

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Southern Highlands Branch



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INTERVIEWEE: **MR BUD TOWNSING**
INTERVIEWER: HEATHER MCINTYRE
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MR BUD TOWNSING, AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY,
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SEPTEMBER 2025 BY HEATHER MCINTYRE.

There have been some minor changes to this transcript to improve clarity and accuracy.

0.00

This is an interview with Heather McIntyre, interviewer and Bud Townsing, interviewee. The interview is intended to cover the activities Bud has undertaken in the areas of heritage and conservation over many years, with a focus on his roles involving the Australian Garden History Society, but not limited to this. Bud brings many skills to these activities, including his expertise in photography, research, writing, publication and creating exhibitions. The interview aims to cover some of the influences, motivations for and development of these domains. Bud Townsing is speaking with me, Heather McIntyre for the Australian Garden History Society, Oral History National Collection.

Bud, would you please state your name for the recording?

This is the voice of Bud Townsing, who has signed the consent form for AGHS.

Thank you.

To start the interview, Bud, we usually like to find out a little bit about you, maybe some biographical details. Could you please tell us a bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

I was born in Oakleigh, Victoria in 1945, 4 of March, and my mum and dad met in Victoria. My dad was a Western Australian, and he met my mum when he was doing his war service. They had a whirlwind romance, and two children were born in quick succession, my sister Peta, who was born in 1943, late in 1943, and I was born in 1945. We were a close family, and we kids were 14 months apart, and I have a later brother, Glen, who came along 10 years later.

Right. And did your family then move back to Western Australia.

At the end of the war. Talking 1945 my dad had three job choices. He could have gone to Japan as part of the occupation forces, as a lieutenant colonel, the papers had come through, so he could have finished his military career that way, or he had a job offer from Western Australia, from the Public Service Commissioner, where he'd worked before, prior to the war, and the third one, I only found out recently, he had the opportunity to be the head, the administrative head of the Liberal Party in Victoria [laughter].. And life, life would have been very much different if he'd taken that last option.

it would have, wouldn't it?

So the story is, in 1945 we shifted to Western Australia, to a house in Cottesloe. First, it's in Peter Cuffley's book of houses of the 40s and 50s [Australian Houses of the 40s and 50s]. It was the first Housing Commission house built after the Second World War in Western Australia. And it must have been part of the package to attract my dad to go there, I suppose.

Australian Garden History Society
Bud Townsing

And did you stay long in that house?

No, we didn't. We moved to Mount Hawthorne, which I think was to look after my grandfather, Joseph, who was 80. My grandmother, who I never met, she died same year I was born. So we moved. We moved to Mount Hawthorne, to Joseph's house, and looked after him until he passed away, and my parents then built a house in Menorah. It's now called Menorah. Always used to be called Mount Lawley, so I tend to switch from one to the other. They built a house in Menorah at 22 Rodham Street, which is also featured in Peter Cuffley's book of houses of the 40s and 50s, with a shot of the dreaded Vauxhall parked in the driveway of a brand new 22 Robin Street, which is still our family home, actually, because my daughter owns it, she and her husband, so she and her children are the fifth generation of our family to have lived in that house.

That's amazing. And you said you were a close family. What was life like when you were a child over there in Western Australia?

05:06

It was in Mount Hawthorne. I think it was the, we've had the covid era. Back then it was, it was, it's gone out of my head. Back then it was polio, and for which there wasn't a vaccine. And my mum was afraid of us, us kids, the parents getting polio, so we basically lived in isolation for a couple of years. I can't really remember that, that far back, apart from the fact we were living in isolation. And my sister, we'll call her opinionated. There's nothing wrong with being opinionated. We developed our own language. So we had, we had our own language and words. Only, Kenneth, my father was, could understand our particular language and us kids. But we, because we lived in isolation, we actually, we, we developed her own language, and my sister didn't speak spoken English till about the age of six, or something like that. So it was a result of us kids living in isolation.

Was this to have a conversation between the siblings, rather than your parents being involved? Or you said your dad picked it up? Was this to try and keep your conversations away from the understanding of your parents that you developed this language?

No, my dad could understand it. His name was, it's the only word I can remember, stomach follow [indistinct], of all names, which we later found out meant sour grapes, which we thought was appropriate and quite funny. Apparently we could converse with him in our in our own, in our own language. And my dad was a great storyteller. So yeah, he may well have been a party to this development of our own language

And it led to you having a name as well, I think didn't it, in this language?

Well, Bud is my nickname, and we can thank Peta for that. And it's a corruption of brother. So, so it's, yeah, it was her. It was her name for brother that became Bud. And Bud was always my family name, I was named after Ronald, who was Franny's, my mum's, brother. Ron died in an aircraft training accident in World War II in the Rift Valley in South Africa. He perished in a thunderstorm, and she could never, I was named after him, but she

could never, it was too much hardship to call me, to call me Ron. Yeah, so I was named after him, but never called Ronald. Yes, still too hard. In the bedroom over there I've still got, I've still got the photograph of Ron and his flying badges; Frannie gave it to me. I can still remember that moment because she had tears on her eye, in her eyes, when she gave it to us to look after, which, which we've done.

That's very important. And so once you got out of polio isolation, did life change very much for you?

It would have. School began we went to, I went to, North Perth Primary School, which is a, I would call it an inner-city school and a very good government school. My sister Peta she went to Perth College, which is the private school down in Mount Lawley, still going still going strong. And my granddaughter, Emily, will be going to Perth College next year when she completes primary school. Thus, carrying on that tradition. But I went to, the basic memories are just of going to school, about that era at North Perth Primary School, which is, looks a bit like the Bowral Primary School across the way here. We can put it in this period and a very good, really good public school with a really good school tradition, which was passed on from one year to the next year, it was a good school. And from then we went to high school. I went to Mount Lawley High School, which was about 200 yards away from 22 Robin Street. Still, there been rebuilt, of course, once or twice since. And so I went to that brand new, brand new high school as part of my education,

10:48

Right. And was school a good place for you?

