AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SYDNEY BRANCH

Photo: Roslyn Burge

Interviewee:	STUART **READ**
Interviewer:	ROSLYN BURGE
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This is an interview with Stuart Read, who is being interviewed for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on Gadigal land in Sydney, at Stuart's home in Elizabeth Bay on Saturday, 9 August 2025, and the interviewer is Roslyn Burge.

Stuart, thank you for participating in the Society's Oral History Collection.

Nervous pleasure.

I should add, we're also on Gadigal land too for this.

Yeah, hello.

And we might start with just some brief biographical details where you grew up in New Zealand?

Yeah, sure, Wellington in the middle - across the harbour is a little in … Sydney terms, you'd say Watson's Bay, end of the road, village, seaside village called Eastbourne, Ōkiwi in Māori. And I grew up in Eastbourne in a street called Maire Street, which is the name of a tree. In fact, most of the streets I walked down to school are named after trees, which is rather nice. You'd learn a bit of Māori and learn a bit of what's that, and most of them are lined by Pōhutukawa trees. So come Christmas time, you'd be walking on red carpet to school. Amazing. Eastbourne's tiny, and it's backed by bush, and we spent a lot of time on the beach or in the bush, so I guess that was helpful.

I went to high school in the middle of Lower Hutt, which is halfway to Wellington around the harbour. I wouldn't say that was gloriously horticultural or led to great inspiration. I mean, I loved science and other things, but I was a bit keen on horticulture from the beginning, I suppose … had two parents who were very keen gardeners. Dad, when he could, and Mum all the time. Even on wet days, we'd sit on the divan and get out the toffee tin and look at all the labels of things that may or may not have gone into (or) survived in the garden. What happened to that, Mum? So, when I guess I was learning plant names off her too, and language, and she loved language, so that that helped.

But yeah, I decided I was interested in horticulture and science sort of, alongside it. And that led to Lincoln College, which is now a University of its own. It was an agricultural college out of Christchurch. Actually, before I went to Lincoln, sorry, back a step, that led to Duncan and Davies, which is a big production nursery in Taranaki in the middle north of New Zealand, famous for rhododendrons and a number of things, but huge. They had an apprentice set up, and I was an apprentice. And then stayed on. They had a research and development department. I worked another year or two in there, which was fun, sort of selecting what should be coming up next for the market, new varieties of hybrids and what have you. So, the apprenticeship, and then on to University, I was determined to learn the trade a bit first, not just go on theory. And a lot of my co students, interestingly, were really weak on plants and really a bit lacking in practicality, I suppose. They'd come straight out of a science degree into another academic course. That wasn't the case for me. I was a bit … bit of both, straddling the fence.

So I guess yes, New Zealand bred me and skilled me up, in a way. And I was lucky. I caught the tail end of the golden years of the apprentice system, and people like Jim Rumble, wonderful people in Duncan and Davies who were, I suppose, you'd say, industry leaders and dead keen horticulturists. I saw already going to things like Horticultural Society meetings in New Plymouth of, you know, just the die-hard rhododendron lovers of the world, or, you know, 'I've just been on an Alpine trip of Chile and here's my slides', you know: those people.

So if you were keen to learn there was, you know, 'go and talk to so and so Stuart'. Or, 'You know, we're going there on the weekend'. Wonderful opportunity. Same thing in Canterbury, you know, not so far from the Southern Alps so if you wanted to go trekking, you could, you could do that, and of course I did. But yeah, that was New Zealand. And then looked around and thought, there's not much going on for work here, and came to Australia.

So Australia, first landing was Canberra. I was in love and he was there and so that was, that was home, and Canberra was a good landing, actually. It was a smaller place than perhaps Sydney or Melbourne might have been, but to a small place boy, which was a bit less scary. Had a rather, what do you say, educational year of trying to get a job and, you know, crack into the system and learn how to write job applications and perform in interviews and blah, blah. But fell on my feet in a, again, a kind of an apprentice system. They call it graduate assistant, I don't remember, but, you know, a graduate-entry public sector job and you could rotate around departments which was terrific. Because you could get a feel for what was interesting and, you know, it was a good fit for your interests.

I turned down a career in Quarantine Inspection Service and, you know, abattoirs could have been my … didn't appeal, did the opposite of what everyone recommended: don't go to Environment, it's far too stressful. What did he do? Go straight for Environment, and then don't go to Heritage. You know, same thing. What does he do? Go straight for Heritage. I lucked in again: I caught the tail-end of the golden years of the Australian Heritage Commission and met wonderful people like Juliet Ramsay, for instance, but a whole heap of people specialising in Aboriginal Heritage or Natural Heritage, bush and wetlands and so on, people and cultural heritage people, and that's my tribe actually, I rather like the breadth in that area. And that's also where I discovered AGHS, I suppose, was through people like Juliet, and you know, you might be interested in this talk, or we're going to such and such on the weekend. And boy, was I ever.

Background noises from parkland outside Stuart's apartment.

When you say it was the tail end of the golden period of heritage, were you aware that it was the tail end?

Oh, yes, yes, they were all talking about that even, even broader in the environment portfolio, people were very much talking about, "Oh, it's not as good as when Whitlam was in power or when Richardson was Environment Minister." So we'd had a period of growth and funding and serious investment, I suppose, in that sector, and skilling up – creating, creating things like environment departments. I'm not sure when the first one was, but creating things like 1975 the Heritage Commission Act, and Max Bourke, you know, having a career and running that joint, and people like David Yencken and tapping people on the shoulders, all of the things like the Garden History (Society) happening at

much the same time, late 70s, early 80s. So probably the ‘80s to ‘90s was the major period of growth. And doing you know, groundbreaking studies, including, you know, the garden studies of each state.

Other people in the Oral History Collection have, you know, sagely talked about all of that work had been done and we had a base of knowledge and we were interested in more, you know, sort of, you ask a question and you come out with another question. Not to say that we weren't still doing positive work and growing the knowledge base when I joined, but it was very much a period of, oh, well, it's not as much funding, or, you know, people were moving on from the government sector into private practice and so on. So it was a period of transition, a bit.

Did you ever consider going into private practice?

I've flirted with the idea and I've done the odd job on the side for still do, usually voluntary. But actually no: I'm not good with money; I'm not good with office organization, I suppose; they're not my interests or strong points. So unless I had a partner that was happy to do that stuff, I think it'd be a disaster, actually. And this way I'll get to (hopefully) concentrate on the bits that are interesting and I think I can contribute to. Government's been a good fit for me – a shaky fit at times, it goes through, you know, the pendulum swings a bit, but on the whole, it's been a good fit.

And if you've got a body of people with you, you've got a corporate knowledge that you can draw on, perhaps.

Oh, yeah, and a lot of fun to be had, too. I mean, you're learning the whole time. You think you've got a grip on the subject, and you haven't at all. You meet someone else and they talk completely different language about it or ask different questions. You think, ‘oh, hang on a minute’. You know, that's wonderful. I mean at the moment, it's been my Aboriginal colleagues just (helping me) relearning Australia. You know, really, here we are talking about Gadigal Country, you know, where does one mob finish, and where the boundaries are: even stuff like that. We're now writing statements of Country for each new state heritage listing: whose Country are we on? And sometimes that comes right through into the significance of the place. Sometimes it's more in the history: fair enough. But, you know, it's a good question, where am I?

And that wasn't there when you started.

No, look, I think there were good intentions, but I think it's a journey, and I think even a journey to involve more than one discussion and who's in the room? Sharon Sullivan, who used to run the Commission, used to say, it's no good banging on the door and protesting in the street, you've got to be in the room and at the table. She's right. And Aboriginal people the same: (it’s the) same deal, to some extent, they're not in the room and not at the table, and we need to work on that. I think we are working on it, but we need more.

