Australian Garden History Society
National Oral History Collection

VICTORIAN BRANCH

Photographer: Dr Kate Cregan, 2 MAY 2024

INTERVIEWEE	JOHN HAWKER
INTERVIEWER	DR KATE CREGAN
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ALL USES OF THIS INTERVIEW SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THE INTERVIEWEE AND THE SOCIETY: JOHN HAWKER, AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY, INTERVIEWED 2 MAY 2024 BY DR KATE CREGAN

Ok, we're here today um to interview John Hawker. My name is Dr Kate Cregan and I'm doing this oral history recording on behalf of the Australian Garden History Society, it's part of their larger project on oral histories. Ah, and it is Thursday the 2nd of May and we're at John's home in Windsor. So just to start off John, um, I'd like you to tell me a bit about where you were born, when you were born, a little bit about your, you know, early background please.

Yes, ok. I was born in Melbourne but I grew up on a dairy farm in northern Victoria, in the Goulbourn Valley, a place called Wyuna. And I went to school in Echuca, my primary schooling was in Tongala, and then my secondary schooling was in Echuca

Ok. Um and a dairy farm, your parents owned a dairy farm?

They did. In fact it was my grandparents', um, my father's parents, originally and we moved there in about 1960. When my parents moved off the land, my sister took over the farm and it, with the change in the dairy industry, you know, they sold up and moved in to Kyabram. But there's been a long history of farming on my, both my grandparents' side. And it's probably why I got into horticulture, with my maternal grandparents were orchardists as well as dairy farmers and livestock people so they all had fruit trees but probably the thing that captured my attention was vegetables. They all had, most of my relatives and family all grew their own vegetables, you know, which today people have kind of got back into again in terms of a sustainable lifestyle.

So was that also around Tongala, Kyabram, Wyuna?

It was, yes, and I had an aunt, a great-aunt in Nathalia who had one of the most remarkable gardens I can remember. I never knew what any of the plants were but they all, she always fascinated me what they did grow. From, you know, colourful shrubs and trees through to citrus and fruit trees and again a large vegetable garden.

2:58

Ok, and did, were you involved in any of that sort of gardening as a young person?

Well, certainly at my parents, I certainly did the bulk of the gardening, or I feel I did. And certainly at my grandparents who were the orchardists, I had my own garden, in terms of I'd created it in amongst their vegetable garden and orchard. So I can remember at the age of eight, nine or ten, growing my own plants and you know, shrubs and trees, so from a very early age I've always been fascinated by growing things.

So that patch of garden, was that something you initiated, or they encouraged you?

I think they would have encouraged me, for sure yes, but I just followed what they were doing. It's what you did, kind of, in, on a farm. Yes.

3:55

And did you help our with cows as well?

My brother and I were never enthusiastic dairy farmers, except when we absolutely had to help, and that was kind of later in my teenage years. And neither of us took up a career in dairy farming, in farming at all. Did all, when we finished our secondary schooling my brother went to Bendigo to study metallurgy and I went to Melbourne, to Burnley, to study horticulture.

Ok, so what High School did you go to?

It was Echuca Technical school, it's no longer there, it's now the site of the Echuca State School. So I spent six years travelling you know an hour to school on a bus every day, so it was a fairly routine life, yeah.

And did that um, you know, as some rural or regional high schools were more interested in um promoting agricultural subjects, was it like that?

Well I did do agriculture, they had in year, form three PF, which was Professional Farming. I did three years of that course, so there were certainly agriculture, and certainly a level of horticulture being taught, but I can remember soil science related subjects, plant disease and certainly not botany, but you had a good introduction into agricultural practices, yeah.

So around that age, what were you thinking you would do with that kind of knowledge?

5:48

Yes. Well I thought, um, you know the most influence on my career was certainly attending Burnley. I first started there in 1972, 3 and 4, a three year diploma of horticulture course. And that had an everlasting um influence on my life and my career. It was just a fantastic experience. Never regretted a day of going to Burnley.

So you were obviously plant-focussed a very young age and sort of …

Oh yes, well oh, I tell my son I spent my pocket money on Your Garden magazine or, and we'd be regular viewers of Sow What, and the other source was the Weekly Times, we'd get that every week as well. And there was always a large section on gardening, unlike today, certainly back in the 60s and 70s the Weekly Times had a very good section on horticulture and gardening.

Correct. Yes, yes. But it gave you kind of seasonal activities and plants and certainly there was always a large section on fruit growing and vegetable growing in the Weekly Times.

Yes, um, Sow What, that takes me back, Kevin Heinz

Yes, it was regular viewing requirement, wasn't it? He was pretty entertaining, very informative and I think. I can remember growing oak, acorns and watching, you know, in a glass jar how the root kind of went downwards and the shoot popped up above the ground level. So I've been fascinated by plants pretty much all my life. And it's why I chose, I think, to go, to study horticulture rather than go off to Ag[ricultural] school, because Dookie was obviously much closer, I could have attended, rather than Burnley, but plants took over.