Yeah . . . I was not, I was never a brilliant student. I don't learn by being taught. I tend to learn by finding out and experimenting. So I'm good at some subjects and I'm bad at other ones, where I've got to learn stuff. So, my school career was, was not, was not a brilliant one, because Peta, my sister, she was Dux of Perth College, whereas I never got anywhere near that. So, yes, I was not that good at school. I still managed to get a Commonwealth scholarship. Yeah, just scraped over I think it was the 75% mark.

You must have been pretty good!

So I just managed to scrape over that and got a Commonwealth, I did get a Commonwealth scholarship. Not that, not that it meant anything particular, but yeah, I did crack it. That meant that meant I could go to uni.

Right. And where did you go to university?

Well, you had only one choice, which was the was the University of, I was about to say, the University of Tasmania! It was the University of Western Australia, which is at Crawley. There's been a long, my dad, Kenneth, spent a long time on the Senate. He spent 14 or 15 years on the University Senate. So it was a sort of a fairly well-known family territory, if you like, because my dad knew all the professors this, that and the other. Yes, and Western Australia is a small place, was a small place then, probably still is a small place today. So people would know, would know people, and my parents in particular, because of Kenneth's position as the State under

treasurer who basically knew everybody in Western Australia, because they all needed money at some time, sometime or other, and to get it, you had to go and see the under treasurer. So that was, and he had very strong relationships with the premiers of the day, like David Brand, John Tonkin, Charlie Court, who he got on really strongly with, particularly David Brand, who had the utmost faith in Kenneth as a public servant, family advisor, or whatever. When I was courting Maureen, we were in Canberra at the time, and we just met, and it wasn't a long courtship. We went and met Kenneth at a Premier's conference in Canberra, and we met David Brand and the other premiers. Maureen, and David Brand got on like a house on fire and, and then pretty soon after that, Maureen and I got engaged, and Franny had never met her. She spoke to Kenneth, and couldn't get much out of him one way or the other on Maureen, so she rang up David Brand, who gave her a really good, gave her a really good wrap up. Very thankful for David for that.

Yes, well, that was good. It didn't change your mind, of course.

No, not at all, but it just shows you the very closeness of the community in Western Austral

Yes, but was that at all intimidating to you going to the university with your father being so heavily involved there?

15:00

No, not in the least.

That's good. What did you do at university?

I did a commerce degree, economics and commerce degree.

And did you have a three, or four year degree there?

I had a three-year degree, which took four years with it, I had to repeat a year.

Too many good times?

I was never any good at accounting, accounting or statistics. I struggled with those subjects, and it's curious that in my working life they are the areas I've excelled in. So its ones about theory and the other ones about practice. So I was, I struggle at the theory side, but I excel at, at the practical side. So that's, that's my explanation for it, anyhow.

That sounds a good one. Have you subsequently done any other sort of tertiary studies?

No, it's just the uni degree and school of hard knocks. Yeah, no further studies. Maureen kept on studying. She just, she was a continuous student at the University of New South Wales. She was a student for about 15 or 16 years in total.

You left it to her.

Yeah. It's just what she, she liked doing, and she had a strong bond with uni, and kept on. It was over 15 years that she kept, kept on going back to, she was doing a master's in town planning, and got it, got a diploma in town planning at the end of the day, yes.

And after you'd finished your degree, did you stay in Western Australia for any time?

No, I sort of, because my dad... because my dad cast a big shadow in West Australia, I decided I'd try my luck in the eastern states. So I went for a job interview with the Commonwealth Public Service. I got interviewed and got a job at the Department of Trade, and went off to a training course in Canberra in 1967, about March 1967, and Maureen, by coincidence, had signed up with the Commonwealth Public Service also, and she was in the Public, get the names right, she was in the Public Service Commissioners training school for new graduates in the Commonwealth Public Service. So we went on this joint training course, and that's when we met.

And you didn't last too long in Canberra, the two of you, did you?

We got married in Canberra. We met about March, April. Got married in October. Better get that date right. Rented a house there for a couple of months. End of the day. We didn't like the Canberra environment. We didn't want to become public servants. Maureen, trained as a solicitor, was, I think that's what she wanted to be. We were attracted to old houses and stuff whilst we lived in Canberra, but we were bit too new to make any commitments. We didn't, yeah, we didn't go down that trail there. So we decided we had a Volkswagen. We had an Afghan hound. Maureen had only been married for a week, and decided that you A, you've got to have a dog. And B, which one is for sale this week, which turned out to be an Afghan hound, by the name of Bentley, and we had him for the next 15 years. So, we had a dog, we had a Volkswagen 1500 so we decided to drive around Australia, go back to Western Australia, and camp and drive back to WA. Spent some time in Perth with Frannie and Kenneth, my mum and dad, and then Maureen decided that she wanted to keep on going. I could have cheerfully gone back to Western Australia, but Maureen's roots were always back in this area, basically. And so we kept on driving, up through the West Australian coast, up through to, we've been through to Darwin, down the center, across down the east coast. And one day we, we drove into Glebe, Sydney, yep, and rented a house there.

20:37

Yes. How long did all that take?

Not that long, three or four months, because you get, you sort of start off slow, then you get quicker and quicker at the end.

Yes, that's right. So you rented a house in Glebe for a while, did you?

Yes. 91 Glebe Point Road, the rent was 20 bucks a week and walking distance to town, so didn't have to pay bus fares, which saved money. So when we moved to Sydney we rented the house. Maureen was the first one to get a job. So she got a job as an articled law clerk with a guy called a, master solicitor called Tim Dettman. He's also very big in camellias. Actually, he was a specialist in camellias, and very, very traditional, small City of Sydney based family law business. So she worked for him, and I looked for a job, and I got a job with, my first job was with the Bank of New South Wales, which I only lasted there for about a year. And then I got a job at CSR, which was a wonderful company to work for.

You were there for quite a while, I think, weren't you?