Who else do you remember from your Canberra days?

Oh, golly, it was a big mob. There must have been about, gosh, wouldn't have been 100 but say 80 people in three sections, and some of them very what would you say … colourful characters cut a dash people, some of them were sort of show ponies.

What does colourful mean for you?

10.00

Well, wasn't your grey public servant look? Put it that way, and that's part of the attraction of the Environment portfolio and the Heritage mob within it, anyway, I might add. 'Grey is a colour but there are other colours', as my mother would say. I guess some people had a certain amount of style and I suppose that was partly contact with people from outside Australia: a lot of them were linked through ICOMOS on international committees and stuff, or travelled a fair bit for work and would pick up gorgeous, you know, jewellery or ornaments they might have on a lapel or a scarf that might be tossed nonchalantly over the shoulder, that sort of thing, which was, seemed a bit radical behaviour, shall we say, mid '90s, perhaps a standard behaviour now, but, you know, it was just a bit more interesting. Where'd you get that thing from, or what's that weird bit of weaving? And, you know, just … it would be unfair to pick people out too much, I think but I mean, I was in the Historic Environment section.

Here's an aside. Betty Meehan, used to … wonderful archeologist … used to run the Aboriginal Heritage Section. And I wasn't working for Betty, but I remember a lovely aside: … she reckoned her bottom filing drawer was full of white wine and champagne and on Fridays there'd be a party. *I like the look of you* in terms of managers. There were people who were just a bit offbeat, and were allowed to be off beat, I mean, they actually … the work was good and the work got done. So, it's not a question of output, but with some flair, shall we say.

And being in Canberra you've got a much greater proximity to politics and politicians, were you aware of that as well?

Oh unavoidable, and in some senses that's the attraction, that's why people are there, close to power, close to decisions. To me it was more of bigger picture, and that was really…

And being in Canberra, you've got a much greater proximity to politics and politicians. Were you aware of that as well?

Oh, unavoidable. In some senses, that's the attraction, that's why people are there, close to power or close to decisions. To me, it was more bigger picture, and that was really attractive, you know, to get your head out of New South Wales or out of New Zealand and looking at the whole country, say, or getting your head out of Australia and looking at the whole world. And that was, again, an attraction of things like World Heritage. The World Heritage Unit was part of the Environment Department. I worked in that unit on nominations and on listings and on management, you know, getting a management plan together for Kakadu or whatever it was. Interesting, because it's big picture stuff, and actually the nuts and bolts can be very local and very specific, can be a management plan and how do we, you know, how often do we burn this country or, you know, to shift the fences or build a visitor centre – it might be very practical, but it might be very theoretical, too.

We don't have a good research underpinning for managing this place. We need to, you know, write down Aboriginal values of this place in more detail and talk to the local traditional owners, you know, get their blessing for co-management. All that, you know:

some big ideas… and that's very attractive. And heritage is full of this, and they're evolving you know, you don't actually ever get there. Each age has a shifting, what would you say, sphere of interest? And again, that's - I find that attractive. I think intellectually, it's … it's stimulating. And same with the Garden History Society ... it's … it's a wide church. It's got a lot of people in it, and some of them are full on academic intellectuals, if you like. Some of them are nuts and bolts … 'couldn't be bothered … I'm gardening'. Huge range, and that's delicious, you know. Or even, you know, 'meet someone from Bolivia who's got the same interests as you because they're into historic gardens in Bolivia'. I mean, give me a break, Bolivia! Your mind starts making these links and connections. I think that's healthy, and that certainly tickles my mind.

How often do you meet people from Bolivia?

Not often enough. I'm following some woman on Instagram just because the plants are so strange, but it's not a country you hear enough about.

And just before we leave Canberra, you mentioned David Yencken who was so significant in the early days. Did you work with him?

Oh, I wish! No, no, a historic figure to me, I never had the pleasure. I really enjoyed listening to him and reading him through the Oral History Program. But again, perhaps the generation before me, or, you know, ships that pass, I suppose, I got a bit close, like people who knew him well, and I'd worked with - so you'd hear things - put it that way.

So, you joined the AGHS in Canberra?

Yes, I think.

And I think, weren't you on the committee?

Oh yes, I think I was, for my sins! They foolishly made me treasurer one year that … that wasn't repeated. They must have been desperate.

I think … there … every society is desperate for treasurers.

Yeah, that's right - good point.

But … but you were certainly on the committee there for a period of time, working with people like Nancy Clarke and Trisha Dixon.

Oh yes, wonderful people.

Do you remember any of the particular events from that time with that Branch?

Golly, that's testing the brain, top of the head? No, but on reflection, very likely, yes. I mean, that Branch is interesting. Again, a bit more … well … a bit more … Each committee, each branch has its own character, right, and that branch, I think, punches above its weight, a bit. It's full of people who are, you know, highly educated, highly skilled actually. Which is not to say other branches are not, too, but it shows, a bit - they're a bit ambitious in their program. And talks tend to be, you know, visiting expert on x gets to talk to the Branch, or you go to visit Lanyon, say, or Mugga-Mugga, say, a local historic property - there's the curator talking to you, because they'd been kneaded into it, elbowed into it. It's a small place, Canberra, and that's … that's an advantage in a way, and it's also a phone call away or a short drive to the National Library, handy, or National Archives: handy.

It's got one or two advantages that most places don't. So again, if you know someone who knows someone who's in the Gallery, here we are in the Gallery having a function. Thank you very much. AGHS, it's being a bit glib, but it … it was a lot of fun. And I think it's always a struggle keeping a committee together or organising a program, you know. To talk to anyone on a daily basis, you'd wonder why you do it, but looking back, we had a lot of fun and did a lot of wonderful things. Not least the little booklets of garden recordings of mostly rural gardens, and actually outside the ACT, but in that radius, you know, Braidwood, Bungendore, sort of the country towns over the border, if you like.[1]

And some quite early 1840s … '50s, and just small, practical, you know: here's a garden plan, here's a plant list, here's a quick potted history of this family, or these families, you know, what the hell were they doing here? And why is there a garden? Wonderful snapshots, and I think a bit of an eye opener to some of the owners … oh … somebody else likes my place, or it's got some value, good stuff, building blocks.

And I was going to speak about that later, because the … you gave a talk most recently about *Coolringdon*, which is the subject of one of those little books, isn't it?

Did I? It is, but did I? Gosh, I've been doing rather a lot of talks lately, scrambled in my brain. What's the next one?

Oh, dear. I thought in the June (2025) issue of the … the *Branch Cuttings*, you talked about managing historic sites.

Oh, I did, yes. Sorry.

So much in your blood.

Yeah. Well, I misunderstood, yes. It was a more general talk about, you know, how do you manage a historic garden, really? Or what are the aspects to that? What is a historic garden? And, yes, I guess it was using a few examples, you know, here's … here's one that you might know, or here's a big one, here's a small one. He's a complex one; here's a simple one. And that would have been one of those examples, yes, that I remember.[2]

And also, out of that Branch came the *Recording Gardens* book. Were you involved in that?

Actually, not. I think that might have preceded me, but I guess I was involved in using it and testing … road testing it. Again, that Branch has been around a while, and had some …I think that was runs on the board before I got there: put it that way. But we certainly used it. I mean, those garden recording booklets, that's exactly what they were. You know, this doesn't have to be bigger than Texas. It can be quite small, 5 … 10 pages, two or three pages, actually, is, you know, even just having a plan and a plant list is handy. That tree matters. It's a rare cypress. Oh, I didn't realise, you know. It's too big, it's next to the woodshed … it's got to go. So, hang on a minute. It's the only one in the state – it can be useful, yeah, so I guess from that angle, using those tools, yeah, rather than developing (a site, as if it is a blank slate with no inherent values).