That must have been quite a change for you moving from, you know, a rural dairy farm around that area back to Melbourne

It was certainly a change, you know. I look at my nieces and nephews now and they take it, took it in their stride when they came to Melbourne to do their tertiary studies, but certainly my experience, even in the early '70s was a was a big lifestyle change to come to the, come to Melbourne, from a population of just 1000 people in Tongala. So, a huge difference.

So how did you get by, I mean what did you live in a share a house, in in accommodation or in a …?

I was very lucky, I enquired when I had my interview before the principal, Eric Littlejohn, at Burnley, it would have been late 1971, was a lady in Toorak had rung up asking for a gardener, a live-in gardener, so I actually had free board in a house, that had a large garden, so I could walk to Burnley across the river from where I was staying. So, there was a really good relationship develop between that. And there were other Burnley students went and stayed there after I left as well. This lady was very influential in terms of my life and my career as well. Yeah.

Ok, so, what was her motivation? Apart from getting her garden cared for?

The main motivation was to have a free gardener, but it was very convenient. She had a kind of a separate space downstairs to be accommodated and you could use the common kitchen. We, we got on really well. I think a couple of years before I arrived she'd, or perhaps just the year before, she'd lost her husband, so she was in this very large house all by herself and ah, it certainly helped from, you know, just to have somebody around as well as being able to have somebody to look after the garden.

Ok, and as you say, she obviously, you weren't the only recipient of that bounty

10:36

No, no. I know, well I did Burnley and then I went and worked for Brown Brothers Winery for a year in 1975 and then I came back and did an Ag Science degree at Melbourne Uni so I came back and stayed in this house until I got married in 1978. So, you know, there was two periods that I stayed there. And I enjoyed looking after the garden. Firstly, it was different to what

I'd grown up with in northern Victoria and there were a lot of plants and trees and shrubs that I'd never, never experienced before, so it was a good learning experience as well as my studies at Burnley. To combine a practical horticulture by looking after this garden and with my horticultural studies as well, so they kind of complemented each other.

So was she a garden enthusiast, or she had you in, or had various students in because she wasn't?

11:40

Yes, she liked a nice garden for sure, and a colourful garden and I can remember growing, she had these, it was a kind of a terraced front garden with slate pavers ah but the, the two raised beds always had massive annual displays, zinnias in the summer or you know impatiens or various other colourful plants. So there was this regular display in the front of the house. And she wanted that kind of maintained. So it was a lot of work but the results were pretty impressive. Yeah. Even if I say so myself, it was very enjoyable and it certainly highlighted the garden but also set off the house as well. It was kind of an inter-war two storey house in Kooyong Road.

Ok, is still there?

It's still there, yes.

Is the garden still as nice?

Yeah, well you can't see much of the garden now as with much as with a lot of places in Toorak it's all closed off from the street, but the bulk of the garden is still there. I still remember the trees that I worked with or enjoyed, like a magnolia and lillypilly and camelias, they still remain. Yeah.

Ok. So you said that you ah, went up to Brown Brothers, is that Brown Brothers on the way to …

At Milawa, yes. Well, in my final year at Burnley there was a horticultural project and I developed an interest in viticulture at that time and it was also the area, the industry was just taking off, you know, like there was massive expansion in vineyard development. And in 1975 Brown Brothers I can remember the King Valley being full of tobacco. And ofcourse today it's full of grapes, but in '75 there were no grapes in the King Valley, there were no grapes around Beechworth, and so on. Even in the Yarra Valley just outside Melbourne, there were very few vineyards, whereas today, and certainly in the '70s and '80s that really exploded. So, when I did do my first year at Brown Brothers I um enrolled in a associate diploma of viticulture, which was a correspondence course from Charles Sturt University, which was at that time called the Riverina College of Advanced Education at Wagga. And so I did that, yeah, and I was pleased that it gave you an insight into the cultivation of grapes. Yeah, it was good. I still have a great interest in viticulture.

Ok, never been tempted to have your own winery?

Ah well, I wasn't tempted. I'd only spent a year in that position as an assistant vineyard manager at Brown's. It was good working with the Brown Brothers, I mainly worked with Peter Brown. It was really a good experience to kind of look at that industry. But if you were going to embark on that as a career you certainly needed a lot of, you know, financial backing. … You needed time. Much more time than growing vegetables, or fruit trees even.

Ok, so what brought you back to Melbourne and further study?

15:30

Well, I thought after having worked in the business. I kind of had thought I thought might have a career in CSIRO or the Department of Agriculture in kind of plant diseases and path[ology], you know plant pathogens and things, so I was given the opportunity to study Agricultural Science at Melbourne Uni. And with a view of kind of developing a career in plant science. That changed. I went, after I finished Melbourne I took off a year in all of 1981, I travelled around the world and we were away for about 12 months and so we went to the UK, all through Europe, America and Mexico. So it was a chance, an opportunity to kind of look at these other landscapes and other plants and certainly during that time I'd obviously visited Kew Gardens and Blenheim Palace was a place I remember that I still admire. And a few other National Trust properties. The Chelsea Physic Garden in London, I've been back to a few times since and it's just a beautiful space in you know the centre of London. So, … I think that certainly exposed myself to you know a whole range of different landscapes and different vegetation. And ironically, in America I had a chance to go to Yosemite and so I saw the Giant Redwoods in Yosemite, the Mariposa Woods, and then, even in Mexico down near Oaxaca, I saw one of the largest girth trees, the Mexican Swamp Cypress down near, [Arbol] del Tule in southern Mexico. So, just by coincidence when I came back in 1982 I was given a position at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens which had developed a joint project with the National Trust to survey significant trees in Victoria. So, I was offered that position at the end of, I remember exactly the date I started working at the Botanic Gardens, and that was the 13th of December 1982.

