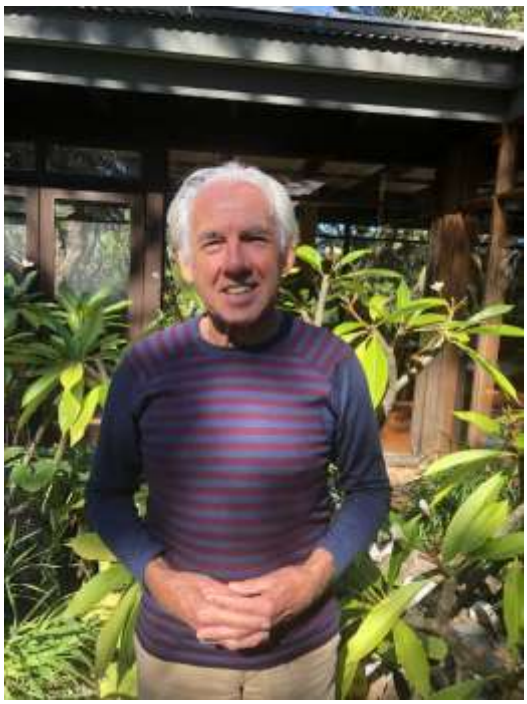
AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Southern Highlands Branch



John Stowar

Dennis McManus

Photographs supplied by interviewees.

INTERVIEWEE:	MR JOHN STOWAR [JW] AND MR DENNIS MC MANUS [DM]
INTERVIEWER:	LYN BARRETT ASSISTED BY HEATHER MCINTYRE
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	16 MARCH 2025
PLACE OF INTERVIEW:	AT HOME OF LYN BARRETT BOWRAL, NSW, 2576
LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:	1 HOUR 31 MINS
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:	ALL USES OF THIS INTERVIEW SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THE INTERVIEWEE AND THE SOCIETY: MR JOHN STOWAR AND MR DENNIS MCMANUS, AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY, NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, INTERVIEWED 16 MARCH 2025 BY LYN BARRETT

There have been minor changes to this transcript for reasons of clarity and accuracy.

This is an interview with John Stowar and Dennis McManus, both men are friends and we're involved with the former NSW Governor's summer residence, Hillview, at Sutton Forest, New South Wales. The property dates from 1882 till 1957. This interview is intended to cover the history and involvement of the Australian Garden History Society in the conservation and custodianship of Hillview between 1993, I'm saying, and 1999.

[JS] Yeah.

John started his working life as a science teacher, and in 1966 he was inspired by Betty Maloney's publication designing Australian Bush Gardens, which he'll talk about later. And as a result, John's career direction changed, and he has been involved in horticulture and landscapes ever since. John was involved in establishing the Highlands School of horticulture at Hillview in the 1980s and he's a member of the Australian Garden History Society. When he was a member of the Australian Garden History Society, he took on the roles of the Southern Highlands Branch Chair and was Convenor of the National Conference in Bowral in 2000. In recent years, John has been putting his horticultural knowledge and an inquiring scientific mind into studying fire retardant plantings, and has been writing papers for Diggers Club magazine and Robertson Environment Protection Society.

Dennis has had a 40 year career in planning and heritage with the New South Wales Government, before retiring in 2006.Since retirement, Dennis has been an active volunteer with the Highlands Garden Society, the Berrima District Historical Society, and the local branches of the National Trust, U3A and Australian Garden History. Dennis was on the Wingecarribee Shire Heritage Committee from 2012 and, commencing in 2020, coordinated a massive review of 609 heritage items and places and 16 conservation areas across the Shire. As of March 2025, clearance for a final exhibition and gazetting is awaited from the New South Wales Department of Planning involving 412 items and 13 conservation areas.
This interview is being conducted at Bowral, on Sunday, the 16th of March. 2025, and the time is 9:40am.

This is the voice of Lyn Barrett speaking, and this is the voice of Heather McIntyre.

Gentlemen, can I ask you to state your names for the recorder.

[JS] John Stowar

[DM] Dennis McManus

John and Dennis, you've both signed consent forms for the Australian Garden History. And if you would like, we will give a copy to the Berrima Historical Society if you're in agreement.

[DM] That sounds good.

[JS] Yes, good idea. Thank you.

I have offered a copy, to gift a copy, of the recording and transcript to the King's Foundation Australia, who have undertaken the custodianship of Hillview, but I've not heard back at this time.

[DM] Thank you, yeah.

Would you be happy for that transcript and recording to go to them as well?

[DM] Good idea. Yes.

[JS] Yes, excellent.

Alright, well, let's start with you, Dennis. We always start Australian Garden History Society interviews with a little bit of biographical information just to set the scene as to who you are.

Right? So, you want me to start off now. Good. Thank you for that. So, I was born in Portland, out past Lithgow in 1945 and since that time, I've lived in a number of places. And of course, since 1999 in the Southern Highlands. In 1951 my parents moved to Prospect, which is five miles past Parramatta to the west, and that's where all my childhood was spent and until I moved into Glebe in 1968. My first primary school was at Prospect. And just to say Prospect in those days in the 1950s was a little rural settlement, quite historic in a way. And typically of the post war period, the school never had enough room, so my classroom for one year was in the local School of Arts, and a kind of Henry Lawson style of place, including snakes everywhere. So that was a good time.

5:05

Later, schooling was at Blacktown and Parramatta, and of course, then on to university. I've got a number of degrees, firstly an Arts degree in history and geography, and then later town planning and heritage conservation. The first two degrees were from Sydney, and the later Masters Degree was from the University of New South Wales, an excellent course in in heritage. In terms of career, I started work in well, by the way, I should say I started university when I was 16, and I can't encourage anybody to ever do that. It's much, much too young to be starting university. But never mind.
And so far as my career was concerned, one of my friends from Geography Class mentioned that he had put his name down to start work at the NSW State Planning Authority, and of course, that's where I started. In those days, it was not so difficult to get a job. And in fact, at my interview, I was asked why I was applying for this job in planning, and I told them I wasn't too sure I believed in town planning [laughter]. Hardly the way to go about an interview, but being desperate they employed me.

And of course, I was with that same department with a change of names for 40 years. In the beginning it was statutory planning I was involved with and we're talking about December 1966, it's the State Planning Authority (SPA).
The SPA was the old Mark Foys building in the city, a wonderful building. The State Planning Authority, that had only been set up three years beforehand. The chair was Nigel Ashton, who was a wonderful man and later became the Chair of the Heritage Council after Justice Hope. Very interesting person in the sense that he had vision. This seems to be something that planners lack nowadays, they don't seem to be terribly vision oriented, but he was. The Heritage Act was passed in 1977 and came into effect in April 1978. I did apply to join the Heritage Branch of the Department of Planning in 1978 because I was really keen on heritage, you know, right from teenage years, I suppose. But that didn't happen. But in 81 the opportunity came up. I'd been overseas on a long service leave holiday in China, and when I came back, the new head of the Environment and Heritage Section, a man called John Whitehouse, asked me to come down and spend three months in the Heritage Branch to sort some things out in the grants program. And 25 years later, I was still there.
John Whitehouse was very important because he wrote the Environment Platform for the Labor Party before it took Office under Neville Wran in 1976

[JS] 25 years in Heritage. Dennis has got staying power. [laughter]