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1 See publications listed at ACT Monaro Riverina - Australian Garden History Society

2 Managing an historic garden; some helpful information, Stuart Read, published by Australian Garden History Society 2025

So, is there a way for you to talk about that, to bring that expertise to other branches and do they embrace it?

Oh, look, I think yes. And I think other branches have been doing parallel things, perhaps without the booklet, for as long as … and some branches longer.

Victorian branch has been a pioneer, in many ways.

Tasmanian, wonderful book, Phyl Frazer Simon's book on *Historic Tasmanian Gardens*.[3] It's full of plans, beautiful sketches and quick snatches about this garden and why it matters, and so on. It's mini recordings in a hefty book, I might say, for that state and pioneering work and those sorts of books exist for most states. I'm not saying they're all done by the branches, but certainly the same people tend to bob up. Put it this way: it's a small pool of who's interested and who's doing the work. And what does it matter who writes it down actually, or who publishes it at the end of the day? Is it (published)? Does it exist? Can you get it? These days (if) it doesn't exist digitally and that's a challenge for young people, who expect everything to be on their phone.

But there was a time I had a joy of taking a young person to (see, and) saying: 'there was a time before you were born when we had paper files; look at this, young person, there's a room full of paper files'. Her face was a picture. But I guess a lot of garden history is written and published, and that's (valuable): … digitising is a magic and a favourite word. We need to do a bit more of that too, here and there, and be a bit strategic, like what should be most useful, and be done first.

20.14

You mentioned Phyl Simons. Did you know her or meet her?

Again, no, didn't have the pleasure. Well, did I? I might have met her once or twice, very briefly, but really, just hello and, you know, admiring glances. But again, knew a lot of people that she knew well and worked with and have had more to do with them. Again, next generation, I suppose, Gwenda Sheridan, a great Tasmanian, again, subject of this program was one of those, and she'd done a lot of work with Phyl and following up on Phyl's work, filling in gaps, you know, where there might have been an impression of a place. Gwenda has done a quite a detailed history of that place later. And come back to Stuart, 'what's that irritating conifer in the corner?' 'You know, that blue thing with the strappy leaves'… I have had the joy of, you know, trying to figure out a few, fill a few gaps: so, that way.

And were you involved with … with the preparation of Gwenda Sheridan's book?

A bit, yeah, commenting on drafts and, you know, filling, filling gaps, particularly on plants and unusual plants. Yes, she did another wonderful study on significant trees of Tasmania: same thing - Gwenda, you know, *Chamaecyparis*. is completely wrong, irritating, you know, nitpicking persons: but she's very gracious, put up with a lot of pestering. But wonderful work, actually and again, pioneering work. It's extremely rich that state and doesn't realise what it's got, and a lot of it's disappearing quickly. Things are not on heritage lists that perhaps ought to be, or maybe the house is listed, but not the garden or the farm, and maybe that matters too.

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[3] *Historic Tasmanian Gardens*, Phyl Frazer Simons, Mulini Press, Canberra, 1987

In the … just this week, in the latest e-newsletter for the Tasmania, which lists the state by state, it's wonderful to have it sort of compacted together, and they list a talk by a man whose name escapes me, but he's talking about unforgettable or invisible landscapes in Tasmania.[4]

Yeah, wonderful.

Are you familiar with his work?

No, I'm not, but full marks to him, really. I mean, the more you scratch and look in Tasmania, the more you find. Particularly Aboriginal Tasmania, which has been neglected, but happily is getting some attention now, and so it ought. Convict Tasmania has had a lot of attention and energy, rightly: but that's only one layer, right? And what came before and what happened since? In each part, you know, it's a different story in this north to the south and east to where, blah, blah, small island. But doesn't mean it's small story.

Different characters.

Totally.

And you were also involved in the battle for Cambria.

Well, for instance, yeah, Eastern Tasmania up the coast, yeah, and that was another of Gwenda's jobs and shifting ownerships and shifting ideas about George Meredith country and (his) farm, historically. But these days, not in the Meredith family anymore and might be a resort and might have this or that, you know, exciting feature dropped in. Interesting, and it's a national issue, and perhaps an international issue, of, you know, glorious coastal sites that might, you know, morph into something else and global audiences who just feel like dropping into, you know, 'do a country' in two or three days in luxury.

Nothing against that, but does it have to happen on this site? Or, if it does have to happen on this site, can we have a say in that and a conversation, please, rather than just, 'here's my solution', dropped in from, you know, Addis Ababa or New York. Hang on a minute! Like, what about, you know, that orchard, that picking garden, you know? Can we keep a bit of the historic site too and make it a more interesting resort, or more interesting whatever? Of course we can, if there's goodwill.

So, the Tasmanian Branch, come to think of it, has had quite a few heavy battles to fight.

Oh, look absolutely and still does. I mean the, you know, let's have an AFL Stadium on the waterfront at Hobart, and get on, get in on the national game: pure nonsense. And that's not restricted to Tasmania. Look, everyone's having stadium battles. It's a national issue again, but they're not immune. And you know … even having Bass Strait between you and the mainland doesn't protect you. Sorry. You know there are big forces out there looking around for exciting sites to do stuff. And yeah, Garden History is up against that, of course.

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4 Report-of-Uninnocent-Landscapes.pdf Ian Terry

So, Stuart coming to the Sydney Branch. When did you leave Canberra?

Canberra? '97 … I started this job in Sydney, so I guess I switched allegiance to the Sydney Branch, and eventually got my arm twisted onto the committee. I won't remain there.

Was it arm twisting?

Oh, not really. At least you have some say about what's coming up. And I've always got an idea or two: so I should know better.

Is that welcomed or people burdened by ideas?

Oh, I don't know. I think a bit of both - depends who you ask.

But it's been a happy, I think, arrangement. I don't see people running out the door screaming: put it that way. And it's a healthy and a growing branch, I'm pleased to say, with a lively program and even pulling in rather abstruse strings and topics and visits, which I again, am pleased about. You know, what is garden history and is it restricted to the great and the grand in the 19th century? Absolutely not. You know: should it be about landscape design or new work or modernism, industrial archeology? Well, maybe, you know. Sydney's been … what do you say generous or open to perhaps a little flexible thinking about what is garden history and supporting that - that's pleasing.

So is it a very different tone to the Branch than when you joined in 19 … when you came to it in 97?

Oh, look, inevitably, there's been several chairs and several mixes of committee, and I think each one has its … has its character and its … its ways. It's perhaps difficult to say, you know. I'm the Chair at the moment, and you have a certain view as the chair, then you might be different when you're just on the committee, say, and someone else is Chair. But I think that's inevitable. People are all different. And also, membership interests shift over time, too. We've been doing a lot of walks, and comparative walks, an example being 1970s versus 1890s parks on Sydney Harbour – you know, a walk contrasting two of those, lately.

Which of those places?

Oh, okay, Yurulbin or Long Nose Point Park (in the Sydney suburb of Balmain) dates to the 1970s it's … its ex-industrial shipbuilding cleared bit of sandstone with buildings all over it and become bushland and become a park. Since that in the '70s, and just down the street is Birchgrove Oval, which is turn of the century, 1890s through 1910/20, if you like, more traditional in feel: a late Victorian or high Victorian Park. And such a contrast, you know, and they're doing the same job for the same audience, you know. It's recreation, but what does recreation comprise? What do people expect in a park? Or, you know, storytelling and wonderful. And that was just, you know, an interesting day we had, pleasingly through the Institute of Landscape Architects who were really interested in … in fact, who nominated parks like Yurulbin at Long Nose Point Park … nominated it for state heritage listing.