Christmas present

Yes, yes. Looking back on it, strange that I started it just before Christmas because normally people would wait until the new year. But I'd been, I'd come back to Australia in March of 1982 so … we were keen to … get a more permanent position and um get you know, start my career. And during that period, I'd worked with some other arborists and tree surgeons and landscapers so I'd, again, had this kind of hands on experience which I really enjoyed as well within horticulture and I think from my experience being a good gardener, or you know horticulturist and landscape person, being exposed and experiencing those different elements are important in terms of um understanding what's required and when it's required and how good you can be with plants.

So that was while you were travelling, do you mean?

I worked in horticulture when I was travelling. We spent four months in London and I worked at a nursery called World's End Nursery in Chelsea and I've been back a couple of times since, it's still there. And so this was a nursery that, you know, just like any retail nursery we sold lots of instant display plants ah for summer colour, you know hanging baskets and um even I can remember, it was my first time that I'd come across those colourful grafted cacti, that still seem to be popular, pretty absurd looking plant. But um we sold lots of those as well. Succulents and cacti even in London.

20:00

Ok and what about when you were sort of travelling through the Americas and stuff were you working then as well?

No, no, we were just on a tour. We landed in New York and we caught a tour across um to the West Coast so we dropped down, down. Well we were there in late October so the autumn, it was the first time I'd really experienced spectacular autumn colour, even in Central Park in New York I still remember a tree called Nyssa sylvatica being you know almost on fire in terms of the colour. And it was again a species rarely you encountered in Victoria. And um so down the East Coast, through the natural landscape there was just a blaze of colour with you know Liquidambars and Rhus and various other American species, all the way to New Orleans and that was a highlight around there with the Swamp Cypress, the Taxodium distichum, all along the Mississippi basin, which was, and Spanish Moss everywhere hanging off the trees. So really, a landscape I can remember vividly because again, it was something I'd never seen before. Then through Arizona and the Grand Canyon, again, you know plants, arid plants that you'd never seen before, the Joshua Tree certainly stands out. And then we had a friend in San Francisco that took us to Muir Woods, which was the place of the Coastal Redwoods, Sequoia sempervirens, so again, a forest we explored and still have vivid memories of as well. So kind of exposing myself to these plants and different landscapes certainly influenced my thinking in terms of you know how spectacular you know our plant community really is.

Globally?

Globally, yes.

I was just thinking all of things you've just described, very different from the, the trees and the wildlife along the Murry which, where you grew up

Yeah, pretty much just Red Gums, lots of them. Yes. And they're important of course, they're beautiful trees, I love River Red Gums. But it was certainly a flat gum landscape that I was more familiar with that you obviously don't have at all anywhere outside Australia. So, but being able to kind of experience or walk through those areas certainly influenced, influences your thinking.

23:05

Ok, so that period when you were travelling um did you have a purpose in going travelling or was it, you know, a change after going through all your study and working?

Yeah, well I, I think my wife and I were both very keen travellers, we'd done a little bit even when we were at Uni, we'd been to New Zealand. And so, that was something we'd always planned for and enjoyed, and to take a year off to go travelling is something that you know we've never regretted, at all, we've encouraged it, in fact our son went to Canada for two years, we had a chance to go and visit him and it's something we really encouraged because it's just being able to travel and experience other cultures and other you know, lives, and landscapes I think just makes you a better person. You know, it certainly is something that you know you value and you enjoy that experience.

So you came back from that and as you say you had the job offer at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, so what did you do while you were there?

Ok, well I spent eight years at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, '82 to '89 or 1990 roughly. I left in August 1990 I could call it. My role there was really as a trees officer and significant trees project for the National Trust. So I was looking at trees within the Botanic Gardens in terms of their management and care and then we were working with the National Trust to develop this tree register for significant trees and that's very much modelled on what had happened in significant trees in America which focussed on size mainly, Big Trees Register, but also with the institute of Horticulture in New Zealand they developed a more inclusive criteria to look at kind of commemorative historic, as well as botanical values of trees. And so we did a pilot study in 1981 that was a National Estate funded grant and from that pilot study which was, coincided with the Year of the Tree, that the United Nations had declared, every state in Australia was encouraged to develop a tree register which was managed by each state, [by the] National Trust. And certainly, in the case of Victoria we were able to get repeat National Estate grants so certainly for that eight-year period we had a program of surveying the state for significant trees. Which we still continue, … Greg Moore is now the Chair and I've been on the Committee since December 1982. So, we have over 1000 trees on the register and um, and so from a period of where kind of trees were just neglected or not, or misunderstood of their values and in that I'm including Avenues of Honour, believe it or not. They really were ignored in the '80s, we've turned the whole group around to certainly encourage a better understanding of the value of trees both from an historical perspective as well as, you know, botanical in terms of size and species and um and um their distribu[tion], natural distribution with in the State. So there are other values that now you know everybody clearly understand and. And I think trees play a very important role in both our kind of local landscapes, but more broadly within our, you know, cultural heritage as well. Yeah. And we're looking at, talking about trees that are naturally occurring as well as cultivated. And fortunately, Victoria has got a climate that allows a wide variety of trees to be grown. A lot of people complain about Melbourne's weather, but for a tree it's generally pretty good. Although the challenge now is with being hotter and drier, and more extreme events, which of those trees are going to stand up