[DM] So it was, it was an interesting time I and I've listened, as I've mentioned to you, to the interview that Chris Bettridge gave. And of course, Chris joined in 78, 1978 and he was there when I arrived. But I was a little bit of an odd character in that heritage branch, because I'm really the boy from Blacktown, as it were, the western suburbs. The others were not. I had a rather different view of how things might operate, and probably based on my own background, my, my father's views on life, I tended, I think, to be somewhat more practical. So, one of my first difficulties there was that, as a Grants Officer, people would be asking money to fix their roof. And of course, the architecture plan should be asking for a CMP. And I'd say, Well, what Conservation Management Plan? This man's got a leaking roof, [laughter] which is, in any event, a major thing, probably in my time there, partly because of my planning background, was to see that a major a, an influence on, on how the built environment goes is local government, and with a colleague, I helped set up a local government heritage programme. Really the first part of it was December, 1993 with the first heritage advisor in the state. Now, 40 years later, that programme still going and what, yes, it was good programme. And what it was about was giving advice to councils on how, many of whom had not a clue about what heritage was about, was how they could go about things, how they could, and we had a booklet called eight suggestions, you know. And they included, do a heritage study, appoint a heritage committee, appoint of heritage advisor, look after your heritage items, look after your main street and so on. Very, very good programme, very low cost programme. And for the whole 25 years I was there, I was the Grants Officer, so I had some money we could run this programme. And before I left, it was only costing about $200,000 to run for the entire state, so very low cost, with small dollar for dollar grants to council to do all those things. So I did enjoy that, my work, the entire time I was at the heritage office. I worked really outside the building, as it were, did a lot of travel across the state, and wasn't too keen on staff meetings [laughter]. I really, I thought my job was to help other people do things. So I dealt with a lot of churches and community groups and so on, as well, as I say, the local government. So that was a big thing for me, by the way, before I joined heritage, my other interest and to do with John Whitehouse and his involvement in natural environment and, and with national parks, and he was certainly instrumental having involved Bob Carr

included many more national park acres for the state, was I worked on Myall Lakes. And I see that from that interview with Chris Bettridge that he'd also been working on Myall Lakes. And in my case, it was about how to plan the surrounding areas to the, to the lake. This had never been to the National Park. This had never been done before. So it, that natural environment was an interest of mine. But of course, in heritage, most of my interest was the built environment here. So I just, just finally to say, in the 1990s I did get an Order of Australia Award, and that really primarily was about that, that was heritage conservation. But from my point of view, it was to do with that outward focus, and particularly to local government.

And it continues today. Before we go on to that, John, do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

13:05

[JS] Yes, actually, Dennis and I go back a long way together, because I'll incorporate that in what I'm going to say. But right back in 1967 we found ourselves both working for the state planning authority of New South Wales, and not only were we working there, but I had just bought, bought a terrace house in Glebe. It was advertised for sale for $13,000 and I heard you could buy it with 10% deposit, and I had $1,300 in the bank. I said, I'm going to go for that. I told Dennis. I went to the solicitor, and he said, oh, you can't buy this. He said, you'll have to have your father's approval. You're not 21 yet. And I said, Oh, no, I don't want to do that. I don't think he'd like me to be buying this. But anyway, Dennis was looking for somewhere to live. I bought the terrace house. Dennis came and lived with me, with another three or four students, didn't we?

[DM] Yes in those days, every room was a bedroom. The only common room was the kitchen.

[JS] But anyway, the irony of buying in Glebe was that I really wanted to get to the country. I was born in Sydney, raised in Sydney, and I wanted to live in the country, and I hadn't had an opportunity to do that. So the plan was by my father that I should accept a teacher scholarship, train as a teacher, and then maybe go to the country that way. So, when it came to apply for our preferences for where I should go, they gave you three choices, the department. And so, I put South Coast first, North Coast second, Far West, third. And what did I get home? Homebush Boys High [laughter]. Yeah, I was devastated. However, I was only teaching there for a week, and I received a telegram on the Friday to say, start Yass, Monday morning. Oh, my goodness. Which was unbelievable for me to say, get my act together that quickly and get down to Yass and be there teaching.

How old would you be at that stage?

15:25

[JS] How old? Yes, I was 19, yes. So, I was trained as a science teacher, and I got to Yass High. I loved Yass High. It was a gorgeous school. Small school, we only had about 200 kids, and they're all very friendly, country kids, totally different to those that I'd known in the city. But anyway, I loved my year teaching there at Yass, but it became quite clear to me that I did not want to be a science teacher. I didn't like the school environment. I didn't like the regimentation of everything and the routine and timetabling. So, I made up my mind I would escape as soon as I possibly could. So, I only taught for a year and a half because an opportunity came to join

Manly Council as a town planning assistant. And I really like town planning too, because I've been studying planning subjects when I did my geography degree. And so I accepted that job, and I was only there for six months, and then I saw this job advertised for the State Planning Authority, and I thought, well, that sounds even better. So that's the direction I moved in, with the aim of eventually getting into a field that was outdoors, that wasn't restricting me to working in an office all the time, and landscape architecture came up as the field I should really put my sights on because I was interested in design as well as horticulture and landscapes. So as it turned out, I gave up science teaching almost before I started. And although I was living in Sydney, I was enjoying town planning with the prospect of becoming a landscape architect. So I started, I finished my degree like Dennis did at Sydney Uni, with majors in geography, and I did botany as my other one. And then I was ready to get into town planning, the, sorry, landscape architecture, the only course available at the time was a two year post grad diploma at New South Wales uni. Yes, it was an evening course, [cough] pardon me. So, I did that diploma, and I was convinced that's exactly what I wanted to do.

You had some good mentors.

[JS] I had some excellent mentors. I should just not leave 1966 before I move further on. Because not only was it my first year teaching science, but it was the year I was going to be conscripted for Vietnam, and I was dreading it, because I thought I'd be a conscientious objector if my number was called up. Thank goodness it was not called up. And the school realized that, that was great. The students knew that I'd escaped it. That was significant. The other thing that happened in 1966 was that I discovered a little book called Designing Australian Bush Gardens by Betty Maloney and her sister, Jean Walker. And this book, as it turns out, was an instant best seller. It was the first book written on using Australian plants and all the design things you should think about. And I was enthralled by that book, and I thought that's the way I want to go. I subsequently met Betty Maloney, and actually went and had a look at her garden, at French's Forest, and it's captivating, typical size suburban garden, but absolutely beautifully done. So, I was hooked on, on town planning and landscape jointly, because I'm still very interested in town planning issues, but principally I wanted to be in the country. So I moved through several jobs to start with in the city. In 1973 a job was advertised with Bankstown Council as a for a landscape architect assistant, and the landscape planner, or the landscape architect working for Bankstown Council was Alan Corey. And Alan was quite a radical sort of fellow, but loved by his students. He was a tremendous lecturer, very enthusiastic about his subject of landscape design. And I happened to land this job as his assistant, and and I fell on my feet because he's such a well- regarded fellow. And Alan was unique in a way, because he started off as an apprentice gardener at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, worked his way up there and enjoyed working as a gardener. And he discovered that he too, wanted to do landscape architecture, and he went to America to do his training, but we were, we found where we had a lot in common. We were great mates, and I had a very enjoyable time with him. The only problem was Bankstown, as a community, was not prepared for landscape architecture. And every plan that Alan would prepare and I would enthusiastically support, it would be submitted to the council, and it would be rejected almost outright as not what the people of Bankstown wanted, which was really gut wrenching in a way, yeah, and at the time, most of the streets in the Bankstown community were planted up with callistemon, callistemon, callistemon, and hardly anything else. And here was Alan trying to introduce all sorts of innovation, very innovative. Big, big trees, shade loving trees. And even the park superintendent in Bankstown couldn't accept that we should be planting these giant shade trees as what, what Alan had in mind, because it's a hot climate out there. Anyway, that was a real battle. We were actually

both sacked before the end of the year because the council claimed we were not producing the sort of things that the community needed

22:00

[DM] More bottle brushes [laughter]

[JS] Exactly. So the writing was on the wall. Alan thought, all right, well, I can't hang around here. And John, you obviously don't want to stay either. There was so much opposition to us being sacked. By the way, we were reinstated very shortly after, but we both realized that we're wasting our time, yeah, as much as we wanted to try and make an impact and do the right thing [indistinct chatter], exactly, so we reluctantly said, well, we can't bash our heads against the wall here, and we'll move on.