Yes, I was there from the early 70s through to about 88, I was with CSR. So we sort of got restless towards about 88, I got a bit a bit restless, this sort of move to the country type of urge. I think John Stowar did one of those. So we all dream of a move to the country. So there's a little bit of that. So I had an opportunity to get a redundancy, and then the only problem with that is I'd have to look for a job. So we looked around the Southern Highlands, and nothing flew out of the woodwork. And eventually I got a job in Tasmania with the Department of State Development. And that's what took us to Tasmania, which was another, a whole new chapter in our lives.

Yes, that would be very different, I imagine. And you stayed in Tasmania for some years too, didn't you?

We were there till 2005

Best part of 16 years with the same department, which in that department was something of a record, I think.

Right. And where did you move to then, in terms of your career or living?

Well, my career, I worked for The Department of State Development for all that 15 year, 16 year period. Then we moved back here in 2005 and I retired. Well, sort of retired. My son Matthew, decided to start a wind surfing business, and so I looked after the wind surfing business for the next eight years. So we sold online. So we sold windsurfing equipment online. From Bundanoon, people's eyes would roll when you said windsurfing. Bundanoon, yes, yes, come and visit us and we sold windsurfing equipment, imported windsurfing equipment and sold it online. We were a pioneer internet business from Bundanoon, still in wind surfing gear, which was a nice way to retire, because it meant I was still talking with people. We didn't have automated systems. That was deliberate. So every customer we spoke to and knew their names. If they were coming past Bundanoon, they'd call in and say hello, or if we happened to see them down at Sanctuary Point or somewhere like that. So we built up relationships with people and that business all around Australia.

25:22

It's very personal, though.

Yeah, we ran it as a very personal business, yes.

Then you finally did retire from paid work. Did you?

Yes, that was, must have been about for 2000 Yeah. Matthew decided to get out of the business because we couldn't grow the business, because windsurfing was a mature business. Kiting came along, and the young guys went off kiting and other things. So we, we closed the business up, and actually when we closed it up, we had 60 emails from people saying, thanks, thanks for the memories, if you like. So yes, because we were giving people really good value because we had no overheads, no shop to support. Shops didn't like us, needless to say, but yes, we were a valuable source of equipment.

Yes, quite a new model, really.

Yes. So what did we do after that? I think I started writing books after that,

That's right. What about getting back to your living in Glebe, in rental accommodation in Glebe Point Road. What happened after that?

We had looked around to buy another house. Maureen had lived in Glebe when she was doing her university. So she had strong links to Glebe, but we also went a bit further afield, to Annandale, because Annandale had bigger blocks of land than Glebe or Balmain, so it attracted us more. And we met a wonderful real estate agent called Norman D Evans, and he, he was trying to find us the right period of house. We were the first people to ever come and look for skirting boards up to your waist and stuff like this. We're the first people who actually looked at a house to see what the original features of the house were. So we, with the help of Norman D Evans, we came up with a house at 232 Johnston Street, which is about an 1890 late Victorian house. All of the period features had been stripped out of it by some guy who thought he was trying to do the right thing, so the bones were there. But it needed, shall we say, a full restoration, which many of the houses of the inner city did at that phase. There was nothing that wasn't unusual probably may not be unusual today. No, it is unusual today. But this was the rediscovery of the inner city as a good living area, because people were aghast at the thought you were actually going to live in Johnson Street, Annandale. That's people in Bank of NSW would say, you know, it's incredibly sunny there. You'll just roast in the summertime and stuff like that. There's no capital gain. I would point out that we'd been there for we'd been in Johnston Street for two years, and the capital gain was 25% a year. The purchase price wasn't much, so we hadn't done badly, and it just shows you how values and perceptions can change, and that we were, I'll call us pioneers in the inner west, along with Paddington, Glebe, Leichhardt, Balmain. There was a strong movement, and we had the formation of the Paddington Society, the Glebe Society and our association and the Balmain group. We had these groups formed to help preserve the townscapes, the buildings, plant the trees, get the inner city back to where it was, because the inner city was bereft of trees. Annandale was bereft of trees when we moved there. You look at it now, and it's a nice tree lined area. It's totally changed in one or two generations, depending on how you do your accounting. So, we joined the Glebe Society when we moved to club first year, members, and then the Annandale Society formed

just after that, and Maureen became the Chair of the Annandale Association, a couple of years after its formation, the third chair, I think. We had an active role in fighting for the preservation of the suburb. Did our own town plan, and did it, did a whole lot. I did a whole lot of statistical work on population density, which I still do, and we worked closely with people from Glebe, Balmain, some colorful characters like the then Mayor, Nick Origlass, who was a great character and a true Democrat, and he's took the inner city to, I'll call it meaningful self-government, whereby the area was preserved, as opposed to being something where the government policy of the day was just to move people, move people out and increase densities, which probably sounds a bit familiar to today, doesn't it?

32:22

It does. That's right. So you and Maureen sort of had an interest in preserving not only the houses and getting more trees, but also the general streetscape and suburb I suppose.

It was the whole suburb, because it was planned to put expressways through the middle of Annandale, through Glebe as well. So there are large areas of freeway affected land there. Those freeways didn't get built. In fact, in a sense, they've just been finished. They're now the tunnels that are going under. But those freeways would have destroyed the suburbs as we know it. And it was that, it was a string of battles. It was the battle against the three-storey, walk-up blocks of flats. It was the battle against the Maritime Services Board who didn't want public access to the harbour foreshores. They wanted to turn it into a marina. Wherever we went, we had to have a fight. And they were long hard, could be 10-year fight, 15-year fight to try and just get normal public access to parks on the foreshore and stuff like that.

Yes, and then in your own family life. You did a lot of these renovations yourself, I think in the house, did you?