into the future and we know some of the answers but not all the answers in that regard. Because I think Melbourne really prides itself on its elm population. I co-write a book on Elms in Australia and we … know it's a strong feature of Melbourne but also rural towns like Beechworth and Maldon and Camperdown, probably best known for its Avenue of 1876 Elms. And, so they're iconic and what the future is, well it was at one stage, we were concerned about Dutch Elm disease which did arrive into New Zealand in the early 1990s. Fortunately it's never got here to Australia. But you still see overseas, I had a chance to visit my son in Canada in 2016 and went to Quebec City. They've got over 40,000 elm trees in Quebec City, there's a large population of elms in parks and gardens and street trees, mostly Ulmus americana, the American Elm, but also Ulmus glabra occur in Quebec. So there's still Elms in the rest of the world and occasionally you'll still see them in the UK. The Edinburgh Botanic Gardens has a really important collection of Elm species. So Dutch Elm disease hasn't wiped them out completely.

So it sounds like that work at the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne was not just in the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne, you must have had a fair amount of travel involved in that?

29:50

Well certainly the tree survey work with the National Trust. But probably the biggest project we embarked upon at the Botanical Garden was in 1983, '84 and '85 we received funding for Victoria's regional or provincial Botanic Gardens. And so there were fifteen Botanic Gardens that were part of a rejuvenation project that was initiated by Tom Garnett who was at that the gardening editor for The Age. And so, we kind of reversed the decline for some of these gardens. Like, certainly gardens like Ballarat and Geelong were well-known and well-maintained but lesser gardens like Kyneton and Malmsbury in particular, and even Castlemaine to a lesser extent, had, had really deteriorated significantly in, well the '50s. The decline really stemmed from the 1950s when caravanning and camping was allowed to encroach into these botanical reserves. And really our survey work, ironic, you know 40 years ago, so 1984 we started surveying fifteen regional botanic gardens. We had no record of what was growing in Victoria up until that time. And we discovered lots of species that were unrecorded stemming from … Pinus torreyana, which is rare in the wild from California, but these were growing at the Warrnambool Botanic Gardens, they were growing at White Hills Botanic Gardens and Castlemaine Botanic Gardens. And so it was a delight to be able to record these for the very first time.

Ok

We even found a Kentucky Coffee Tree in the Hamilton Botanic Gardens. And Jubaea which is from Chile, a rare palm, again, rare and threatened species in the world. And we had you know apart, there's a good collection in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens but we had Jubaea palms in the Kyneton Botanic Garden as well. Yeah, so it was all important and that survey work led to a tree conservation program. We allocated funding for tree surgery and um we were gifted trees by the city of Melbourne to replace some tree species. And

the Melbourne Botanic Gardens provided trees for replanting in the regional gardens. And so it was a massive turnaround which is again, importantly, about three years ago was repeated when then there was a state government grant for growing Victoria's gardens, which provided over 2 million dollars to these regional gardens. It's been, it's how the gardens were kind of created in the first place, with support from Melbourne, through Mueller and Guilfoyle and even Daniel Bunce in Geelong, assisting with the cultivating of a wide variety of trees and shrubs

33:12

Ok, you mentioned that camping and caravanning or whatever had been allowed into these spaces, um, what was the impact? I mean, obviously you see that as a negative, can I just sort of clarify why, why that's a negative?

Yeah. Well you need a lot of infrastructure when you have got camping. Like amenities, like laundries, car parking, sealed roads and so where you've got kind of that level of infrastructure and it was clearly well-observed at Kyneton, which took 25 years to eventually get that camping and caravans removed, and the landscape you know a reasonable landscape reinstated. Camping is still permitted at places like Koroit and Port Fairy and so where, you know clearly those gardens suffer as a result of … camping infrastructure and use.

Ok so, the building of that infrastructure meant the taking down of …

Trees

… areas of, got you

Obviously, you can't plant a tree or shrubbery or parkland, where you've got competing use of camping and caravanning. Yeah, so, even, lots of, in the 50s you know when that you know recreation activity really did take off, the regional gardens, being Crown Land, was seen as you know opportune places for a new use, and was just accepted and tolerated. You know as post Second World War there was great growth and demand on you know public space and um so it really you know adversely impacted, certainly on the core botanical values of these reserves. Yeah.