Yes. Well, you've had incredible histories so far, but I'd like to now focus our attention and our conversation on Hillview. That's what the interview is.

[JS] Yes, yes

And Hillview, of course, was the summer residence of the governors of New South Wales from 1882 to 1957 and it's in beautiful Sutton Forest. So, Dennis, can you give us, give us a really brief, because it's, it's written up in quite a lot of documentations, the history of Hillview, but you, you lived it because you were involved with it. So if you could give us a brief overview, and maybe your meetings with Mr. Edwin Klein as well.

[DM] Yes, thanks. Thanks for that. Lynn. Look, yes, it is, it is true. The Hillview materials are written up. But just, just briefly about the 19th century background, just so you've got some idea of its importance, is the government was looking for a hill station or as some summer residences called. There were other places, of course, around the world, including India and other states in Australia which had the same idea, and the idea was to particularly get out of Sydney in the summer. And people have probably forgotten that, no doubt it wasn't so smelly at Government House, but other parts of Sydney were smelly because there were lots of horses [laughter] used in the city in those days, and summer, it wasn't the best, best time to be there. In any event, there was already a move before Hillview was ever considered as a government residence people were moving there. But the big move came in in 1867 when the railway was built. It made the Southern Highlands accessible a real estate agent called Richard Richardson built Hillview, and the name of the property in his time was Prospect. He built a two-storey stone, Gothic building on the southern, not a large building, very, very pleasant building, and it was this building that the government bought in 1882. Lord Loftus, who was the governor at that time, had been staying at Throsby Park, and he had asked the government about buying a property. That's what led to that happening. So, by the way, and of course, in the time afterwards, the house was extended in, within the next 20 years, it became a very big house of 32 bedrooms. But curiously enough, that Gothic House is still there. It's still in the middle of all that later extension. So to me, it's kind of interesting. 16 governors were there until 1957 and by 1957 the place was looking at definitely old fashioned. People were going to other more interesting parts, including back to London on a constellation aircraft, the governor could easily do this, and Hillview was considered surplus, so the government decided to sell it. Mr. Klein saw the advertisements for the auction and

decided to attend now, in 1957 he was only 56 years old, but he'd been a builder all his life. He'd never married. He was born in Parkes, 1901, and he, he had been, he'd been a reader of Reader's Digest. And in Reader's Digest, he read this article about retirement villages, which was an entirely new concept. It hadn't been talked about before. And he thought, well, this, this is something I could do with Hillview. It's this big place and, and that's what he had in mind.

26:50

Now fast forward to my first meeting with him, which is the actual handover from Mr. Klein to the government. The gift was 1985 but sometime before that, I had a phone call from Mr. Klein, and this is in my job at the Heritage office. Probably they thought, oh, Dennis can handle this. He's always dealing with people outside the building. And he said to me, Mr. McManus, I'm ringing to you about a property called Hillview. I hadn't got a clue about this place, and it wasn't known in my office as well, to my knowledge. And he said, look, I have asked other people, other organisations, organisations, about gifting it, but they haven't been interested, and they probably include things like Apex and Lions Club. I don't know whether he ever approached the National Trust, but no one was interested. But he said I would be interested to talk to you about it. Now, in those days, and in fact, in almost my all my time in heritage, I did a lot of work on weekends, often with a government car, I could get around. And this meant I was pretty busy during the week anyway, and so I went down to see him. It was in winter time, and well, we've been discussing a little bit earlier than this interview. It can be a bit cool here, but the, and of course, I met Mr. Klein, a very short man, little bit hunched, not but, but very, very lively. He, of course, I discovered later, very much, a man interested in books, going back a little bit to the business about the Reader's Digest and the retirement village, he told me almost straight away, well, Dennis, that didn't work out, because I discovered that the people who came here, so it did get underway, they were not interested in the things I was interested in. And he had, he had sort of certain rules about what you could and couldn't discuss but, but he had it in mind that was going to be this, you know, very gentle discussion [laughter] but he but he thought, no, they didn't have those same interests. He, and he put it bluntly to me, he said what they really wanted to know was, where was the nearest RSL Club? But in any event, that didn't happen. The amazing thing, along with this, which I took me a little while to really realize, was that he didn't live in the house at all. He lived in the in the staff wing, commonly called the ADC wing. It was just a wing of four rooms, and that's where he was. That's where he'd spend his time permanently he wasn't in the main house at all. No, he loved that little spot, but, but, here's the but, but he used the kitchen in the old house. So we're talking about, in this case, the Gothic section. This, this large kitchen which had an archetype stove there, but was by this stage electric. And he said, would you like a cup of tea? And I thought, well, this is, and I not too sure who came down with me, it may have been my partner, may have been somebody else, but anyway, these memories I record, I said, That'd be a nice idea. He had this very large aluminum pot, the sort of thing you'd have when you have, you know, 20 or 30 people, and it was on the stove. And of course, I thought, gosh, this tea is a bit strong. And I realized his idea of making tea was to, each day, add another teaspoon of tea to the pot [laughter]. So anyway, very strong tea. By the end of the week, it definitely was strong tea, and by Saturday, it was super strong.

[DM] So that was my first time. The other thing about that visit was it was so cold. And I don't know if you ever had the experience of being inside a house, it's colder than outside, but that was true was it was warmer outside the house than inside. But I did, I did, of course, go over the house and whether I really realized how important it

was at that time, I can't say, but I was a bit blown away with it. And I think what people don't really understand about Hillview is that what a complete complex it was. And to say this, the, the inventory that was done some years later. When I say complete complex, you've got this large garden of which he was developing seven acres, and the history recorded tells more about that design and from Charles Moore time to Mr. Klein's time, when he changed it somewhat, you've got the garden, you've got this house complex, you've got all the furniture. So when Mr. Klein bought the place. He bought the lot, including the chenille bedspreads, and they were still there when I went there, all stock and barrel. Nothing had changed in the cupboards. In the kitchen, there was still Copeland spoke china and cutlery. We're talking about not complete collections, but a lot of stuff there. He never bought that. That was all from the Governor's time, when you went out to the to the outbuildings. Some of the carts were there. The baskets labelled Hillview that took fruit and vegetables back to Government House in Sydney were there.

[JS] I remember the copper pans and copper kettles everywhere, stacks, these huge articles that in standard size house for banquets. Yes, was really impressive. And it was all there like a time warp.