Basically, I did them all. My labour goes in for free because I watch these Grand Design television things always going over budget and stuff like that, whereas my logic was, A, I didn't have a budget B, in my own time, I could do the really labour-intensive jobs, strip and paint. We'd go to demolition sites, get marble fireplaces. Rebuild the marble fireplaces. None of that's technically hard, and that's how we brought the houses back. We didn't alter the houses, much. Maureen says, I alter them lots, but we didn't. When you look back on some of the stuff you do, you can get a bit horrified. But by the standards of the time we were, we had quite a light touch on the house, and tried to take them back to the way they were. If they had cedar skirting boards. Well, it's nice if you can get back to the cedar skirting boards. If they had marble fireplaces, let's put the marble fireplaces back in, repair the fibrous plaster to get as it was. So, that all of that we did ourselves, which means that we weren't, we weren't running up debts. We were we paid \$14,500 for our first house, which isn't a lot of money by today's stance. It was a lot of money by the standards of that day: but it meant that equity kept on growing as property values went up, particularly through the 80s and 90s. So we were, you could build significant wealth in housing. And we also were interested in gardens of the day, because we had the larger garden areas. Our 232 [Johnston St] was 600 square metres, which is not much by a Bowral, oh, it's actually not too bad even by Bowral standards of the day. That's not too bad. But by inner city standards, that's enormous. So we were keen on gardening in the inner city, went through the native garden period of the 1980s. I think we gave up at the end of

the day. But we used to call it, we're in bearer and stock up, take them down. But they didn't ever succeed in this Sydney climate, you tended to go back to the palm trees and think things that do well in that in that environment.

37:12

You built a fernery, I think too, didn't you in one of your houses?

The second house we had, we put an extension of, we actually used a glass house, a wall of a glass house, half a wall of a glass house, which is about 27 feet long in the old language. And we in filled an old verandah there with a glass wall, because a glass house was the cheapest and most effective way of doing it, and that worked well. It's still there today, although the latest owners have done it all in timber, and very nicely as well, but the style is essentially the same. The house we had at 48 Johnston Street, which we're talking about now, it was slightly smaller block of land, about 450 square metres. Our next-door neighbor there a lady called Georgina Bower. She had about 1200 square metres. So between the two we treated them as one house. So between them, we had by any standards, we had a sizable lot of land, and Georgina's garden is still there today.

Oh that's lovely. And by this stage, did you have children?

Yeah, Matthew came along in 1975, Lizzy in 1980 so Matt was he was born at 232 Lizzie was born at 48 Johnston Street. So, yeah, the kids became part of the scene. Part of their upbringing was to go to council meetings. They all thought that was entirely normal.

Yes.

Crawled under the chairs of the table at a public meeting, and actually, to the great credit of the all of the councilors is that whilst we're in a confrontational situation about development, most of the time, the kids were always tolerated. So it was, it was, they were always welcome. They could crawl under the furniture, whatever. And we'd all go to public meetings, protest meetings, kids would come along.

Sounds that was very big part of your life, conservation and heritage there, wasn't it?

It was a total, it was a way of life, and Maureen, she was home based. So she gave up working, in the work sense, in the 70s, but she actually had a full-time job bringing up the kids. That's a full-time job because the kids preferred not to have child care. A, child care wasn't around. But first and foremost, I think, Maureen, before she had any kids, organized the first childcare meeting in Annandale. But I think it's also a better way of bringing up kids. But she also was really heavily involved in resident action. If people had a problem they would come and see Maureen, and she would see what help could be done. It became very much a way of life.

39:51

It was, wasn't it? Yes, but you left that way of life eventually, did you?

We had the sea change to Tasmania, which was 88-89. Because I had the job rule one, if you go to go to Tasmania, make sure you got a job. So had a job, didn't pay that well, but at least it was a job. We then went looking for the escape to the country dream house in Tasmania, and we had this vision of a Georgian sandstone house in our head. Needless to say, when we went down there looking, we couldn't find one in Launceston or within cooee of Launceston. So we found a house called Tamarleigh, which was for sale, which was Victorian splendour on steroids, I suppose. It was a triple fronted, cast-iron lace, 1882 house in close to original condition. It was as close to original condition, as you can get, as it had been looked after. So we, we acquired it and took it over because it had 10 acres of land. It was a large house of 600 square meters of floor area, not including verandahs. It had a garden by the previous owner. She done it developed a beautiful Tasmanian country ladies garden. And she was a proper gardener and she had, she and Tom decided to downsize. So, they sold us the house, and we got yes, we got quite friendly with them. See each other regularly as we inherited Tamarleigh.

An interesting tower there as well, with the gas lighting wasn't there.

Well, it still had the original features, including the gas plant. Wherever I go into an old house, I go looking for the gas plant, basically. It also had a servants' bell, a setup of up of six servant bells. So everything was connected by cable, which was the mother of all jobs, which was to connect them so they'd actually physically ring. So we still have the original servants' bells which I had, which I did reconnect, got parts specially made for it, and the, what was called the light tower, was the was the gas generator for the gas plant, because the house we're talking 1882, so no electricity. Gas was the was the light supply. So, so somehow ran on petroleum vapour gas. So apparently you get a can of it, toss it in over a spark, it would gurgle into a rotating chamber, which would agitate it and release the gas in a controlled way. And that was that supplied the light for the house. And it was almost intact when we when we left.

45:05

And did your way of life in advocacy and conservation heritage that you had in Annandale, did that continue down in Tamarleigh?

No, it didn't. Because suddenly we had children, we had ponies, we had horses... we had MG cars. We had a large heritage house to look after, in its own right. There was more gardening and work in Tamarleigh than we could, than we could ever finish. So really it was Tamarleigh and like the Tasmanian way of life, which took over. So we stepped back from advocacy, or we did go to the odd meeting about pot plants, this, that and the other, but we were not actively involved in Tasmania. We had enough on our plates to look after Tamarleigh, and just doing that and bringing up the kids, with the pony club, the MG sports clubs and MG cars, which we, I think we had three at one phase, one of which we've still got, yes, so that that took over, yes.

And I imagine there'd be a lot of work, actually, in conserving and maintaining that house and the garden.

Yeah and we didn't have bags of money. My choice is always to do it myself. If I do it myself, I'm not going into a Grand Designs and go broke and you can do, most of it yourself. We repainted all the internal walls, the original colours, the original skirting boards, were done in a varnish, stained finish, all hand done. So we replicated that. Similarly, the fireplaces were marble. The fireplaces downstairs were marble, upstairs they were faux marble. They were, they were timber, but it had been painted to look like marble. So we taught ourselves to do that. So we, we learned how to marbleize fireplaces, so we were replicating the finishes that were there.