AILA did that but they also have a thing called AILA FRESH, which is young, rising new landscape architects, and they promoted the event, and so we had a whole bunch of young faces (*Who are you?*) on this walk, which was wonderful, you know. So, but they

may join AGHS, I hope they do, because we love to have them and they're obviously interested.

They're interest might be in modern, you know, post-modern Sydney School Landscape Design, people like Bruce MacKenzie, who was responsible for that job, ('who was he?' Interested) I mean, he even gave a talk to the Sydney Branch once - I twisted his arm about private gardens. He's had a career building public parks or public landscaping. He said, 'I've never done private gardens', and that's why he sort of took that question away and said, yes. He said, well, actually, 'I've had three or four for my own gardens, I can talk about that'. It was a terrific night because it was not the expected Bruce, it was the other Bruce. Good fun.

So … so as one body of the organisation ages and moves on. There's a need to build new membership from a younger cohort.

Yes.

And that's always seemed to be a struggle for the Society. It sounds like with these new relationships, that will shift

Well, look, I think yes, wherever - we're all in the same boat. I think all community groups worry about this, and maybe worry a bit much. I think the trick might be just organising events that might have appeal to young people and promoting figuring out how to promote those events, too. And things like AILA FRESH are one way of doing that. A lot of young people are looking for: what would you say? a wider network, a career, you know. They might be a design graduate or young architect or what have you, looking for a job. And they might meet someone, be tapped on the shoulder, you know… And the nice thing about AGHS events is they're friendly. And there's often a lot of time to socialise first, which can be a bit nervous-making, if you're in a room full of people you don't know. But actually, if someone's taking you and introducing you to someone, that could be your next career move.

30.00

So I think we probably underestimate the usefulness of those diverse crowds. They're very useful. My career is a good example. You know, how did I meet so and so? Or probably through Juliet Ramsay at AHC, or, you know, so and so at the World Heritage. It's how things happen, such and such said, "Come to this talk", and I met X, and I'd never thought about that as a career option that's actually really useful to a young person. So it's partly marketing and partly being welcoming and making sure that someone does actually introduce them and it's not a scary (event) - but actually it's 'what … what's their next talk?' You know, that was fun. Maybe they'll join; maybe not. I mean, we agonise about getting new members, but they don't have to join AGHS. We just … we charge them more if they don't join: I don't mind that.

And you just mentioned World Heritage, tell me about that.

Oh, okay. Well, look, I had a brief flirtation with it in a professional sense, I've worked in that unit in Canberra for, golly, a year or two, and I've remained interested. I mean, one of my colleagues right now, two of my colleagues in Parramatta are working on multi-nation World Heritage Nomination of Trade Halls, would you believe? Led by … Sweden

or Denmark, but including, would you believe, Broken Hill Trade Hall for Australia's component? I think there might be a Melbourne one, but Ballarat?

Anyway, it's got Australian Trade Halls plus International to go forward for World Heritage listing. And they're working on Parramatta's Female Factory precinct, the Cumberland Hospital, you know, the kind of 'mad, bad and the ugly' government side of Parramatta, again, to go for World Heritage listing to be added to our Convict Sites - existing (W.H.) listing. So, it's not like I've left World Heritage behind, I remain interested in that big picture, and I think again, through ICOMOS committee work, interested in those debates. You know what, what is convictism? And actually, that's a global phenomenon, even. What's trade unionism? And, you know, labour and all that stuff. They're international stories, and we might get to know them locally, but it's really interesting to put your brain to that and to think about it in someone else's shoes. I'm still doing that, I suppose, or, you know, irritating those colleagues by tapping them on the shoulder and saying, "Well, have you looked at this? Or what about talking to such and such?" They're probably rolling their eyes at me, but I guess I'm still involved and still interested.

And ICOMOS, when did you join ICOMOS?

Oh, gosh, look. I couldn't tell you, I'd have to check the CV. But some time ago, it would be before I left Canberra, so it would be '90s, I think, probably encouraged by colleagues in the AHC. And a very good recommendation that was, again, sort of mind opening and scope expanding and being invited onto a landscape committee … a cultural landscape committee (Juliet would have talked about this) … which is international. There's a national equivalent. It's become, at the Australia level, it's name has become Landscapes and Routes: Cultural Routes. There are people that are just into things like, you know, the Qantas .... what do they call it …the Kangaroo Route / Hop to Europe, the multiple jet stops, you know, Singapore, or wherever it is that a plane used to have to stop until planes got cleverer.

Or the Route 66 in America, you know, the highway people: there's routes people, plus there's landscape people like me and we got together. Sort of a strange marriage, but a good marriage, because they're all about landscapes, actually. But again, I don't go to every international meeting … there's regular international meetings. Could be a conference, could be a convention, could be a general assembly, as they call even bigger events - all the ICOMOS people together - but a lot of it's done by email and done late at night, by zoom, depending on the time in Timbuktu … could be awkward and a hell of a lot of reading.

But actually, you know, some of it's an absolute joy, and we've done things like publications, (eg:) What's a cultural landscape and how do you define them? And lots of debates about that, of course, and translating it into French or into, you know, Kazakhstani or whatever language, because it needs to be in those languages for anyone to take it up in those countries: fair enough, or to contribute. But you know, practical guidelines … Historic Parks around the world, and you know how to be a bit more serious about documenting and managing parks. And an absolute joy to work on things like that, and squabble with the Canadians or differ with the Argentinians, or, you know, deal with that irritating, you know, push from Asia to do X and say 'why?' But that's part of the work, and actually it's international work, so hopefully it's useful.

You went … talking of international work … you went to France to deliver a paper about Avenues of Remembrance, tell me about that.

Oh, that was a lot of fun. There's a tiny little place called Liffol-le-grand, and it was trés petite, actually. But a wonderful woman, Chantal Pradines: let's call her the Avenue Lady from France, organised an international conference, symposium on avenues, or 'Allees Avenues' in French. French call them allees, but Avenues of Honour to World War One or World War II, and we do keep going to war. So, there can be Vietnam or other … other conflicts, but remembered through planting trees, sometimes in avenues along roads, sometimes just in single lines along roads. And boy, that was interesting. I somehow managed to talk about Australian avenues.

Two talks, one about Australia, one about New Zealand, which was a bit smaller, bit more modest, but I got a got a leg in. But alongside, here come the Italians with 17,000 avenues: who knew?[5] They have been absolutely systematic. Some of them are tiny, but, you know, full credit. It was international so it was so interesting to hear, you know, all of those European countries have been at war and massive losses to various wars, of course. So, they all have avenues - surprise, but so do the Americas. So does, you know, Australasia - who knew?! Wonderful. I think a lot of those papers are online. Thankfully, it was … a lot was digitised and recorded, so you can Google this and find them. My papers are online, which is a joy, but there's a parallel organisation in Australia called Treenet, who are arborists, if you like an industry, a trade grouping, but part of their interest is Avenues of Honour too and they've had a long project … longer than AGHS, and a database and a website documenting Australia's ones.[6]

Longer than AGHS?

I think, I think the project started with Treenet, and we certainly adopted it and run it in parallel too, there is good relations between the two bodies and that's how I came to be in France. It was actually a bit of … an Australian paper was a joint effort with Glenn Williams from Treenet and I think he might have even interrupted me regularly, and, you know, it was a co-delivery, but on Australia. I can't remember now, but Glenn's a joy, and we're still finding more avenues because some of them are poorly documented, or it's a country town that's been abandoned and, you know, the knowledge is not nailed down. I think it's … it's you never get there with heritage. You think you're making progress, but actually, we're still learning.

So when you went to France, was that the first time they'd heard about the avenues in Australia?