[DM] And there is an inventory that was done in 1992 this is after Mr. Klein died, and there were 1644 items and 266 boxes. So a lot of stuff was put away to get ready for leasing of the property. But it was, it was, it was quite remarkable. In any event, there had to be a form of consideration of this. I did arrange, not long after that visit for, after talking, inside the, what was then still the Department of Planning , about the gift, I did arrange for the, the whole Heritage Council to go. At that time the chairman was Nigel Ashton. And I also invited the Historic Houses Trust, and at that time the chair was Peter Watts. And of course, Peter Watts later had big involvement with garden history, or that time onwards, and also the chair of historic houses trust a very lovely man called Wal [Jack] Ferguson who'd only just stepped down as being Deputy Premier. Very interesting, old Labor politician, very friendly, and I did get to talk to him on that day. But, so it that was an interesting meet to try to, because it wasn't necessarily a foregone conclusion, that the government would accept it. I was hoping they would, because that seemed to me, but just on this point, by the way, of how things were managed, in hindsight, one disappointment to me was that Peter Watts, in the Historic Houses Trust, of course, was already underway, Peter Watts declined any involvement with Hillview. And curiously enough, I think he told me about a view from the government architect, which had described it as a great dump [laughter]. And I thought, well, maybe it's a great, you know, maybe it's a great dump, but it's a heritage dump. This is what heritage is about. This is it. This is this complete thing. So the sad thing is, and, and, of course, the irony from my point of view, is that I did keep in touch all the years with Peter Watts, but things that I knew about, and later they took on a property in the Nowra area where the people had approached me, and a number of other places I put Peter in contact with, the irony for me was that he used to say to me, what's important, from our point of view, is the complete collection. And I thought, my God, could you get a better one Hillview? Hillview was, it just didn't suit him, by the way. His view was that that well in England, there is the is the idea about giving places a life. And so he thought it would, would have a better life as a private hotel.

36:00

When he came, Dennis, to see you had he abandoned the idea of a retirement home completely?

[DM] Oh yes, Mr. Klein, yeah. So that's right, that was long since, and I think we're talking about, so he bought it in 1957, yeah. And really, the retirement was out of the six months. He just had enough. And so, but he was there really by himself all that time.

Yes, till 1990 and he was quite happy there, very happy in doing what he was doing, because he was an avid gardener. Yeah, he had plenty to occupy.

[DM] And on the garden front of course, it interested me, but it wasn't that wasn't my major focus at the time. He told me about the camellias he'd grown. But again, I didn't know much about camellias at that time, and so that's of interest. In any event, the arrangement was that he did, his idea was that he would do, he only had one condition, which is pretty amazing by the way, talked about the people of New South Wales, not, not just the government, he wanted to leave it to the people. And his idea was he'd enjoyed it since 1957 and he wanted to sort of give it back. I thought that was fabulous and really, and people don't, it was a really generous offer. But he also was not entirely stupid about this. So his idea was that he should be able to live there for the rest of his life. And in many ways, it stood of course, there was some burden lifted off him. There were financial burdens about rates and taxes. They weren't necessary anymore. And, but, but, but, he then stayed on as as as caretaker. And he used to call himself that, the caretaker. And in one particular article in the Sydney Morning Herald, he made mention, he will have a bit of a sense of humour, he says the government had taken off him so [laughter]. So, but this is not true anyway, that same article, or perhaps a little bit later, I may be getting them conflated, I did, I did raise the issue about a caretaker for the place, and we had then, we're talking about probably 1987 or so it seems to be the record. It could have been a bit later. People contacted me at the heritage and my memory was that seven lots of people put their hand up, but a couple from Victoria, I did, and I interviewed them all, were Helen and Victor Tatt and they'd been looking after a caravan park, and they came along, and I thought they were terrific. They were they were just the people, down to earth people. They were, they were happy to occupy one of the outbuildings there, which is in the same, in the little courtyard. And they stayed on. Now the good news is, from Mr. Klein's point of view, is not only did they look after the place, but in later years, they looked after him. So until almost the day he died, they were there. So it was smart, so, and they were there right through until the lease period. Now, in terms of when Mr. Klein died in 1990 there was earlier, there was early on the idea about leasing this business, about, of course, giving the place life and so on, not costing the government money. In my own case, the budget we had for the whole state was very small. The place was being administered by the department's, you know, real estate property section. So they were thinking about leasing. But in 1990 and in 1992 I think they tried, it didn't work. And then seven years later, they tried again. They had several people put in tenders of some sort. And finally, a tender was given now that particular couple who came along, it was not a happy period, from my point of view. And again, that has been written up in the notes that will be attached to this oral history. But it was and, and the party in question stayed on there until the end of last year, which is 2024 when it became the King's Trust. So, so that and I have written up the the lessons from that about the leasing of places,

Yes, we've attached those too.

[DM] Exactly, right. But in terms of personal response, it did affect me quite strongly, because I thought, compared to this, the generous character of Mr. Klein and how he'd given the gift this wasn't really being

properly respected and, and one would hope that would never happen again. And of course, in relation to Hillview, it seems like it's going to have a happier future, but it's it is a lesson about and how government should be stronger about these things and take on the public interest and not and not the private interest involved. And we've had other issues, including here, including here the Jail at Berima, which has been sold privately, not with good outcomes.

[JS] That leads in, mentioning the jail in Berrima, because the Highlands School of Horticulture, which was a little operation that that I began with a few other locals in Southern Highlands, namely Margaret Hahn, Margaret Browne, Nick Bray, there are a few of us, and Judy Fakes a well- known arborist in the area. We thought there was a need for some garden classes, and that I had known Hillview from way, way back when I'd first met Dennis, that this fabulous property was there, and that clicked as me, as a possible venue to hold these classes, and not only just hold classes, but it provided the facilities that the horticulture and agriculture students could work on, on a real life project. Because when I first went to Hillview, I was absolutely blown away by the fabulous aged trees, the range of trees, you know, oaks and elms and all sorts of conifers. It was fabulous. And then you arrived on that site, climbing to the top of the hill with a panoramic vista all the way around. It was breathtaking. And

Superb.

[JS] Oh, absolutely. And for a lot of these students who were coming from Sydney suburbs just to visit a site like that, would open their eyes to all sorts of possibilities. So that's what we did. We were running classes there, and were taking TAFE students, principally from Wollongong TAFE and Padstow TAFE, to do their practical work in the grounds. So it was a fabulous facility. And I thought, gee, as a long term thing, this would be a wonderful thing to be able to do. Well, here we are now. We've entered this era where the King's Trust has taken it over and they're going to be doing that very sort of thing.

Well yes, let's keep our fingers and toes crossed. Yeah, it all comes when you first went to that garden, John, could you see any of Charles Moore's original planning, because he was the director of the botanic gardens at the time, were there, and he actually set out the original landscape. Was there much of that left when you visited, or had?

44:12

[JS] I would have to say it didn't stand out to me. I mean, the driveway, the drive approach to Hillview, was an avenue of elms, and they were struggling. They really were in poor condition, and it was questionable whether they should even be replaced. And apart from that, no, the only thing I would see as an indicative of Charles Moore was this wonderful collection of big English type trees, yes, particularly the oaks, a wonderful range of oak trees.

Well there was a few people, yourself included from the Australian Garden History Society, Southern Highlands Branch, Nicholas Bray and Jim Hopkins.

[JS] Yes, that's right.

And you all collaborated together. We did, and you did, a lot of work out there. Yes, tell us a little bit about …

[JS] Well we did ,when we're talking about Berrima Correctional Center a little moment ago, that was an interesting. Okay, the Garden History Society were interested in helping out with the maintenance and provide opportunity for students to come and work there too. But in the meantime, before that could be organised, we had working bees with volunteers in the community to come and do a bit of work there, and someone came up with the suggestion that maybe the inmates of Berrima Correctional Center would be interested to come and help you. And we did. We had several occasions where Nick Bray and myself were there with these guys that came out very enthusiastically to do whatever was needed in the grounds. Mind you, these fellows were not the baddies. They were not the sort of criminals you'd have to be wary of if you put a shovel or a pick in their hands. These were guys that had been caught for embezzlement and fraud. And you know, the crimes that aren't nasty, I would say so[laughter]. They were a lovely bunch of people. And we had these wonderful days where we would go out, they would all rock up, maybe 20 of them, and we'd work hard in the garden, planting more trees, pruning trees, weeding, making tree guards, big wire guards to protect the new planting.