And what about the garden? Did you do much work in that, in terms of changing it, or was it mainly maintaining.

Our philosophy with gardens is to keep what we've got, is to respect the people who've been there before us. The [previous] owner used to come back and visit us on many occasions. Yes, so we respected her and her garden and tried to maintain the garden. Probably extended it a bit, as one does, and gardening in Tasmania isn't easy. Just looking at a picture of Tamarleigh across the table here, there's a weed called sticky weed, which grows around here in the springtime. At Tamarleigh sticky weed would take over, and you would spend hours and hours pulling out bloody sticky weed. You're looking after a garden of that size, and we get sticky weed around here, which I secretly go around and weed, but I don't want to spend the rest of my life pulling it out. Fortunately, it's not as endemic here as in Tassie, but yeah, there are certain there's a lot to look after. If you've got hawthorn hedges, trimmed hawthorne hedges, you've got, which we did have, which we cut, I cut, you've got a lot to look after.

Yes, it sounds as though you did quite a lot, in fact, but your time in Tasmania did end.

Yeah, we decided to come back because the kids had come, the kids Matt and Lizzie had come back to the mainland to get a job. That's the part of Lizzie went to Western Australia with James. And Matt moved back to Sydney and moved to a house in Piper Street, Sydney, a little house that we still own. He moved back there. Lizzie moved to Western Australia, and Maureen always felt isolated in Tasmania, and so we decided to sell Tamarleigh, which was a two-year process and in 2005 we eventually sold it to a lady from Sydney who literally jumped over the fence on a Sunday afternoon, didn't wait for the agent. Came over the fence, did her own inspection, we showed her through, and she came back and made an offer on the following Monday.

50:51

Wow. And where did you live, when you left Tasmania?

Fortunately, we still had 1 Dorothy Friend Place, which we had bought as a weekender in 1983 and so we decided to move back there. Well, we had a house to move back to,

Yes, and what caused you to buy that house in 1983, what was the attraction?

Prospects of a garden? So which in '83 we had it, and we had the house leased out during that period to a lady called Anderson, who I think may have been involved in Garden History, and she actually helped nurse the garden through. When we came back in 2005 the garden was in pretty good shape. So we got back to tidying it up a bit, repainting the house, redoing the kitchen, yes rejuvenated Dorothy Friend Place, once again. Not changing it much, but still Maureen would not agree with that. Made some changes and changed the kitchen, modernized it, basically a repaint, lots of detail work, looking after the old roof, yes, just trying to keep it in good shape. Keep the verandahs in good shape. It had timber verandahs running around four sides of the house, so there was a fair bit to sort of bring the house back into shape with us having been away for a long period of time.

Yes, and did the garden need much getting into shape?

No, it didn't. We had some guys help us. We went into the [Bundanoon] Garden Ramble in 2008... and so we must have been confident enough to go into the Garden Ramble. And we got some gardening guys to help us get the house and get the garden back into shape for a Garden Ramble Day. So it was we were happy to put it in the Garden Ramble.

You had a lot of people, I think, didn't you?

We had over 1000 over the two days, which was, for us, was a lot of people, and people seemed to like Dorothy Friend Place, for what for whatever reasons. It's a house with character and a garden with character.

Did you continue doing the Bundanoon Garden Ramble, or just that one year?

No, we only ever did the one, one year of that. We didn't ever join the garden club there. We had, oh, we used to go to the Rambles. We, we went and joined the Bundanoon History Group. So a lot of time and effort went into the Bundanoon History Group and doing things like oral histories, like we're doing here today. So we got involved with oral histories, family histories, and then we got onto displays in the old goods shed. And that's what started us on photography. A photographer called Augustus Nicholas and his wife Sarah Nicholas, they were under known photographers from about 1870 so they became a focus of ours. That's where the latter-day interest in photography is. I've always been interested in photography, but early photography became a passion, if you like, and so we did a lot of work on the Nicholas family and other Bundanoon early photographers as well.

55:42

Yes, and the garden. Did you, with all this interest in history taking up a lot of your time, did you have to get any help in the garden?

We used to get the guy called Gardening Hands. I can't think of their names. It's actually the guy that comes here and helps me with the garden. He was one of the people helped us there. Yes, we always had some help in the garden. Maureen didn't ever like pruning anything, and I used to get into trouble if I pruned anything. The

gardening guys would have a quiet chat with Maureen, and they'd reach, they would reach a suitable solution as to how it could be trimmed, but not wrecked. So they sort of guided us through and the guy that does the gardening down here now Michael, he was helping us back to the 1 Dorothy Friend Place days, and he's still doing the garden here. Maureen passed away in 2020 and I didn't get anybody to help in the garden for a couple of years, didn't see Michael, but he came back about three years ago and said, I'd like to help with the garden again. With Maureen's passing he'd been so upset that he hadn't come back. So he does the garden here today the way Maureen would have wanted it. So, yes, so it's a bit hard to explain to anybody, but, that's how the garden here gets done. And he comes back with about three people once a month, type of thing.

And you've been keeping up with getting rid of this Tasmanian weed.

And no sticky weed here, no sticky weed. I could find the odd bit. It's a matter of trying to keep a garden like this one under control, but it's sort of, the garden here is semi controlled.

It looks very nice to me.

It's allowed to do its own thing as well.

You have some special interest too, don't you, in sundials, is it?

I have a few sundials. There's one out the window behind us here. One thing leads to another with me. So I was doing a book on a house, of Yarrabin, with a lady called Keva North, and she's into sundials as well. And it so happens we were dealing with the same person who made them in, in South Australia by the name of Sundials Marg. So we had this joint interest in sundials. So I had one made when Maureen passed away. We've always collected them, so there's a couple of other ones around, and I've had a couple more made since. So yes, those sundials are a special interest. All gardens should have at least one.

Trees too? I think you, you've got a wonderful tree here, haven't you?

Well over our shoulder, here is the coast redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens*, which we claim to be Bowral's largest tree and it must be one of the largest trees in any suburban house. It's about the size of a 10 or 12-storey building. It's eight metres around the girth, and it's 35 meters tall. It's tall by any standard. And it's certainly not bad for a suburban house being of this magnitude.

