Open Garden Scheme and the northern gardens, not that I've been through a lot of them, but they were running before the Open Garden Scheme and I think it would have happened with or without – you know. And well people just do love gardens. It improves the value of your establishment no end. I mean a house without a garden, it can be a mansion and you see them sticking out like sore thumbs and yet you can see the most humble cottage with a most interesting garden that really appeals to you and therefore the value of it in your mind would go up enormously.

**(Jenny) Well I have to comment here and I wish the local council could subscribe to that philosophy too because there's talk of another row of trees begin removed.**

Where's that?

**Outside the library. Shall I turn the tape off?**

INTERVIEW ENDS: 1 hour 4 minutes 54 seconds

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<sup>i</sup> Noeline Miller's daughter is Vicki Taylor, interviewed by Marilyn Pidgeon for Northern NSW AGHS Oral History Project.