Ok, because, I'm familiar with the Kyneton

Kyneton …

Gardens and I was just trying to imagine where that caravanning would have been and now that you say that, I can see where that might have been, where there is now a children's play area …

35:38

Correct. Yes. It's exactly there and extended down towards the Campaspe River to the south as well, yep.

Yep got you

So you know, you end up with playgrounds although I'm more accepting of playgrounds and barbeques and kind of that activity in some of the regional Botanical Gardens, you know. We have it certainly at Hamilton Botanic Gardens and if it's done well and it can be incorporated but certainly something that really developed in recent years is sort of play space, a more natural, a bit like, it's a flow on from the Children's Garden at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Which actually was never created in the proper Botanic Gardens, it was always in part of King's Domain. But certainly, that nature play is very important and we have some really nice spaces like, now, in the Kyneton Botanic Gardens but also Warrnambool and we're trying to get some funding for a scheme developed for the Hamilton Botanic Gardens which has been designed by Andrew Laidlaw as well. So Yeah. It's all about you know location, design, and incorporation into an established landscape. If it's done well it's very, it's possible

Well it's certainly, in the case of Kyneton, it seems to bring a lot more people into the Garden. That's just personal observation.

Yep, I'm sure it does. It's a bit like, another change I've seen is kind of arts activities in regional gardens you know. Firstly, with Wind in the Willows at the Melbourne Gardens was late 1980s when I was there and now it's developed into outdoor theatre and various other kinds of arts programs. So, certainly, you know, I think it's a really good use of that, of those areas because it brings in a group of people that normal, perhaps may never visit a garden. And we're certainly wanting to encourage young people into these spaces. They're very important.

So is that connected to um the resurgence of little Botanic Gardens? I'm just thinking, by happenstance I came across one in Girgarre.

38:10

Yes, yep. Oh, I think the loss of kind of indigenous plants is really driving our newer botanic gardens, there's one at Shepparton, there's one at Girgarre. The White Hills Botanic garden has doubled in size. At Geelong, the 21st Century Garden and that's expanded now into a Pacific Ring garden. So, I think those expansions are the result of loss of local flora but also a desire to um create a new experience for a new generation. Yeah. So, really you know, the gardens need to be relevant to be you know progressive and um kind of meeting people's desires, going into the future. Yeah.

Ok, so that's two major projects that you worked on at the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne. Were there other major projects, or other projects?

Well, it was all pre-computer of course so these days it was at, really just the beginning of maintaining plant records and that, so certainly since my time at the Melbourne Gardens and some of the other larger city gardens is that they are doing succession planning. It's been a major growth area particularly for the tree population and then trying to determine matching climate change as well with new trees. So, I think that's a whole new development that's

occurred and it's certainly very important to consider. The other area that kind of developing specialist plant collections in our regional gardens and I've had an opportunity more recently to look at the Daylesford Botanic Gardens and what collections they could create there around what are already established plantings. Their quite important for their conifer collection but also extends all the way through to ferns in their fern gully as well. So both Daylesford and Camperdown Botanic Gardens both sit on you know kind of volcanic cones, or the rims of ancient volcanoes, so it's kind of a new opportunity to look at you know different growing conditions … better soils that, but they will probably need irrigation support moving forward as trees, as well, as the climate gets hotter and trees need to be assisted. So, yeah, wiser use of trees. The other change I've seen, mulch. We probably don't fully understand the importance of mulch, moving forward in gardening. And certainly, in my early stage there was not a lot of mulch being applied. In fact, at Warrnambool most of the beds were just raked, it was just bare soil and of course that's been a huge turnaround. So, I think a better understanding of the soil environment is certainly assisting in tree and gardening planning as well. Yeah.

So when, um, you [were at] the Botanical Gardens, I've read in that article that you took a, or you were awarded a Churchill fellowship. So what was the plan with the Churchill fellowship, because you have to propose what you're going to do, don't you?

42:02

Yeah, yep. Well I was fortunate that in 1987 I attended a summer school at West Dean, which is south-west of London, it's an old property and they ran various courses there so I attended a … conserving historic [gardens] course that was run out of the property and that gave me an opportunity to meet people like Tom Wright, John Sales and John Workman, from the National Trust. And the following year I applied for um a Churchill fellowship, which I was awarded in 1989. And that was really to expand my experience but you know, understanding of maintaining historic landscapes. So I took the opportunity to go to Botanic Gardens in Italy – Padua and Pisa and Florence gardens, and the Rome Botanic gardens – so again, it was an opportunity to look at how historic Botanic gardens were being maintained and managed. And then most importantly, in England I was able to work with the National Trust, which are seen to be leaders, and are leaders in historic garden management and conservation. So certainly, the opportunity to spend some time with John Sales, who came to Australia in 1988 … [on] a joint project, or support, with the Australian Garden History Society and the British Council. So, the bicentennial year John came to Melbourne so I was able to meet up with him. And then the following year I spent some time with him on various National Trust places. And I worked, had the opportunity to work at Biddulph Grange near the Congleton and Manchester area of the UK … It wasn't open to the public at this point, it was just a remarkable garden that they'd inherited. Required a lot of renewal and development and I've been back once since. I went there in '89 and certainly the chance to again [in 2000], to visit National Trust properties, both Kew and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens and um the Chelsea Physic Garden, again, just kind of exposed my myself to kind of how

these places you know were being presented and how they were being managed and the challenges of um, you know, garden conservation.