1:00:22

Definitely not, and you, you've extended that to being involved with the council, with a tree register, haven't you?

Yes, I've not been involved in that myself. I have been certainly supportive of a tree register. And hope this one goes in the tree register. This one is if we just step back into registries. I've been involved with a guy called

Dennis McManus and other volunteers about heritage listing of houses in the Southern Highlands, and for over 400 houses have been put up for heritage listing and some gardens and some trees. And it's been about a three-year journey, four-year journey, and it is now going on public exhibition this coming month, October. Which should, keeping my fingers crossed, be the last step in the most significant heritage preservation action in the Southern Highlands, which we can be proud of. All of those volunteers who helped do it, hundreds of hours of voluntary time of people from Mittagong, Moss Vale and Bundanoon have put in volunteer time. Council has supported it and endorsed it. We would only do it with Council's support. It's a very significant move forward in terms of heritage preservation. With this house here, the house is on the list to be heritage listed. Actually, Dorothy Friend Place is heritage listed, but this one is on, hopefully, at the end of October, will be heritage listed. The interior of the house is heritage listed. The garden is to be heritage listed. And the big tree, which we've been talking about is also on the list to be heritage listed. So, it gets heritage listed in a number of ways. I don't see, I see that as recognizing the heritage values of the garden and the tree and the interior of the house. It doesn't stop you from doing things, but it means if you do do stuff, you need to be very respectful of what is already, of what is already there. And you are a custodian for the next owner.

That's right. So you're now living in Bowral, and that meant a move from 1 Dorothy Friend place. What sort of initiated that?

Maureen as a kid, grew up at Thirlmere, Tahmoor, Thirlmere area. She always had a hankering for Bowral, and Bowral was close to the services. Bundanoon is isolated from the point of view of shops, medical, hospitals, so forth, whereas here you're close to services, shops, whatever. We thought, moving to Bowral, we thought coming from Bundanoon, that Bowral was a huge place, and we'd easily find a house that suited us. We looked for a couple of weeks and we couldn't find anything that suited us. And so eventually we wandered around and thought, well, where would we like to live in Bowral. We drove around the corner of Church Street here and stopped in front of 4 Church Street and we decided that this might be, this might be the spot. And a week or so later, a for sale sign appeared under no agents, and that the house was for sale. We rang up the sign and spoke to the owners, a thoroughly nice family, who we still speak to, a local doctor and his wife. And yeah, we spoke to them. We hadn't sold Dorothy Friend Place. So we need to do a very open sale with it, with the seller, which we did, and that went smoothly. And it even included us adopting the cat, Sebastian, who wandered around here from time to time, because he had to have a home found for him. Yeah. So, this house suited us,

1:06:04

Sounds quite serendipitous the way you actually acquired it.

Yep, it's still the best house for our needs, because it's an original house. It's got a good garden, it's a bit more complicated than we ideally would have liked, but we've made it more complicated since. So that we can't complain too much, and the garden is nice. Like all gardens, it does evolve, but we've tried to maintain the character of the garden and its heritage classification. It's quite a special garden.

And was there a change in your focus and your interest by moving from Bundanoon to Bowral?

It was that we were suddenly into heritage in a much bigger way than Tasmania. We were into heritage. We were fighting the proposed development of a Hospice at 11 Edward Street, which we and the locals here opposed. We and the neighbours fought that. We wrote a book about the history of the street, not about the hospice, not saying whether it's a good thing or a bad thing. We wrote a book about the history of Church and Edward Streets, as to how they were valuable heritage streets and gardens, and set out the character of Bowral, as we knew it. That's what our book was about. Doesn't, mention hospices at all. It just, it is about trying to establish the heritage of where you live. And so that was a whole change of focus, which set us on a on a course for various other books often for similar purposes. We did another one on St Jude Street because it was mooted, it was in Church and Bowral Street because the hospice was going to move there. So we did another book which is on the heritage qualities of those houses. We did another book on Alf Stephens, mentor of Don Bradman, and that's Aitken Road. Aitken Road was under threat because Lend Lease were buying up Aitkin Road hand over fist with the idea of building, of taking away the heritage houses there, including Alf Stevens house. We wrote a book about Alf Stephens, including the Aitken Road conservation area. And the house is there, built by Alf Stephens. Doesn't mention Lend Lease once, but it sets out the character of Aitken Road. It sets out the importance of Alf Stephens as a builder, establishing the character of the area here. And Bowral being Bowral, Alf was also the mentor of Don Bradman. And there was a cricket pitch up in Aitkin Road at Grantham, which is Alf's old house, which was under the threat. And The Don used to play on that. So it's the old Stephens book is, once again, not about Lend Lease. It's about the story and character of the of the Aitken Road area, and also the character of Alf Stephen's houses. If you've got a Don Bradman, you might that's, that's an important historical link, and, shall we say, can be useful in winning heritage argument.

1:10:32

Yes, and that, that was a talk you gave to Australian Garden History Society, wasn't it?

Yes, I did give a talk on Alf Stephens to the AGHS. That's the first time I'd ever spoken to the AGHS. I think yes.

You weren't a member at that time?

I was a lapsed member. My mum used to pay for it. When we lived in Tassie, my mum used to pay for the AGHS membership. And the other interesting thing is my sister Peta Townsing.... was also an AGHS member Western Australia. Peta, passed away a couple of years ago, and this is a note on her passing. She joined, Peta, joined the AGHS WA in its early years and maintained her membership. Although residing in Bridgetown, latterly [indistinct wording], she took every opportunity to promote the WA branch, designing and formatting the 2014 Albany conference brochure as well, for a period, being a committee member. Through her untiring efforts, the Mount Lawley Society was established, and the number of Federation houses in the Mount Lawley area, same saved from demolition, is her legacy. So it's fascinating that my sister was an active member of AGHS, and it's also interesting, this is going back to heritage in the Mount Lawley Society, for which Peta was the moving force to get the suburbs of Menorah and Mount Lawley heritage listed. And they were much more successful. Now that was about as successful as we were. And this is a story about this. My sister Peta came and visited us in

Annandale in the mid-1970s when Maureen was chair of the Annandale Society, and she looked and understood as to what we were doing to save Annandale. She took note of that and went back to Perth. My sister didn't do things by half. She went back to Perth and started the Mount Lawley Society, and managed to get the whole of the suburb heritage listed. We took our hats off to Peta at that point. She was in that space of time. Well, both societies in the long term were very successful, but she was she was incredibly successful, and without her, Mount Lawley wouldn't exist as a heritage suburb, which in some senses links back to a visit to Annandale. You know many, many years earlier.