I believe so. Yes, I think they were very surprised there were so many. There's literally hundreds - there might be, golly, I'm not good at numbers, but let's say six … six or seven hundred in Australia, which is not bad. It's not as good as the Italians, damn it. But it's not bad. They were actually fighting, there. Well, that's right, we're a long way from it, but we sent troops or we sent nurses. So, I guess we were very involved, even – and it's quite

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5 'New Zealand Avenues of Honour', paper at international symposium, *Tree Avenues – from War to Peace*, https://allees-avenues.eu/en/colloque-2018/2-uncategorised/31-programme-symposium, Liffol-le-Grand, Vosges, France, 12/11/2018, online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V32Rsd3ASMY

6 www.treenet.org (and search for avenues of honour, on it)

poignant. I mean, I've been working on Greek Australian heritage lately, and even learning about places like Cyprus and hospitals you know, that were servicing either jump pads to Gallipoli. Or, what would you say, mop up places, after Gallipoli … strong links to Australia. Funny thing, they've got a war memorial on Lemnos … in Crete, and we have things called Lemnos memorials and scattered. It's those interconnections are everywhere. And boy, is that interesting, and we're still writing them down or discovering them.

Another of those ongoing projects for the AGHS particularly is the *Landscapes at Risk*, which you've been … did you initiate it?

I probably did: troublemaker. I mean, advocacy has probably been around forever before me and AGHS, they've done it, you know, since the beginning. That's partly why we started. But I guess trying to put something (in public) … We didn't always have a website, and we have a website, so it's got a section on advocacy, and that has this list. It's not as up to date as I'd like, and that's partly about us being volunteers, and who's doing it lately, and so on. But it's also national, and that's been … taken a while to achieve and get in a way, get buy in from each branch, because somebody's got to do stuff regularly and update stuff. And that's … that's a joy, but, but a pain.

A pain in what way, Stuart?

Well, we're all volunteers, and everyone's busy. So, you know, it's not to say every branch has the capacity to do that or it is as active as each other branch. So, some branches (on the landscapes at risk, list) look really good. And that's because they've got a good skilled, you know, bunch of people who are happy to do that stuff. It's not the case everywhere. And that's fine. You know, we don't pay people. It's just, you know, in their spare time, and as people are happy to contribute. But yeah, I'm still nudging people about that list, and hopeful we can get a bit more up to date one online. And, you know, I mean, the work goes on, and the more important thing is that, you know, AGHS branches do advocacy at the time it's, you know, (that) issues are hot, and while … before the public exhibitions of development and … what's the word - advertising periods close, you know, the timelines can be very severe. So, it's less urgent to put it on the website and tell the world you've done it afterwards - that can wait - so perhaps that's one reason - people are busy and not responding.

40.14

Well, time-poor and volunteerism is part of the underpinning of the Society. How do you find time to do all that you do?

Well, even clearing a hole to have this interview tells you something, doesn't it! I wonder if I do, some days.

But you're Chair again of the Sydney Branch.

Yeah I am.

So, you're organising … you're attending meetings. You're organising some of the activities. There must be other people doing that. Are you doing the catering as well?

Oh, no, no. Happy to say other, other valiant and better cooks than I are doing the catering side of things. Pleased about that.

So, it's big business.

Well, it's regular. Put it that way. I'm also on a committee planning the conference for next year for Orange, and perhaps running the tours before and after said conference. So that's two committees, not one, but I'm happy to do it, it's … it's mostly fun, it's … mostly very gratifying, really. I mean, I get to expand my circle of people I'm talking to and wasn't aware of. And know which is, which is good, but hopefully it means the Branch is lively and people are interested to come, and maybe even join.

So how are the things progressing for the for the Orange Conference?

Quite well: we've secured a venue. We're working on speakers, and we're nailing down themes and nuggety places to visit. Yeah, it's all happening.

I always thought it would be good to interview the committee before the conference, then after the conference.

Yeah, well, now would be a very good time. I think Helen and Bill (Oates) are off to do a trial run in the next couple of weeks, it's very good time. We're all optimistic and hopeful at this stage,

And it'll be a warmer time of year to do the conference.

Well, exactly, yes, it'll be what, October. So, you're not quite as chilly as we've had a stiff winter and a long one.

Did you attend the … you attend the *Browned Off* conference I think in Sydney, that was in the mid '90s. You were still in Canberra then, perhaps?[7]

Was I? *Browned Off*? Was it '04? So, I would have been.

It was '04.

Yes. Here, I think - probably on the committee at the time. They are a lot of work. I think people you know come and enjoy conferences and talk about them fondly, but that's in blissful ignorance of what's behind the scenes … they're also becoming more complicated. The 2019 (no) 2020 one was delivered online and that was a first and a challenge, and an amazing committee and Christine Hay did a terrific job of wrangling that and keeping cheerful somehow, on top of what seemed like a writhing octopus of issues to me.

During covid: it was very difficult.

Yeah, but we managed it, and it's recorded, again, so even if you weren't there, you can access it, which is wonderful. And you know, we've … technology is a friend in that way, you need someone who's capable of handling it: not me, but it's got opportunities.

Are you going to the Mount Gambier Conference?

Too right. I think the previous Mount Gambier Conference was one of my favorites. Such an interesting part of Australia. I mean, I come from volcano country, and I expect

[7] *Browned Off : old gardens in a new world,* Sydney 2004

volcanoes, and there just aren't enough in this country, there's about 300 of them sleeping between Melbourne and Adelaide.

Yes, yes. You have that statistic. Yes, just for the record, tell me about that.

Oh, well, I think it's one of the three. Again, this ICOMOS and these sorts of people, volcano people, tell me … my mother used to play tennis with Edith, who was Australian, but her husband was a volcanologist, and he'd pop off on planes to go to conferences and give papers on how to move your village in a hurry or temporary agriculture.

Apparently, Southern Australia has the third largest volcanic plain in the world, with something like 300 and - let's say 330 - not extinct, dormant volcanoes between pretty much the edge of Melbourne and the edge of Adelaide and Mount Gambier is in the .. in the west of that … on limestone country, which grows fine red grapes and so on, other pleasures, but it has sinkholes. You know, what's a sinkhole? And some of them have gardens in them - wonderful. You know this Umpherston Sinkhole … we will be going there, I'm sure …The Blue Lake. You know the town's water supply is a crater lake: funny, that. Delicious to somebody like me. I mean, I look at things like the Canary Islands, think, oh, got to go there. It's full of volcanoes. What fun? What can go wrong?

And Dragon trees.

Yes. That's right. Oh, I'll be there.

The 2019 conference was also held in a very volcanic area in Wellington.

Oh, well, my hometown, yes. Not quite, not quite a crater lake, but certainly not too far from one.

But I remember there was a conference paper given about the … the soils and the … it was quite frightening.

Oh yes. Hamish, the terrifying geologist. They don't call it the Shaky Isles for nothing. Well, I mean, New Zealand, Wellington's on a fault line, right, like the western side of the harbour is the fault line. My father should have been a scientist, he was an accountant. But he was fascinated by, you know… Our toilet at home had a timber wall with a crack in it - and dad was measuring the crack, you know? "Oh, that one was a good one, son, it moved, look, half an inch." He should have been a seismologist, really. It's got its pleasures, New Zealand.

How did you feel about that conference being in your hometown?

Oh, look immensely proud. And it was, it was a smash of a conference. I think we did a better-than-expected job. And think people had a whale of a time. Because Wellington's a wonderful place. I mean, you don't realise it, growing up there. You think it's normal and everywhere is like this. But you know, it's not normal at all. It was fun, a lot of fun.

And you did one of the tours afterwards … the post conference tour?

Pre and post. That's right, yeah, I was leading the tours, which … which went well. No one died, which is terrific. Some of them say they had the best time of their life.

Just … just for the record, again, tell me the route, if you recall.