Ok, so was the, you brought up the Garden History Society, um, in mentioning that it was you know John Sale's coming out in 1988, um, is your interest in or has your interest in gardens always connected to history, or is that something that's grown through your various positions?

45:20

That's certainly grown. … I didn't study history at all, you know, I had a very poor understanding of you know history I would say. But certainly, the opportunity to work on the regional botanic gardens and historic gardens like Rippon Lea and Como for the National Trust here in Victoria, immediately exposes you to the history and the evolution of these landscapes. So, it certainly you know, being exposed to certainly the regional gardens, it just, and having worked in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, just lends itself to getting a greater understanding of their history. So certainly, from that period I became very interested in plant introduction and cultivars, breeding of cultivars and selection. So work by Dr Roger Spence who was the botanist at the Herbarium that I worked with on the survey, plant surveys, we know that Pinus radiata, the Monterey Pine, came into the Melbourne Garden, Sydney and Hobart in December 1857, so kind of, that's the commencement date for pines. And certainly, by the 1860s and '80s, Mueller was calling it Superior Pine and it really took over the softwood timber industry from the 1880s. So we've got huge plantations of Monterey Pine. And even something as common as like the Claret Ash, which is a chance seedling that was raised in a garden in the Adelaide Hills, we know that first only became available around 1933. So, I'm quite interested in when plants were being bred or selected or when plants have been introduced from overseas. And of course having lived through the discovery of the Wollemi Pine I just try to think about that experience versus what was happening in the early 1800s when plant collectors were being sent around the globe to introduce plants into the UK and into, and American plants started to be distributed around the globe as well. So, it's really a fascinating area studying history and in terms of plant, in terms of the plant relationships of that period.

So, when things were introduced, when they got moved around the world

So like even something like the Giant Redwood, Sequoiadendron, was probably discovered around the 1830s but it wasn't until around 1850 that it arrived here in Australia. So, we have a really important database, the Colonial Plant Database that came out of the um out of New South Wales and a lot of work has gone into that so we can look at you know records from 1827 through to Camden Park nursery records of the 1840s and we can see when these plants are being mass produced. It's not a definite answer of when plants were being grown because we know from the point of view of the Wollemi pine it took roughly ten years before it started to be widely distributed. So, but it is a starting point and it helps you to understand when, how trees first appeared in the landscape.

49:00

Ok. Um so, when you got back from doing the Churchill fellowship, you, I believe from that article, you moved on, you moved?

Yes, I only spent another year at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Because again, it was a work opportunity that came up and I moved into urban design at the Department of Planning … I spent five years working with a team within Urban Design and that kind of focussed on trying to improve urban environments in terms of you know paving versus soft landscape and where trees fit into that in urban environments. We were one of the first groups to look at tree planting in Docklands, which has been very difficult because there's, not only is it windy and exposed and there's not a lot of soil, and what soil there is generally pretty severely contaminated, it was more than challenging to try and get a treed landscape into Docklands. But it's important to have trees in that environment. If it's all just paving and buildings, nobody is going to enjoy that at all. That was kind of a new experience to try and work within, you know, a new city environment to look at tree planting. And then with the new Heritage Act of 1995, it was declared and so at the end of 1995 I moved to the Heritage Branch, Heritage Victoria. And because the definition of Heritage was expanded beyond buildings and structures and land to include gardens, trees, cemeteries, Avenues of Honour and so on. So all of a sudden there was this requirement to have somebody who could assess landscapes for the Heritage Register. And I happened to be in the right place at the right time. So, we were all in the same Department so I just moved across from Urban Design, which was kind of it almost disappeared I think for a period, and I was able to work for the next 26 or 24 years in in Heritage Victoria.

51:42

Okay.

And that was a really exciting time as well. Yeah. So, I was there at the beginning of this new registration of designed and cultural landscapes, including trees and cemeteries …

So can you tell me a bit more about Avenues of Honour and cemeteries in that relation? So what did you do?

Yeah, yep. Well you know, it terms of the Victorian Heritage Register, we know lots of buildings and structures are on that register and ah, and the new legislation enabled … Avenues of Honour so places like the Ballarat Avenue of Honour was included on the register, along with the Arch of Victory and various other pieces of infrastructure along the way. I think even the nameplates were part of that registration. Woodend Avenue of Honour, many people would know about. And the Macedon Avenue of Honour, where there's Pin Oaks that would be absolutely spectacular at this time of year. And Victoria has at one stage had probably 300 Avenues of Honour across the State. Even more recently new ones have been discovered that we didn't know existed. So certainly, there are about 100 Avenues of Honour that are reasonably intact and highly valued. And so, as with any treed landscape it's a

balance between kind of keeping the old and the historic versus renewal because in many ways we're in a constant process of renewing heritage landscapes and the moment you stop doing that you have nothing. So but certainly we've embarked upon you know, re-established Avenues at Ballarat and also a few other towns.