Is that from the one of the challenges, either rabbits or kangaroos?

[JS] Yeah, more likely sheep or cattle that are roaming because we didn't want to have our work destroyed in a short time. Yeah, so we're doing that sort of work. Mind you, lunchtime would come, and on the first day, I would open up my bread roll and banana as my lunch ,and and they would light up the barbecue and they would have this fabulous fillet steak [laughter]. Absolutely, no wonder they look forward to it each day, because that was standard fare. But anyway, that's an aside.

Were you lecturing at the time at TAFE?

[JS] I was, yeah, I'd had a whole history, although I didn't like high school teaching, I found I love teaching horticulture and landscape design, so I'd been working at the Ryde School of Horticulture for a number of years, and subsequently, other places. I taught at the Mitchell College of Advanced Education as an external Lecturer in landscape design, and I also worked at Sydney University, again as an assistant to Alan Corey, who was teaching architecture students, and I worked as his tutor in the landscape subject. And at New South Wales Uni, I was working out there for quite a number of years with landscape architecture students. So I loved that aspect of it. And here was a good opportunity.

Was there a formal Conservation Plan drawn up for the gardens.

[JS] There wasn't, to my knowledge, a formal plan, but there were certainly lots of discussions as to what we should do. The main challenge that I think we faced was water. There was never a good water supply at the property. And Mr. Klein, I subsequently read in the report that Sally Darling did, said that he didn't like to put much water on plants. He'd watered them once when he planted them and said, well, you're on your own legs now.

[DM] He told me the same.

[JS] Yeah, I didn't realize that. But anyway, water was not plentiful, and although Mr. Klein was aging and becoming more frail, he didn't have any involvement in the garden that we were doing or the planting that we were doing. So we had to keep lack of water in mind as an issue, and it did mean that new plantings became a huge challenge for everyone to go back weekends, yeah, just try and keep things afloat when it was drought.

But the one thing with the highlands, it's either floods or droughts.

[JS] Absolutely, they're extremes, and especially at Hillview there, it's a very exposed position, so the winds dry the place out as you go up the hill to the top areas, it's very difficult conditions, cold blasts in winter and in summer of you know, the winds come from a different direction, it's still drying it out. And so mulching was a very big thing to try and get plants to survive. But we battled through. Although we didn't do a conservation plan as such for the garden, we did design what I thought was an interesting tree walk so that on some of the open days that we had, people could of their own accord, and with just notes that we gave them, walk at their own pace.

I have a copy.

Oh, right I'd like to have a look at that again. Yeah, and that was a significant collection of trees that people might not have seen anywhere else, and especially the students from places like Padstow in Sydney would never see any of those trees. It lifted their sights, and they experienced something that was quite foreign to what they were used to.

The Australian Garden History Society, Southern Highlands Branch, who were very involved used to do a lot to raise money for the tree planting or arborist, this was back in about '93. Can you tell me a little bit about how that worked; your impressions?

51:00

[JS] Well, what we were trying to do was to make the place more manageable, although we didn't have a conservation plan as such, instead of having camellias dotted all around the place at wide spacings, we felt if you could aggregate them into a number of areas. So that was one of the main things we were doing, was grouping plants together with similar needs, and that helped reduce the watering that was needed and the mulching and all of that. But it wasn't easy. I, when I first went to Hillview, which was way, way back not long after, in the 19 late 60s, we, Dennis and I actually went to Hillview, and because I'd been there as a kid with my parents on an open day that people were able to go and look at the grounds of Hillview. And I discovered Mr. Klein was an avid gardener of dahlias, and I was interested in dahlias also.

And made a come back

[JS] Yeah, it's quite extraordinary. And so there were these big beds of dahlias everywhere. But of course, they were also scattered, like the camellias were, and they were difficult to keep going. Yes, and I don't know whether you'd say dahlias are a significant part of the plan of Hillview now at all.

[DM] Yeah, I'm not sure.

No, I don't know that there's particularly much garden left. No, we were there a few years back for garden history, yes, Christmas function there.

[DM] Yes,

And even the rose beds, least of all you have any roses.

[JS] Well, we had to replant that whole rose bed at one stage.

Very exposed amongst the [indistinct word] stone. Yes, in that formal …

[JS] That's right.

Victorian way.

[JS] Yep, I mean, it was a significant rose bed there, and that was something you wouldn't want to change.

[DM] Yes, because, yeah, by the way, with these open days, and they were typically run for Rotary, Rotary or Apex or Lions Club, I've forgotten which one it was now for Mr. Klein, so for charity, but he, he, he also had notes, which I did see years ago about the house. So the house would be opened as well, which would be, would have been quite interesting for people to see, as well as the garden and his notes. His notes include the instruction about telling people about the house, that, when in doubt, just make it up, it's always more interesting. Which, again, tells you something about his sense of humour.

[JS] True.

I think that the Garden History only ever had one grant for about $7500.

[JS] That could well be right. I cannot recall that, but it wasn't a lot.

And, but then they made incredible donations from the branch something like $10,000.

[JS] Very generous.

[DM] Yes.

[JS] Arborist work, extra new plantings. The arborist work was terribly important because the trees were the significant feature of the site, in my view, and a lot of them had been overcrowded by being planted too close together, and they needed thinning or significant tree work [indistinct chatter]. Yes, that's right. So you know that was the, probably the most useful part for the student's point of view, is how to manage aging trees. Yes, and they could learn those skills, and they were climbing, doing the whole shebang

They were given, you know, one of the greatest privileges, really, for a student, to be able to work on a governor's residence,

[JS] Absolutely

because there's a lot of history.

[JS] Yes, that's right.

Did you have a favourite space in the garden or on the site?

[JS] I just love the top. When you work your way up, go up that long, long driveway, and you come to the complex of buildings, and then you go around the buildings, and keep going through, the what was almost a paddock, then you see this incredible vista of the farms all around. And to me, that was the most significant part of the site.

[DM] Yeah, I think, well, for me, the place is always the whole ensemble. I don't, you know, sort of dissect it too much, but John's right, and that's view to the south, you know, which is the, which is the major view, and the view you would have got from, you know, really, where the dining room area was, yes, is the important one .Just going back a step, that business about hearing John talk about a Garden History Society, isn't it amazing that we reflect here's a government property and there's all this underpinning and money coming from, not from the government sector, no. And in my case, as I said, the government wallet wasn't big enough for that. It's ironic. So it does confirm that idea, and this happened to me, really, in a sense, hundreds of times in my time in the heritage office, the idea about saying what will hold the property till something comes along? I mean, in the case of Hillview, we've got the King's Trust. So it's, it is all come, you know, you know, all these years later, 40 years later. But there is something to be said for that. People get down about things. And I think, well, if you don't have the property, if you don't look after it in the meantime, you haven't got that choice later. And I did think right from early on that okay, thinking about what Peter Watts had to say and so on, that's all very well, but in years to come, this place will have a greater significance. And this happened to me about things like bridges and, you know, courthouses and stuff along the way. So it wasn't just Hillview, but it's curious, and typically, of course, it relies on volunteers. And John's given a very good example of this.

Well, think that the Southern Highlands branch was very generous in not only the manpower, but the expertise within your committee too.

[JS] With we were lovely.

Sally Darling. Her ability to write and communicate with the department,

[JS] I think she was excellent, really.

watching the volunteers and what can we do without tripping on too many toes and keeping it, with Nicholas Brays experience in Wisley and places overseas.

[JS] He was such a supportive person.