Oh, golly, I can't remember. Is that awful?

We can always add that, yeah, afterwards, sorry, to jump that one on you suddenly.[8]

Oh, again, it was recorded … the concert … sorry, the conference … talks were recorded, so that was a great thing. I'm not sure if the first time we did it, but you don't have to have gone you can, you can still get a flavour for that online, which is terrific actually.[9]

And the weather was good?

The weather was surprisingly good. Wellington could be fickle, shall we say, but it obliged.

Stuart, we've just had a small break. Thank you for another cup of coffee. I just wanted to … continuing that thread of Wellington, you became chair of the AGHS at that point with Bronwyn … Bronwyn Blake.

Co-chair.

Co-chair. Yes.

That was the first co-chairship.

Yes. How was that?

I was it … was a joy and - complementary skills. So couldn't have done it without each other, probably. Yeah, I was aware of Bronwyn, but you know, got to know her a lot better in that that year or whatever the term was and, (it was) an absolute joy.

Do you think it's doable again?

Oh, look. I think it's a good idea. I think it's … it's a lot to ask of one person, especially a busy person and Bronwyn is wrangling three kids, so she's extremely busy compared to me, and I'm busy. But I guess, why not? I think … I can't even remember how it came about the first time, but it … it worked. And I think, yeah, it could work again.

So, on the practical side of managing the paperwork and the discussions that all happened digitally, by phone?

Yeah, never so many emails sent in a year or two. Thank goodness for the internet. But we have these gadgets, right? So, it's doable … problems in Canberra, or actually, outside Canberra. I'm in Sydney, but – it doesn't matter, as long as the internet works. You might have missed last night's email, but the big opportunity today, we've got these. It's a huge country, Australia, and I think people underestimate those distances, but we can get around that.

What do you remember with affection from your time as chair?

Oh, gosh. Well, sort of dance card stuff like, who's going to say what on occasions, because it's bit rude for a Co-chair to muscle out their Co-chair. You know you have to both speak, actually: so who says what? A bit … very interesting to be remind … regularly reminded of other points of view. You know, points of view of people raising families, you

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[8] Wellington - Te Horo (N. of Wellington: Kairanga garden); Palmerston North (Chatswood Country gardens, Victoria Esplanade gardens); Westoe, Kakariki/Marton; The Herb Farm, Ashurst; Greenhaugh, Ashurst; Lansdale, Kairanga; Nga Manu Nature Reserve, Waikanae; Te Mai Mai, Peka Peka - Wellington

[9] Projects & Reports - Australian Garden History Society has the NZ conference.

know, like with kids, wrangling kids, just energy levels or times of day, rhythms of communication that that will work and fitting in when it … when it can be fitted in.

Bronwyn is very gracious about that, and very generous person, I think. She made room and it worked well. But I guess that was educational for me. It sort of forced me to get out of my shoes and think, okay, you know, does this need a phone call? Is this a serious, big or a small issue? Can I just make a decision and copy her in? Or how are we going to handle this situation or that? Or what / who else needs to be in on this: those sorts of things. And some of that's a bit of tick tack, you know, you can't make those decisions on your own… Some you can and you can cut people slack, you know, give them a break, and they don't need to know about every instance. But again, a lot goes on in the background, and perhaps members are unaware of that, and perhaps that's in other realms of life too, not just garden history.

50.15

You were both chairs during that time of COVID, which now seems almost … almost forgotten, but not quite.

Absolutely.

And you. Thank you. Thank you. You. You wrote about the 40th anniversary *(1980 : 2020 : 2060)* that's coming up, so you inherited the … the planning that had gone into that 40th anniversary.[10] What do you … what flowed on from the 40th?

Oh gosh. Well, first stepping back … its great fun figuring out what on earth to say about a decade. We had a Sydney event where we had … what was it an online – it might have been an online event, but one or two people speaking about each decade of those 40 years? In chunks. And what to say? Again, what to say, what to leave out, who to highlight, or events? So much fun. But I think people were amazed that we'd had 40 years, you know. 'Oh really, I've been a member for five, I didn't really '… a bit of that went on. So also, perhaps a bit of reminding, you know: jobs already done or events already held … you know, we've had two conferences in that city so do we need another one in that city? People just weren't aware. So, there was a bit of stock-taking after that, and a bit of also future directions, like a lot of talk about what next. You know: new ways of doing outreach, new technology. And this thing about young people: how do we interest and involve young people, or even let them know we exist? How can that happen in technology they use, or in language they use, rather than perhaps what we were used to, a print publication?

You know, it's a different era, different generation perhaps. A bit of that happened, and I think that was healthy, it was really kind of future scoping, and that's a bit rare perhaps in community organisations to do that, being a bit strategic and calling on … (we have) a lot of expertise in the Society, right? So, people who've managed organisations through change. People like Peter Watts: you know, wonderful people, very willing to chip in - you know, "Oh this works, that's a good idea, why don't … have you ever tried that", you know, just again, sounding people out. And quite a bit of that happened after … and is ongoing,

[10] *Australian Garden History*, October 2020, Vol. 32, No. 2, p. 34

I understand. I'm not on the National Management Committee now, but I imagine that's still going on there, you know? Okay, what about the next 10 years, or the next five? and so on.

It's almost inevitable that you need to be forward thinking.

Well, it's useful, yeah, if you don't want to die.

The … in 2020 you announced that strategic … five-year strategic plan, which is now obviously coming to the end of its time, in 2025, do you know of any dazzling outcomes from that strategic plan, successes, failures?

Oh, look, shorthand. I don't, and I'm not on the National Management Committee so again, I suspect they are looking at that quite carefully, and have been for those five years. How are we going? Are we there yet? But I'm not aware of that myself.

Do you miss the NMC?

A little. As a big picture boy and as sort of a nosey person? Yeah, a bit. In fairness, every month we get brief reports on the NMC. Steve's our Branch rep, and he's pretty good.[11] So, you know, it's not like we're unaware. I joined … the NMC has two meetings in face-to-face meetings a year, February in Melbourne and July in Sydney. And they … after their one day in Sydney I got invited to the dinner afterwards. And that was a joy. Because I mean, you're back with the gang and gossiping madly and you know … you get a gist of what was on the table that day, if not in spades - you get a hint. That was fun. I must say, I liked that.

What are some of the issues preoccupying?

Oh, this thing about young people, of course, and this thing about technology a bit. Perhaps also conferences, and I guess: the complexity or the cost of conferences, and maybe putting off some members who don't have a ready income, or you know, struggling to get to conferences. They might be interested, or they might be struggling with technology, you know, we might be offering zoom and you can dial into a conference, but that's not comfortable for everybody. It's certainly comfortable if you're 17 to 20 years old. But perhaps not if you're another age - fair enough, like, you know what works, or figuring out hybrid models, that's a bit tricky and a bit costly. Can be done though. I mean, Sydney was a good example, where you can record, you can actually broadcast live at cost. But things like that, you know: how could we vary the mix or vary the product a bit and get to more people?

Stuart, we also spoke earlier about some of the … the … you spoke about … I have to paraphrase earlier in our conversation, you talked about someone who embraced your skills, and I very much remember Jeanne Villani certainly talking about … I remember her saying she wanted to meet this young man who knew about things that she didn't know about. Does that happen often?

Well, it does, happily. Can't seem to go out without it happening.

[11] Steven Halliday

And of course, Jeanne had that beautiful garden in Bayview, and another she developed in Bowral and was a great friend of yours.

Well, an amazing woman, really. For a girl from Hastings who her mother pushed out of home, “Oh, you'll never have fun here, go away to London”, washed up in Australia, and created some wonderful gardens, among other things. But, yeah, a curious person and I think that's probably why we got on like a house on fire as I'm a curious person too, lots of questions, what's that … and who's that person?