So did you do anything more then, after your talk on Alf Stephens, with AGHS?

We did, Claude Crowe. Claude Crowe was a gardener from Berrima, he's a plantsman. He had a nursery in Berrima, legendary, Claude and Isabelle Crowe were legendary figures in the Southern Highlands. If you wanted to go get something or get knowledge or advice, you went and saw Claude. So we did a book on there's a bit more history to it than that. I put together the exhibition of gardens and landscapes of the Southern Highlands at the Berrima Museum. I did that under covid, and I did it with wearing both a AGHS hat and a Berrima Museum hat and a Berrima Historical Society hat. The beauty of wearing different hats is you can change it when it suits you, but you can also get things done. You can see things from different perspectives. So that, so I knew about Claude Crowe. I didn't put him in the exhibition, largely because I was after 10 big screens. I got my 10. And so I drew a line at that point. And because I had my exhibition up and running, my objective is to do things, complete them, get them up and running. I'm totally pragmatic, so I didn't do Claude but subsequently, I did do Claude. In fact, I met his son coming out of Ruth Bailey's house one afternoon. I met Claude's son, Noel, whilst walking across the street. I'd never met Noel before, but there was a guy working in the garden. He looked a bit like Claude Crowe. I said, Are you, you Noel Crowe? Yeah. So we introduced ourselves, and I said, I'm doing a book on your dad. Would you like to come around what I've sketched out? So he came around here, and we worked on, he did the forward for me. We worked on the book on Claude and Isabel Crowe. Isabel Crowe saw the Southern Highlands, Bowral in particular, as a living memorial to Claude, to the work of Claude and Isabel, this is their memorial. There's no fancy plaque or anything like that. The memorial is the landscape. If we go up the top of the Gib, look down over Bowral, that landscape, is the memorial to Claude, and with and if you look at a 1928 map or photograph of Bowral of which we've got a copy, there were very few trees here. So what we see is a landscape, a man- made landscape, which Claude and Isabelle Crowe had a big influence in bringing together over a long period.

1:17:49

And did you do other books then with the AGHS, or with another of your hats on, with them?

The beauty of doing your own books is you can do whatever you like. I did one on Bundanoon, the shops at Bundanoon in 2010. I've done books on Martin Moore, the photographer, I've done about 22 books in total. The beauty of doing books is they leave you with a record and it's still the best. It's still the best way of looking up information. And if you've done the work, you I remember it. So books is still my key way of doing things. If I want to convince somebody of an argument, I go and do a book. We've done one here on Friends of Bowral,

which we did to brief Councillors, which is to try and give the Councillors an understanding of what the density of suburbs like this are in terms of real estate densities per square metre. I mean, the typical area where we are here now 1800 square metres, whereas your modern housing estate is what, not necessarily 400 square metres. It's trying to show that the character of the Southern Highlands, and we're not talking only about here, is very different to where we'll wind up with the state government policies of the future. So, we may well have interesting discussions on our hands with Council. I think it's important to discuss with Council, not to fight with council. Always got more chance to get agreement and best things for people understand what the densities are here and to try and hang on to our conservation areas and the areas of houses we've got, because that's part of the Bowral character. That's what brings here, people today. That's what brought me and Maureen here in the 1980s and that's what brought people up from Sydney all the way through.

1:20:42

Yes, that's right. So, it's part of a sort of gentle advocacy really, your books and exhibitions, are they?

Yes. We call it gentle advocacy... it's trying to use good images to tell, to tell the story. But also it's surprising what comes out of understanding the history of a house and the people who went in there. And let's be blunt, you need every argument that you can have if your Council is in front of the Land and Environment Court. Every Council decision is appealable in the Land and Environment Court. I'm not saying that's a good thing or a bad thing. That's reality. So what we try and do here is to provide information. If I think about the books I've done, most of the Bowral ones, my key focus has been a Commissioner of the Land and Environment Court. So he or she is the person I've got in mind is for he or she to understand the character of the area, the conservation area.,what we're trying to get across, that's it. And I'll try to do it through an old- fashioned device called books, which I still think is the most effective. There was an appeal quite close to here, which we went to, and I provided three copies of one of the books, plus high resolution Nearmap images which the Garden History subscribe to, of the current subdivision compared to the 1921 subdivision. So we're comparing the two, and provide that information to the to the Commissioner. You never know whether the Commissioner has got the information or not, because we're not inside the tent, but we're providing the information. And as I say, the best way of providing information is in book form, because at least you've got a chance that it's going to be opened, and if you make it, put a bright cover on it, use good photographs, tell a good story, then you might win the argument.

So it's not only the beautiful photographs which are very, very appealing, but it's also the research you have to do, too, and the style of writing, isn't it? That is important.

You can never be sure what's going to swing an argument with the Commissioner. He or she is the consent authority. So you need to use every way, every trick and every reasonable device. I mean, the Don Bradman story is a good story. It probably won the argument for Aitken Road in that the pitch that was going, it would have been demolished, the Don played on it. You know, the strength of the Don Bradman images is one of the strongest Australian images there are, so that that can help tell a story. For Alf Stephens, we were trying to do the same with him. Would a Commissioner of the Land and Environment Court know who Alf Stephens was? The

answer is probably not. But we've got a book here which, which gives that you know the history of Alf. From his works and his importance.

1:25:09

Yes, that's right, you know, I think it also influences other people. The things that you've done, I gather, in the community, like *The Gardens and Landscapes of the Southern Highlands Then and Now* exhibition, have been quite influential in altering the way people think about heritage and conservation.