So he's a young man…

[JS] yep,

with interest in heritage and the garden of heritage, and coming from the UK, accepted the significance of it …

[JS] That's right, knowing those sorts of properties,

things, and I'm not sure about Jim Hoskins background, but he was a

58:00

[JS] Yes, well he was a designer. Well, he probably still is, I've lost touch, with Jim. I really don't know, but…

But these are names that are mentioned time and time again, yeah, for the work that they're doing over nearly a decade.

[JS] Yes, that's right. And it was fortunate that it was, kept it going, yes. Otherwise it could have been gone into oblivion.

Could have been lost to deterioration, yeah. And I mean, the other significant thing too, which some people don't know is that at Moss Vale Railway Station, there's the governor's rooms, for the governor getting on the train, able to meet great people then on his way up to Hillview. And then there were some of these as well the next- door property, yes, with the back gate for those people that needed to see the governor so without anyone knowing [laughter]

[DM] Correct

It is a significant property within the highlands. And I think that probably that property the governor coming here bought a lot of the higher society of Sydney into the highlands

[JS] Yes Absolutely, was a draw card. Definitely.

[DM] Yeah, that's right. And talking about that again, the suite of things they said that I used to mention this thing in Moss Vale, by the way, the first governor's residence was back at Mittagong, and which is a big railway station, and then Moss Vale, the government wanted to have closer to Hillview. So they, they did provide that accommodation for him, and a carriage was there permanently. So all of that was there, by the way, in terms of volunteers, I'd just like to mention again, the caretakers, Helen and Victor Tatt, they were, as I said, wonderful people. But can you believe and they were there the whole time that Garden History was there as well. Probably remember them. And can you believe that they were unpaid caretakers? Can you imagine that happening nowadays?

No

[DM] They took it on.

[JS] They did, that's right, that was the basis. All they had was what free accommodation, basically.

1:00:00

[DM] And again, that related to the money I had. I didn't have any money to spend on it. We did money on the roof, but yeah, so they were wonderful. Yes, they looked after the place very well. Yeah.

[JS] And Helen would help out in getting the lunches and things together when we had an open day, you know.

How many people would turn up for the open days.

[JS] I don't know what the sums were, but several 100. It was quite incredible.

Looking at the Treasury auditing and things, it seems to be enough money coming out of two or three open days a year, yes, to be able to support all of the work that you were doing, and doing the conservation and maintaining the garden. Yeah, congratulations to all the people that were involved.

[JS] And commitment,

It was a team effort really wasn't it, a huge number of people.

[JS] Big, a big commitment, yeah.

Because as you said, before you plan to keep it, you've got to keep going every Saturday to keep it watered.

[JS] That's exactly right. Yeah, up and running.

That was very good. We've touched briefly on the 1990s and we'll probably leave that now, because we've already touched briefly on them. We now know that in 2024 Margaret Bettridge was up there, and Chris at one stage, before he passed away during the audits on all the furnishings of Hillview. And we were wondering, what the heavens are they up to now? And of course, then the announcement came at the end of last year, when the King was in Australia, the Kings Foundation Australia was going to take over the lease again of the property, and the property was to be restored, become a little bit like Dumfries, and become a permanent base and developed as a landmark, cultural hub. And so with all the work that you've put in to Hillview over that time, how are you feeling about this decision? I, for one, I don't think it can have a better outcome. I think it's just superb, because that's its strength. It's got so much to offer. The size of the property, the fact that it can be run as a working farm. Yes, it's got all of the facilities that you're doing the acreage …

[DM] It's still got the acreage, 150 acres, has never been changed. Yes, which is wonderful and, and you know these kids, I call them kids, but they're often teenagers that, if only now in the city life, they have an opportunity here where they possibly will live in, do a course, live in, learn a particular craft or a trade. And I mean even the timber furnishings, they were beautiful, the carvings and all the, oh, yes, there's quite significant.

[JS] Yes, it's just and then there's the gardens. I would never have dreamt that it could have this outcome. I just think it's just remarkable. When Dennis sent me an email, when it was first, I thought, I don't believe this.

[DM] It was out of the blue for me, too. I think, I mean, obviously the office, the Heritage Office, knew about this for some time, and told me later they couldn't tell me anything, but knew about, you know, my long involvement with the place. So I got, it was a Tuesday morning I think, I got the British press release. I think it took about three days for anything to be said in the, and I think one of the first one was the local media here, by the way, with particular me, I've always been interested in what Charles, Prince of Wales, had to say about the environment and gardening. And in 2008 the local garden society that I was, I became president of the year afterwards.

That was the Highlands Garden Society.

[DM] That's right, Prince Charles invited us to Highgrove. So we went there. We went there. So, here's, this is sort of, you know, this is a big thing for me, and the interest, and, of course, his interest generally. And I'm told these across the Commonwealth, there are 15 other trusts like this. I don't know. I haven't looked up where they are, no but I assume they might be in Canada or places like that. So I don't know. Just so it is interesting and, and hopefully that will be a good thing, but we'll wait to see. I don't know any of the details, apart from what's been released to the media, they have no had no involvement with them at this time.

I haven't had any correspondence returned, though. I have sent down the original copies of the journals where Sally's writings were in, and then Stuart Read's writings for the conference, in I think 2006, and he because it was one of the optional events, you know.

[JS] A tour.

That was good. We do have a little bit of time. And I should mention to John that not only were you a gardener, you've been you've published books on gardening, you've been a teacher, you've been on the television, written for the magazine.

[JS] A hotchpotch, really

Is there any of those areas that you would like to expand on.

[JS] Well, I've always enjoyed writing, and I just sort of fell into that when, it all started off with Burke's Backyard came on television, and someone heard that they were looking for a presenter, and one of my students apparently dobbed me in and said, oh, he might, might be interested. I think he's taking the excursions that he takes us on, the sort of thing that I could be doing, you see. Anyway, they got in touch, Channel Nine came to my property, out at Robertson and had a look around, and they said we'd like to just give you a little dry run and see what you can say about this sort of thing. So I just did the sort of thing that I normally do with the students, and they apparently really liked it. So that's how I started. And then, of course, one thing leads to another. Once you get involved with a programme like that, then magazines will approach you and ask, can you write for the magazine? So the Today Show, wasn't it? Yeah, I went from only did Burke's Back, well, to be honest, only did Burke's, Burke's Backyard for a year, because at the end of the year, one of the cameramen said to me, said, if you want any more work like this, apart from what you're doing now with Don Burke, forget about doing it here, because he doesn't want you to be a rival. [laughter]

Oh, I see.

[JS] So that was the irony of it. But then there's the Today Show on Channel Nine. They asked me if I would do the morning programme, just a little garden segment each week, and I enjoyed doing that. And, and then there was magazine work, you know, and Women's Day magazine followed on. So one thing leads to another. That's how it is. It's a bit incestuous, or this industry, and I must say, I don't like it. [laughter] It's a plastic industry, you know, and you'd go to a site and you'd be building something, and of course, you'd make it look super simple. And they tell the viewers, you know, you can do this to the weekend. You can do it in two or three hours. And behind the scenes, there are all these people scurrying around, including me, working like a slave, trying to dig a hole big enough to plant the tree. You know, it's not what you see. But anyway, I enjoyed it for when I did it, but I wouldn't want to continue doing it , that sort of work.

Oh yes and then you, then you were busy writing your books at one stage.