53:54

So would that have included urban Avenues of Honour as well. Because I can remember one in my childhood.

Yes, so there was an Avenue of Honour in Brighton in North Road, it was flowering gums. There's also none of those trees exist now and they can't be … reinstated because of the duplication of North Road. We've got other examples where that's happened as well. So certainly, one of the biggest threats to Avenues of Honour are roadworks … but we've been able to kind of manage the Calder Woodburn Memorial Avenue south of Shepparton which you know, it still needs a lot of attention but the values are established, we understand the planting arrangement there of about six or seven different eucalyptus species and so certainly they, it can be conserved for the future. And we certainly can understand you know, at Mortlake, which is Monterey Cypress, that's been more challenging, there's been an older planting that's now been removed and the intention is to put the Home Oaks back where those Monterey Cypress. One of the problems with Monterey Cypress is that you get Cypress canker so you do have to make an informed decision. So this happens with building decisions as well, we no longer use lead pipe or asbestos in buildings, so there's common sense about like-for-like and we can certainly can make an informed change where it's absolutely necessary. But we certainly want to try and put back the same trees that used to be there for sure.

55:56

And with respect to cemeteries, would a cemetery be judged on the significance of the trees and of the monuments and of any other kinds of infrastructure that was there? Would it be a combination or would one thing sort of …

Well it's all the parts that kind of add up to making a cemetery important, whether it be the Maldon cemetery or the Beechworth or the Melbourne General Cemetery. The plants complement the monuments. The layout is often very important, and in fact the layout might have been by a notable designer like at Boroondara … Purchas did the design there, and even [Fawkner] to the north of Melbourne … So, it's a combination of the layout, the presentation, the buildings and structures and the monuments. And in fact, the monuments might only be identified in a few cases because of kind of the ownership of those monuments rests with the family associated with the internments. So, it would have to be, it's different, like the Burke and Wills monument in the Melbourne General Cemetery is certainly identified. At St Kilda, we've got the Von Mueller monument that's identified, and in both those cases they were funded by public subscriptions so there's kind of some community, well a sense of community ownership of those monuments

Ok

So, yeah it's kind of the exception rather than the rule when looking at the burial monuments as part of the significance

Ok

But certainly, the trees in the landscapes are very important. And ofcourse when you look at historic records, cemeteries were landscaped, highly landscaped and gardened in the 1800s and fortunately the Friends of Boroondara have done a heap of work with replanting and gardening in the Boroondara cemetery. So, they're kind of reversing the clock in terms of you know reinstating a colourful garden.

Mmm. No, I'm just thinking, having gone through a country town cemetery, like even Heathcote, there are some fairly prominent trees there, prominent plantings that have survived

Yeah, it's not a cemetery I know of. But again, there is this relationships between conifers in particular and death and the symbolism of many of our cemetery plantings is really strong. And the National Trust and Sally Sagazio of the National Trust has written extensively about that association which again is very important to understand

Yew trees?

Yews yes, Terang cemetery has an Irish Yew Tree and an unusual Monterey Cypress, no sorry an Italian Cypress that looks like a Monterey Cypress in the centre of the Terang cemetery, so some horticultural value exists within some of the early cemetery plantings. At Beechworth there's two fantastic Funeral Cypress from China, and there are Redwoods and Hoop Pine, and again there is that kind of conifer phase is well-represented and remains largely intact in cemeteries. Because they were never kind of developed or put under the same pressure as some of the other early landscapes, they were left alone. Yeah.

1:00:02

Yes, it's um, although going back to thinking about the particular urban Avenue of Honour I was thinking about there was a cemetery very close to it and that's become a car park. So these things do change. [laughing]

Yes.

Ok, so you, did you spend the rest of your career at Heritage Victoria?

I did yes … I retired in January 24th 2019. So that's been quite a lengthy period at Heritage and I worked kind of within the permits team, there was a registrations team a permits team, various other parts of the operation of Heritage Victoria and I kind of did assessments and permits. But permits is all

about management and conservation, so for gardens I previously mentioned, about constant renewal and understanding about managing those landscapes, was an area that I particularly enjoyed working in and I felt also I could contribute to that area you know as well. Yeah.

Ok, um, well I suppose I should ask you about your connection with the AGHS, how did you come to be involved with them? Or be someone that they call upon?

1:01:43

Yeah. Well I've been thinking about that and I'm pretty sure it was about 1988. We had a conference here in Melbourne and um and two people, Nigel Lewis and Richard Aitken, were members and I'm pretty sure I got invited. They were doing some work at the Botanic Gardens on conservation studies, conversation management planning, conservation analysis. And I got to know Nigel and Richard in that regard, the work that they were doing. And I think that they were on the Victorian Branch, and I got invited and I assisted the '88 conference and John Sales attended and it was a very successful conference. And I helped with garden visits at that time. So, I'm pretty sure it was roughly about that period that, and I was on the Victorian Branch committee for over ten years, perhaps twelve or thirteen years I think.