And a questing, what you might say, a restless mind. But also someone who loved history and built a house that looked like a house that she loved, based on Elizabeth Farm in Parramatta. She's not averse to … it was a new house, but actually it was a sympathetic house: she was quite interested in history. So we did a lot of travel, looking at old places or going to talks or, you know, garden clubs or whatever. Just because we were both nosey, I suppose: egged each other on, a bit.

And a stalwart of the Sydney Branch.

Well, that's right, yeah, very good and generous member. We, the Branch, visited Waterfall Cottage[12] several times, and even the other branch, Southern Highlands, had visited her Bowral Garden, for Christmas parties and that sort of thing. Very generous. I think she loved the Society and realised it's, again, a broad church, you know. An interesting group of people, who actually ask better questions. Or, you know, that you might learn something from. You know: ‘talk to that person, they're the either Brugmansia … you like Brugmansia, madam, you know, see that person over there…’ a very handy group of people actually, you know. Or, such and such is a Heritage Carpenter or you need a dry stone wall’. You know, ‘you need your bridge fixed, well, talk to talk to Bert’. Quite handy.

And one of the other, well, not more than there's more than one other. There are other industry experts like Chris Betteridge.

Oh, look, yes. I mean the professionals, the heritage people in the Society are its backbone from the beginning. People like Chris Betteridge, Colleen Morris: good examples. Who've been mentors to me, incidentally, and I've been very fortunate to have, you know, generous guidance from people like that. People like Michael Lehany, you know, Geoffrey Britton. Wonderful, skilled heritage practitioners who love gardens, I suppose, and perhaps part of their career has been gardens or parks or landscape and broadening the scope. You know, it's not just the house or not just the building: ‘what about that, that tree over there, or that lawn, or the sweep of the carriage drive?’ You know, sort of pushing the envelope a little. And that's really been my interest in and my career, but with a lot of help from people like that through the Society. I mean, even the fact that a Society existed was, you know, Juliet was … people like that saying, ‘well, you might enjoy this’. And boy, did I ever but yeah … Warwick Mayne-Wilson, I mean, a career diplomat who changed careers and became a heritage landscape architect. Very generous man, wonderful reports on this, that and the other, and lots of phone calls and visits. And again, I guess, mentoring actually through shared interests.

[12] *Waterfall Cottage* on Cabbage Tree Road at Bayview, near Church Point in Sydney.

And are you able to be a mentor to others?

Oh, look, I don't know, I suppose so. Don't think about it much. But I love a good question, and I like to broadcast that-: you know, don't be shy. I mean, for goodness sake, ask if you want to know. Or, you know, if I don't know I can say well, you know, talk to Michael Lehany about that. Or I might know someone (else) who does know. That's the only way I've ever learned stuff - and a good way. And actually, also narrowing down what the question is. Often the question is a bit broad and it might boil down to: well, can I do this house extension on that side? Or, you know: does this matter or does it not? And who's got that answer or who can help with that answer?

60.00

Often … I mean, one of the talks I give is on gaps in conservation plans. And a lot of heritage people will promote a conservation plan for a place: it's a good, you know, "what do I do next and what matters?" guidance document. But often they're missing stuff and useful stuff, and often they're missing stuff about gardens or landscape altogether, because they might have been done by an architect. No skin off their nose. But you know, is it comprehensive, or who did it? Does it answer the question in hand, maybe not?

Is it only gardens and landscapes that are the gaps in conservation management plans?

Look I mean, again, this point about heritage changing over time and conversations changing. These days Aboriginal Heritage is a constant question and right, rightly constant. Archeology, you know, is hard to spell but also hard to tackle and it hasn't been tackled much, sadly, on some sites at all. Places like Vaucluse House where they're still doing test digs and finding out, you know, original early features and Aboriginal (artefacts) whatever. So, and that's by an exemplary, you know, organisation that's all over there. We're still learning. I mean, the questions each age asks about change and that's healthy. I mean, I think it's healthy to - it's a bit like strategic plans. You don't ever get … get there … You don't even nail it: it just depends on the questions you're asking at the time.

Briefly, when we were just having coffee, you talked about gardens as refuges.

Oh, okay, yeah, I've been asked to write a piece for *Landscape Australia* on this, on historic gardens, often having rare and endangered plants in them. And by that, I mean, you know, (a plant) might be extinct in the wild and it's only alive by being still in cultivation. An example of this would be Camden Park, southwest of Sydney, which has got just one example, Chilean wine palm (*Jubaea chilensis*), these fat trunked palms in it - they are all but… Well, they're not extinct in the wild, but they're restricted to one national park in Chile and they're endangered. But actually, there's five whopping ones in that garden in Camden Park. That garden supplied, I think, 1000 seedlings to plant a forest of them. As one of the 100 forests in the National Arboretum in Canberra, to represent Chile. Wonderful. So you know, a good example of practical conservation or thinking beyond the immediate.

Camden Park's just lost one of their five – it has just fallen over from a fungus. So they've replanted two babies where the old one was or nearby. This idea about succession planning too, but that's not unusual. I mean … that's really (important). I love plants, so that's been one of my interests in old gardens. You get more for your dollar. The diversity is there, that is not in your local garden centre or is not in the trade at the moment,

because fashions come and go. And you know, 200 camellia varieties that were available for sale 100 years ago are not available now. But they might still be in an old shrubbery. And what's that one with the curly petals and the white? Pretty interesting. Or who knew that pomegranates could be double flowered, or come in different colors? I mean, or, you know, a book of pears: thank you France with 1000 pear varieties, you know: diversity.

A thousand pears?

Oh, more than: yes. I mean the Spanish are good at this. Their botanic gardens have 'cultivated biodiversity' displays: that's a good concept. You know, we've lost some of this diversity - and heritage apple collections are a good example of this. You know, some people are onto this and good on them. Or are propagating and selling and reintroducing.

But historic gardens often have these unusual things. It might be a rainforest tree, you know. Charles Moore was running Sydney Botanic Gardens and sending rainforest trees, among other things, and palms to public gardens statewide, by train. And some of those rainforests have disappeared since then and these plants are still growing (in parks, institutions), and isn't that interesting? And maybe that can lead to reintroductions in the wild, that - stranger things happen. Historic gardens are quite useful really, if you look at them that way.

And I know of one instance just in my patch in Broughton Hall where you came across an unremarkable looking plant. Just tell me briefly about that.

Oh, okay, well, it's basically, what would you say? A more sexy tropical lily pilly would be a short description (*Myrrhinium loranthoides*).[13] And not white, but hot pink (flowered). And even not on the tips of the branches, but along the branches it has flowers. 'Cauliflory' is a strange word, but basically means flowering out of the trunk or out of the branches. It does that … in hot pink. Then big white fruit. Please explain. Wonderful plant. I mean, what's that doing there? And you know, it doesn't look much when it's not flowering, but when you see it flowering, you go, oh my God, what's that? (durobby or watermelon tree - *Syzygium moorei*)

So as you meander around the streets of Sydney, do you ... do you come across surprises like that?

All the time, bless. Well, not all the time, but some of the time. Or I tend to go to the bits of Sydney where that's more likely to happen - perhaps that's more like it. The radar goes, hmmm, Stuart, that might be interesting… I mean old cemeteries are pretty interesting that way, too. We used to be much more generous with planting cemeteries and they're often full of riches too - even if neglected.

And you, you have an Instagram account where you post prolifically and with … with extensive words, not just a 10-word sentence.

I'm amazed they let me do it. And they're yestagram, not Instagram, either. This is what I did last weekend. I shouldn't be allowed.

Do you enjoy that?