1:08:30

[JS] I've done a few books. That was my first one. I wanted, the yeah from, from my teaching days with students, I thought that was what they needed, so I wrote this little thing called Sunshine and Shade: Change in the Garden, that was back in 1992. and then it led to Steep and Sloping Gardens ,1996 I did one for the local district here, for the Robertson Environment Protection Society called the Wingecarribee Tree Book that was in 96. I

worked with Angus Stewart doing a little book from Women's Weekly called Colour in the Garden. Ah, 1998 I did a revision of a book published by the Victorian Department of Agriculture called the Garden Advisor,

That was a very popular…

[JS] That was very popular, just as it so happens, I only just revised it and added a few extra chapters that I thought were relevant. And then I happened to stumble upon frangipanis on Magnetic Island. I thought, oh, I don't know much about them, but I'm overwhelmed by them here, and I got so enthusiastic about them that I ended up writing a book on them, and it's the, I think the only book that's ever been written in Australia on frangipanis, and it's become well known in the frangipani circle. I did that jointly with Linda Ross, of the Ross family, Graham and Sandra Ross, by the way, she was a student at New South Wales uni when I was tutoring there. So I got to know her then. That was the connection. She said she was a frangipani tragic [laughter] and and then Lorna Rose, who was a wonderful photographer for many garden publications. She was a student of mine at Ryde School of Horticulture. She was doing her Diploma in Horticulture. She said, I'm mad on them too. And we said, well, we don't know any books about them. Why don't we get together and see if we can put something together, which is what we did. So that's how that happened.

And very popular. And were you involved in the Australian Native Plant Society?

[JS] I have been, even not, not really. No. This just the great irony of it all is that the style of garden that was promoted with Australian bush gardens was work with your environment, whatever native plant you've got, leave them. Work around them, incorporate them in your garden. Get rid of your lawn. Don't have any lawn at all, because lawn is labour. Means labour. You've got a magnificent lawn we're looking at now, but it's hard work. I know that you've got to water it to keep it green, fertilize it, all of that sort of thing. But Betty Maloney said, get rid of all your lawn. And I thought, oh, that sounds good to me too. Probably one of the reasons I wasn't so keen on lawn is that when school holidays arrived in our household, when I was growing up, my father would say, it's time to weed the lawn [laughter]. I would be given a kitchen fork, and he would have one too, and we would have to weed our suburban lawn with a kitchen fork. And we did that one holiday after another. No wonder I hated it [laughter].

[DM] Jolly good story.

[JS] But the other side of the of the bush garden was if, if a limb or branch falls down off a tree in a storm, you simply break it all up and scatter it as mulch. Yes, makes a lot of sense in a bush garden. But now, of course, the great irony is, where I live, I'm in a highly fire prone area, and mulch is frowned upon, yes. And you know, Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve, 2019.

Yes?

[JS] Was a tornado really a fire tornado went wiped everything out miraculously, where we live, our little peninsula escaped, but it's a miracle that it did. But now I'm I don't have any wood mulch anywhere in the

garden. It's too risky, because of all the all the bush around I've got stone mulch. Yes, she did, that's fine, but you certainly wouldn't use brush chip mulch of any sort under the current thinking.

[DM] Yes.

And putting your scientific hat on, and did you, were you looking at sustainable plants in those spots? Because we know that natives, you know, oil content.

[JS] That's exactly right. Well, even up at Robertson, where I was living previously at Mount Murray in the Highlands rainforest country, in the big drought, the native trees, the rainforest trees were shedding their leaves, and there was a great big mulch of fallen leaves. And so they're almost as bad as, as the eucalypts. But I had read that, well, I had actually seen it. I had gone down to Victoria when the big fires in was it in the 1960s I can't tell you the year now, exactly, but anyway, major fire. And I thought, all right, I'm going to go down and have a look at the aftermath of that fire. And what I found up at Mount Macedon, around that area, beautiful old weatherboard homes that were surrounded by aged deciduous trees, English trees, oaks, elms, ash, maples, all of that sort of thing. Some of those homes were completely untouched. The fire jumped over them. Oh, and they provided the windbreak. The trees acted as a buffer to the to the flames and to the direction of the winds. The wind flow over the top took the fire and the embers with it, and so as an aftermath of that fire, I thought this is incredible. That that planting can actually protect a garden or a house from fire. And of course, it's been shown time and time again since I've done research. There was a case in the big fire in 2019 - 20 down at Brogo on the south, far south coast. There was a couple who had a little mud brick cottage in the middle of a vast area of native bush, but, next to that cottage, around their house, there was a huge old mulberry tree. Now, when the fire went through, after everything, the embers had died down, and everyone was allowed to go back to their property. They thought, well, we're going to return to a burnt out nothing. They came back, their little house was untouched. Everything around was burnt to ash, except the little house and the mulberry tree, and they claim that the mulberry tree canopy actually protected that house, because it's now been shown that mulberries are trees that have a high moisture content in the leaves, and they're great fire retardant,

and the weed that everyone just likes, agapanthus.

[JS] Agapanthus is one of the best plants in a fire prone area. Yes, there's no doubt about that.

Lay it down, flat planes, if you've got to roll them, it slows down…

[JS] Absolutely.

[DM] So John has written about this, and I write a piece in the local garden society each month, and I've commented on as well. And our own house at Kangaloon has, has this philosophy on the council land down the front and elsewhere, of course, there are eucalypts, but around our place are all the deciduous trees. And, of course, deciduous trees, this sort of goes counter to the idea about, you know, planting natives, and you get people completely extreme about this and don't listen to reason, is that having near the house, in that case, not so near the house, of course they're going to, they do allow the sunshine in winter, so it's got all those benefits.

But I do think if there was a fire, we probably would have some protection. And John's right, this business about the moisture take up of the deciduous trees in summer, the bush fire season. So more needs to be said about that. But of course, there will be the disbelievers and people that we talk about, you know, sustainability and so on. Well, they're not. They don't know what they're talking about, really. They just got this fixation about Australian natives will fix us all. And they try

[JS] We've lost, we've really lost the direction. Because if we are the most flammable country on this earth because of the eucalypts. They're the most flammable trees on earth, and they're all over the place. So we, even though they're wonderful trees, I love eucalypts, we can't deny the fact that they're magnets for bush fire and and I was interested to read, just the other day that Jackie French, who everyone would know in her writing, she, and I've been to her wonderful garden, she said. You need to have these fire retardant species around your house. She has got agapanthus planted in swathes, and she's got the same deciduous trees we're just talking about around and she has native plants as well, but, but you must have ,and be realistic that we're in this fire prone country.

Do you see that there's that there's climate change, or climate changing?

[JS] Well, there's probably always been changing climates, but at the moment, we're going through a period where it's rapid change. It's accelerated change because of the way we live and manage the land. So it's inevitable that it's going to be with us forever more, and we just have to adapt as best we can.

[DM] Yes but when we adapt, we should be sensible. That's right, and we just shouldn't go along these lines. And they're not, they're not proven to be true. And look at science, yeah, some of the science, and this thing John's been saying about deciduous trees, I think what convinced me was a photograph, I don't if you told me about from a Western Australian magazine, which I've used locally too, about this fire that's come across the side of the hill in Western Australia, and you can see the house surrounded by the city street has been protected. Everything else is completely

[JS} It's remarkable. And in America and China now, I've since discovered they're planting huge buffers, wind and flame buffers in a way that might carry potential you know, disasters.

Are they using the maples?

1:20:10

[JS] Maples are okay, yes, they're good, but there are others that are even better, but they're doing them on a grand scale. The government's doing them in both America and China, why aren't we doing something like that in Australia? No one has taken it on board. The Victorian Fire Authority know very well that because of their experiences and they have, they wrote documents ages ago, maybe 20 years ago, that it does actually help if you plant these things. But why aren't they happening on a grand scale?

Maybe the general public don't know enough about it.

[JS] Yeah, think so. And of course, it seems it's looked upon as being patriotic if you only plant Australian native plants, and you're not patriotic if you don't,

Is there anything that way that you haven't, that we haven't covered in? Did you want to say

[DM] One thing you were going to speak about were influences?