It continues to evolve with exhibitions. I've added fresh bits to it. It's been successful. It's a funny thing with exhibitions, the exhibition evolves but also for somebody coming new into the exhibition it doesn't matter whether it's a new exhibition. You've got to keep it fresh, but there's also an argument for not changing it because to somebody new it's immaterial. We've said, what have we done? We, for example, Claude Crowe's is straight out of the book. Yarrabin and 32 Kangaloon Road, we had that straight out of the book. William Augustus, Nicholas, the photographer, we had him. Yes, the books do provide a basis for some of the exhibitions as well.

Yes, I think even away from the books and the exhibitions, you've been an editor for *Inflorescence*, for the AGHS too. Have you, or are the editor?

I have done my period. Meg Probyn is the new editor, and she's done an excellent first one, and I'll help send her articles. Yes. So, I had a couple of years as editor, I'd never edited anything before, so that was a new experience for me. So over a couple of years, which was to edit and write, and the beauty of being editor, you decide what seems right. I would write stories... about Alf Stephens, whoever? Advocacy work? Yeah, we did a lot of good advocacy work. Garden History [AGHS] is in a good position to do advocacy because we've got a good image, respectable. We're, I think, courageous. We've got an opinion. Ruth particularly, has done a wonderful job, and so we've got the courage to state an opinion. You've got to have conscious desire to build relationships with Council, constructive relationships. I don't think Facebook is, is a really good model. I do read Facebook, but it can create more problems here. I think Australian Garden History is a respected advocate. We subscribe to Nearmaps so we can support a lot of advocacy work, for us and for other groups, using Nearmaps to do that. Yes, so that's part of what we bring. We can bring to the table.

You've done many, many different things. Are there any highlights, things that you've enjoyed more or you felt have had more impact over the years?

The biggest one we leave is, keeping my fingers crossed is the heritage review. That is significant for any Council. It's been volunteer led particularly by Dennis McManus and others. So it's a great legacy, and, from my perspective, Maureen and I used to comment that we sort of came into this urban living life, if you like, in Annandale, as resident advocates, whereas Bowral was meant to be retirement. But what it's turned out to be is more and more resident advocacy, of which the books I've done are a form of that. And so, yes, so the advocacy role hasn't diminished, and I don't think will diminish. We will be under considerable population pressure in the

Southern Highlands. We're not going to stop at the challenges for any development, to not destroy what we've got. It's to maintain the heritage of what we've got here. That isn't going to be easy. It's going to need all the skill sets and advocacy to do it.

1:30:50

It is. Where do you think your interest in heritage and conservation came from?

It was probably . . . I've got no idea but my mum,... obviously, my sister had it. There's a book over on the table there. Peter Cuffley's book, [Australian Houses of the] 40s and 50s. My mum and Peta put out about half a dozen or so similar books. And Peta and my mum, Fran, used to write to him. I've got, I've got full set of correspondence from Peter Cuffley in there in my library. And she had, Frannie had, an interest in architecture, planning. It was just something, she, being in Western Australia... the government botanist was a guy called Charles Gardner. I mean, you knew everybody. He'd come wandering in for a chat on Saturday morning type of thing. It comes from a number of different areas. As kids growing up, we we'd go to the zoo on Saturday morning because Kenneth was on the Board of Management of the Zoological Gardens Board, I think it was called. We'd go there on a Saturday morning. He would be there on business, as this was Kenneth's idea of a day off, was to go to the zoo and make some management decisions with the zoo wearing his treasurer hat and we'd have the run of the zoo. We'd go to Yanchep, owned by, run by, the same people. So, we could explore the caves, the history of the caves. And Franny had an interest in housing, and Maureen had a similar interest, coming out of a totally different... growing up to me. Somehow the interests aligned.

Yes.

She was a book collector, and famous, almost a famous book collector. Yes, so she collected books, that's part of her, part of what she is and was, and she'd always done that from the early days. It's just something we did.

Yes, and the photography,

I've always had good cameras. Had the first Pentax, Kenneth would have bought that back from Japan oh, in late 60s, early 70s, late 60s. So I've done photography since, yes. I used to have my dark room, lightroom, whatever it's called, yes, I used to do photography back when I was growing up as a kid. I was a member of the MG Car Club; used to photograph MG car events, motor racing, I liked motor racing, so I used to go to Carco, photograph. Yes. Photography goes right back.

Yes. And I think your, your garden, now your father declared himself a gardener, didn't he, at some stage?

1:35:03

He did. Kenneth's idea of gardening was to count the leaves. If the truth be known, because he was an accountant, he would count the leaves. Now he, his skill set was different. He helped rebuild his Majesty's

Theatre in Perth. In fact, he was, I think he was the chair and Charlie Court asked him to do it. Ken had retired from treasury, so he was asked to take over the management of His Majesty's Theatre, restoration management. He might have been on the Arts Council as well. He just came at things from a different perspective. It was a financial management perspective. Certainly no frills. Got on with people of all walks of life. Yes, it's not your normal skills. Practical gardening, he used to count the leaves.

What about your mum?

But Franny adored it, she would do all the gardening, and, yes, I think she had about 48 or 50 camellias, around the house. So she was the one who did the gardening. She was the one who did the family history. The drive for that came from Franny, Kenneth came along, as you would, and, yes, Franny was the one who drove that. Kenneth's skill set was different. I think it was the skill set of getting on with most people and probably getting things done. The ability to get things done, basically.

Yes, very useful.

If I've inherited a skill set, I think it might be towards that one, which is the ability to do things and make them happen, not procrastinate. It's the beauty of a book. It makes you focus, get it done, get onto the next one, then it gives you a position. So, yeah.

Very good. I think that's probably the end of the questions now, but have you got anything else you'd like to add?

Now look if you need to recast anything then I can redo it.

We can, that's right. Well, I'd like to thank you very much. It's been such an interesting interview, and for all the time that you've given to us, it's been a wonderful experience.

Heaven knows how it will sound.

Interview concludes: 1 hour, 38 minutes and 33 seconds