Ok, and what was your role then, what sorts of things did you become involved in?

Oh, well, we ran a few tours to visit various gardens. I can remember doing some significant tree survey tours and garden tours, botanic garden tours as well. So, it was kind of assisting on activities and I certainly vaguely recall helping with kind of short courses or information, you know, projects. Yeah. Garden surveys. I got involved with a Burnley student who was doing some work at Belmont near Beaufort and so I helped with plant surveys and I've kind of continued that with Garden History as well. Goronga would be the more recent booklet that was produced and I did the plant survey for that. So I've kind of continued helping Garden History in any way I can, yeah. It's a very important organisation. Yeah.

So, your, your interest, it sounds from everything you've said, you're interest in gardens and gardening is lifelong and it has changed over time. It sounds like you've … morphed into being very much about management and taking note of – how do you see things towards the future with gardens? You've already sort of mentioned a little bit with respect to water scarcity and the possibilities of climate change.

1:04:43

Well I'm volunteering at Bishopscourt, an important property in East Melbourne, at the moment since I retired, and some of the challenges there are ageing trees and kind of public risk in terms of you know failure of those trees or parks, or you know branches. And so I think that the challenges there moving forward is you know managing the existing tree population, safely and for as long as you can, but also at the same time, where space allows, to

plant future replacement trees. So we have to constantly think about tree planting for the term, the long-term. Because you know dealing with annuals of vegetable gardens or fruit trees you're looking at a cycle of either twelve months or fifty years but when you're talking about trees you're talking about a life cycle hopefully over at least a hundred years if not two or three hundred years when you're talking about redwoods or even oaks, and probably elms that have a life cycle of a hundred and fifty to two hundred years. So I think, yeah, in terms of kind of maintaining a tree landscape, which is what really people enjoy, I think anyway, about parks and gardens, is that you've got to constantly think about opportunities for long-term tree planting in particular.

So the significant trees of the future?

Yeah, well potentially could become that. If it's done well. But I'd be the first to admit that I've made lots of mistakes with tree planting. And one of the biggest mistakes is just over planting, not realising that a twenty-year old tree, or now I can look back at what we did forty years ago, and see that well it would have been better if that tree had been somewhere else, or we didn't have three but we only had one. Yeah. So, I think don't be afraid to kind of constantly assess and review the tree, because what I would like people to think about is certainly growing trees to their maximum benefit and size so they're not overcrowded or misshapen or in the wrong location. I like trees to kind of to reach their potential. And I'm constantly thinking about that in the landscape. Yeah, for sure.

So, if you had your way – you gave the example of maybe shouldn't have three trees – would you take on out?

1:07:36

Oh, yes, I don't think people should be concerned about removing a twenty-year old tree. But it's important that we have ten and twenty-year old trees. So what I try to keep reminding people in my talk, is that it's ok to have a hundred, hundred year-old trees, but in reality what you want is a hundred trees that range from one to a hundred, because the longevity or the conservation of that landscape, so we should certainly have young and old

Ok

And what we, when you're looking at heritage landscapes you often have to take a tree out to plant a new tree. That's something else I'm fairly strong about. So just filling out space is certainly not something I'd be supportive of at all.

No, and you know sometimes nature does it for you, um

Yes, well, you know the Great Storm at Kew in the UK in what, in '87, I was there just after and just again just before the Great Storm and certainly the comment from Kew Gardens at the time was it just opened up new opportunities. They'd lost a lot of big old historic trees but it created a new environment and so a new opportunity to plant new trees and change the

landscape or do it better. And I think that that's important to think about how can we do better.

Yes, well, um, I was thinking particularly again of Kyneton and the storm that came through was it 3, 4 years ago now. The major storm where a lot of trees came down all over the State in a swathe.

[NH] Oh yes.

And there were some very, very large old trees came down in the Kyneton Botanic Gardens

[JH] June 2021. Yes. Well, even more recently we lost some big trees in the Ballarat Botanic Gardens at the end of '21, as well, November I think '21, so Bunyas, and a big Cottonwood, and Norway Spruce, all collapsed. Fortunately there was no other damage … and I think that's an example of what we're going to probably going to experience more of, is extreme events and you know and wind is certainly going to be one of them, apart from being hot or dry. Yeah but, certainly, downpours and a lot of wind can happen quickly, and suddenly, and it can certainly do a lot of damage. But again, I'm thinking, at Ballarat, it's just again [coughs] (excuse me) the removal of the Cottonwood has allowed a whole new landscape around the new fernery. So it can be an opportunity.

So taking the optimistic view

[JH] Yes, always [both laughing]. Yeah.

Um, ok, well I think I've probably asked all the questions that occurred to me. Is there anything else you'd like to add that I haven't sort of drawn out?

[JH] Um, don't think so, I think we've talked a lot, a lot Kate, so I think you know, hopefully I've been um honest and um helpful. Yeah.

No, it's been um a very fruitful discussion and so thank you very much for taking part and I might stop the recording and then explain a few things about the next stages.

[JH] Ok.

So thank you

Interview ends: 1:11:32