Well, yes, yeah, that's right.

[DM] And just to touch on that briefly, so far as the gardens are concerned, I'd say it was my father, probably more than my mother, that was interested in gardening. And when I was a kid, it was just automatic. We had at Prospect. We had a couple of acres there. Dad ran a market garden for a little while, as well as his main job, which wasn't terribly successful, I might say the market garden was always difficult. But he was, and he was keen on trees. He planted trees and shrubs. He wasn't, we had flowers, but not so many flowers. So that was a big influence for me. And in terms of heritage, you do wonder where that comes from. I remember Clive Lucas saying once he was probably a heritage architect from age 10 or something. Well, it's, and I did have this interest, and it was partly Prospect was, of course, quite historically, when you're growing up, you don't think about these things. You don't realize how special it is, that's right. But things like Parramatta was full of heritage buildings, and Hawkesbury. As a teenager, I used to go with a friend out to Windsor and Richmond, see all these places. And I think I went the first heritage building I ever went into in terms of residency was Hamilton cottage at Parramatta. And I think that really did sort of influence me. And that's why I say to people nowadays, when you know, the National Trust, when I first was in heritage, they had about 85 properties. They're down to 38 they're not interested in sort of taking on new stuff. They always tell you all the problems they've got, but unless you've got some house museums and other buildings accessible to the public, showing how things are, and we gloriously have several here.

And this is the reality.

[DM] That's right to show children that's right. Now, I'm not going to get a response from an eight year old straight away about oh, well, no. This is going to sound, but it's in there, it's in their mindset that they know what this place looks like. So those sorts of things influenced me, and curiously enough, I looked it up this morning. Hamilton College is still going. It's run by the Historical Society. It's probably one of the oldest sort of house museums in Australia that there would be others, but, and just think about the influence it's had on, on kids like me, who went there.

[JS] That’s true. You reminded me, when our children were quite young, we used to drag them off to open days at different historic houses and properties. And of course, I loved it, and my wife did too, but our kids hated it, so we discovered, because they're not allowed to touch this, don't go there. Oh, don't do that, you know, stay in line, and they learn to have a dislike for anything old and heritage. Fortunately, they've gotten over it now, but that environment did not encourage them to be interested in historic things. I think that's

I think that's one of the lovely things at Harpers Cottage, go up to one of the bedrooms. There's the dolls and the toys, yes, and the children are all encouraged to try pick up the rag dolls, play with the top…

[DM] Yeah.

[JS] Well, that's the difference between the Historic Houses Trust.

The first place to do that, perhaps not first, but it's the one I know about is Elizabeth farm, where they decided and bring school groups through, kids can jump on the beds because nothing, very few of the bits of furniture there were original,

[JS] Yeah.

[DM] So they'd had these recreated items, and they had the kitchen going, you know, evening summer,

[JS] Yeah.

[DM] fire would be going. That was a great idea, but the idea that kids could sit on things, otherwise it's as John says, it's a real turnoff.

[JS] Yeah, it's a shame.

What about your gardening side you were saying your father sort of…

[JS] I don't have that approach. I'm not a perfectionist,

[DM] But you've got gardening back to your grandfather.

[JS] Yeah, I discovered that, yeah, just it so happened that my Grandfather's father was a grower in Somerset in England, of violets these, these were the days when he needed people [indistinct few words] yeah, yeah. so, and I went there, and I visited their house, which was still there, and the glass house was in the, big glass house, in their backyard of a terrace house it was, and, and that's where he he left his job early, apparently, to grow violets.

So he had, like, a little nursery business?

[JS] Yeah, commercial business.

[DM] I think you showed me, you had a sign.

[JS] There's a photograph, actually, in the little book, Sunshine and Shade, of him in the garden doing that, yeah. So it was wonderful to discover that, like no one had told me, that, I stumbled upon it.

I remember they used to grow lavender in Turramurra,

[JS] Right, yeah.

And they were the posies, for Mark Foys.

[DM] Yes.

[JS] Right? Lovely roses and perfumes. So, yeah, my, my, well, it must have a gene going back somewhere. [laughter]

[DM] My mother used to say about my father that he should have had a nursery, you know. But one of these things that never quite happened. Now, by the way, my father was a great one for as people were in those days, without much money, cuttings and clippings.

[JS] Yeah.

[DM] And a rather naughty story is that he would go with my grandmother, he used to always sort of wear a [indistinct words]

[JS] Oh, I've heard of this one.

[DM] That's once or twice go to the open gardens, go into the botanical gardens, probably in Orange and Bathurst, and they can come out with a few clippings. [laughter] That's right, just one or two hidden by my grandmother.

John and Dennis, thank you very much for doing this oral history, and thank you for your contribution in protecting and help save Hillview, very significant property for, I feel, the legacy of our children and grandchildren, and it's very important that they actually know these places and how people lived that time. And it wasn't that easy. No, they didn't have double glazing and under floor heating, and that they still survived very well. They did, but so some additional documents to sit with his transcript from Dennis, his biological notes the National Trust, Southern Cross branch newsletter, August 2010 "Hillview, former [NSW] Governor's hill station retreat at Sutton Forest, A sorry lesson in[the] leasing of a heritage property" with a range of thoughts, "Thoughts in relation to management of Government owned heritage properties" 5th of August, 2012. A Financial Review article, 8th of December, 2023, "Most exclusive highland estate is to join prestige market". And then, of course, in 22 October '24, King Charles III launches his vision for the King's Foundation, and the first property in Australia is to be Hillview. And we have from John, your biological, your biographical notes. Did you have any photos or anything about any of the [indistinct word] that…

[JS] I wish I did, but I don't have a single photo

[DM] And I don't either. No.

And then I've managed to squirrel it away a volume 7, the 2nd of September, 1995, Australia Garden History Journal the Hillview Sutton Forest by Sally Darling,

[JS] Very good.

The pamphlet on the Hillview Sutton Forest walk ["The Tree Walk"], Did you draw that up, John?

[JS] Yeah.

Excellent. The 2008 ["From Wilderness to Pleasure Ground"] Bushland. AGHS conference notes by Stuart Read, I've got a date unconfirmed, but the 2009 "Appointment with Yesterday, Discover [and Enjoy] Hillview" a project from the Rotary [Club of West Wollongong]. Do you remember that? And September 24-25 2011 the weekend edition [of the Sydney Morning Herald] had quite an article on "Governor's Retreat Reborn after Trials of Restoration", [by Steve Meacham] which Dennis has documented as well. I've got some notes by Fran Turland, [from the minutes of AGHS Southern Highlands Branch "Hillview Project dating from 1995-1999 29 September 2013], "Garden Jottings', Highlands [Garden Society newsletter] that you wrote Dennis in 2024, Bud Townsend's newsletter for AGHS Southern Highlands Branch in November 2024 as well, both as a result of King's announcement, I also have a 1975 book called "Hillview" by Mary Roach and 1986 Berrima District Historical Society publication number 5 about Hillview ['Hillview, Country Home of the Governors of NSW' by Richard C Ralph]

[DM] Just on that, by the way, Mary Roach was, I think, the wife of Dr Roach, who was, who was Mr. Klien's doctor. Oh, yes. Okay,

So that makes sense, yes. And then, of course, we've got that marvellous "Gardens of the Southern Highlands, 1828 -1988" [by Jane Cavanough, Anthea Prell and Tim North, 1988] that Tim North was involved with, yes. So we keep those booklets right handy as well, right? Excellent.
Is there anything else you'd like to make? That's pretty good, well, thank you very much for your time.

[JS] Thank you very much.

Interview finishes 1 hour 30 minutes 49 seconds