[13] https://toptropicals.com/catalog/uid/myrrhinium_loranthoides.htm

Oh, I do, and I hope it works. I mean; I guess it does work. I've got a few people following me or interacting, and I've met people and learned through that, which is again a good thing. You quickly find out who's interested in the stuff you're interested in. Or, you know, some people ask better questions than others. So, you know, 'what do you mean it's related to x?' 'Oh, no, that's wrong, they've changed the name.' So I'm learning too. It's a two-way process. But you know, I have rude friends who say, 'are you ever home and do you ever go to work?' It appears that I'm just travel … travel.

It does appear that.

It's not true. Occasionally I work.

Stuart, coming back to the Society, and some of the activities it has, … the journal is also … you're scribbling there is there something you wanted to tell me about now?

Oh, well, I just thought I probably should mention dendrology at some point, and dry stone walls at some point.

Tell me about dendrology, we'll come back to the journal.

Oh, okay. It sounds like a medical condition, but actually it means - 'dendron' means tree in Greek, and 'logos' means study - so it means a serious interest in trees and woody plants. Shrubs are quite acceptable too. But who knew there's an International Dendrology Society? Tree nuts, if you like and I'm happy to be a member. You have to be … there's a *Country Life* magazine had an article called 'Societies you can't join' and one of them is an International Dendrology Society -- you have to be invited. Anyway, I got invited: I got inspected and invited. And what fun! Because, again, there's a yearbook which comes … there's a pile of them over there, but you know: you can travel the world without leaving your couch or your bed by reading, you know, a report on Patagonia or Uzbekistan. You know, we've just been on a tour of Portugal, whatever, by often experts or read new research on trees or disease, whatever. Fascinating.

That was a tour you did in Portugal?

No, no, I wish. I'm just reading about them. I haven't done … I've only done Australian and New Zealand dendrology tours, but they're huge fun too. I mean, I'm a bit grumpy about trying to work out if I can fit in one on the Monaro in early November, it's just after the Garden History Conference. And, oh, you know the dilemmas! But I know it'd be good, looking at snow gums and one thing and another. But again, you know: a good mix of people from the dead serious and academic to the dead practical. And 'I'm a farmer, you know: I need trees for shelter belts. Don't bother me with botany. Will it grow in my conditions?' It's like, okay…

So are those tours that they provide available to the public or only to members?

Look, you can be a guest. So often … I mean, that's how I got in - to be invited. So yes, you can but you need to know a member and not quite open to all.

Because there was a tour in, I think, in New Zealand earlier this year. Did you attend that?

No, no. I mean, the Kiwis run their own shop and they do a marvellous job. And I try to get to get to a Kiwi tour each year: not always successfully, but yeah, great fun. Because

again, visiting places with the right people. You know, they have a couple of huge arboreta on the North Island, an absolute joy. If you're there with the curator or the forester, or you know, the person who planted all these oaks and knows all about some rare, endangered community. And they're there talking to, you know, you're having lunch with them, you know, sitting on the bus. Wonderful. Good opportunity to … to learn actually and in very friendly conditions.

Quite funny when the internationals come to Australia. I've joined a few Australian tours, but by internationals (here), and that's kind of amusing too, because you can form impressions of countries through people - which is completely wrong, but it's kind of fun.

Do you have an example of that?

Oh, well, I had to lead … lead the internationals around Sydney Botanic Garden once, and there's a massive sort of delay while everyone gets off busses and gathers and gets their coat and their camera ready and so on. So I thought bugger this, and put my collection of freaky fruits on the ground, which was large bunya cone … pine cones and Banksia, whatever … strange things to look at and scratch and sniff while we were waiting and that was a highlight of the day for some people. 'What's that strange thing? Oh, I haven't got that in Belgium'. I mean we don't realise how wonderful our stuff is – we're actually probably far too modest about it. You shouldn't be.

1 HR 10

Or is that because you live and breathe it?

Well, I'm just, interested. And I guess the nice thing about groups like IDS is you can compare, you know, wonderful people who travel the world and, you know, and do exactly that via geography, you know. What about Gondwanaland? What about, you know, South America, Chile or Papua, New Guinea, sharing species with Australia? And what are those species? And, you know, here's the similarities. I think that's fascinating.

And you went on … on a trip, you were telling me earlier about your trip to Cuba. Was that about history or botany?

Oh, well, more about history (and music) perhaps. I mean, Cuba's got a rich flora. So it was partly about botany, although getting to see it was a bit of a stretch. They've got a … what would you say, a nascent National Park system. And it's not that there isn't nature. There is, but getting to it can be a bit of a struggle. We had a month in Cuba, and boy, was that interesting. I mean, yes, it was certainly about history, and some of the old … you think of Havana as the capital but that's the modern capital. There's Santiago to Cuba. There's older capitals and the locus of power has shifted around. So, the architecture and the kind of Spanish planning side of it is pretty rich. But even … I mean … I was having a conversation about Grafton cathedral and Royal palms the other day … they're wanting to take down a palm tree, and I said, look, that's the only time I've seen a Royal palm in New South Wales and the last time I saw that palm was in the main square in Havana in 2000 so I think that might be rare. Could we possibly keep it?

Are they going to keep it?

Don't know. Don't know. It's dropping fronds, you know, and it might kill a picnic party. I suggested planting shrubs underneath it and encouraging the quick picnic party to go a little further away from the drop zone. I think it's manageable, but we'll see how we go.

So your mention of Spain reminds me that that just this morning, your Demi-sec article popped up in my prompts. Tell me about your work there.[14]

Oh, okay, well, I was lucky to get - find out about and then get - there's a thing called ISSI, and its the International Specialised Skills Institute. It's Australian, based in Victoria, but they basically have a range of ways of funding overseas trips to get Australians skills and learnings that perhaps they couldn't get in Australia. And I applied for one of these, an overseas fellowship, and got it to go around Spain in 2005. And I was curious about who manages historic gardens in Spain, such as the Alhambra, or, you know, Botanic Gardens in Madrid, or what have you. Who makes those decisions, you know? Are they heritage items, and who manages them, and how, and how are they dealing with things like tourism and mass visitation? A big issue in Spain, dealing with things like climate change and a drying climate. And Spain is not exactly wet - most of it, anyway. But it's getting warmer and drier, so challenges about management.

And boy, was that fun. It was supposed to be two or three weeks and I think I scrambled all the leave I could get together, and it was two or three months. Because it's a big country, and I stupidly thought I could drive around, but thank God they've got trains and, you know, managed to save a lot of time. Looks small on a map, Spain, but not that quick to get around. So, I can't say I did the whole country but certainly… Boy was that fun, including things like going to gate crashing a conference in Granada on green spaces in medieval Muslim cities, which was trilingual and English was not one of the trilinguals. Oh, dear. Stuart was trying to interview this guy called Jose Tito Rojo, who's an expert on Islamic gardens, and he was hosting the conference, and he wouldn't answer my emails. I thought, I'm just gonna get there, crash this conference and get to see him that way, afterward. And boy, did I ever**.**

But how do you gate-crash a conference?

Well, I got in, and then he said, come to lunch afterwards. So, lunch afterwards was on the hill across – in the Albaicín, which is the old Muslim town sector - across the valley from the Alhambra. And he was working for the university and lunch was on the terrace of the house on the top of the hill looking at the Alhambra. Thank you very much. But lunch was all in French because he'd invited a French ethnobotanist to lunch who insisted on speaking French. Never worked so hard in my life.

How's your French?

4.45

Not very good, but yeah, again, opportunity - that conference, I only understood 30, 40% of it because it's in Portuguese or whatever these languages were. But boy, I could understand the pictures. And, you know, Islamic culture was everywhere in Southern Europe, not just Spain, but, you know: Northern Africa, a huge empire at one time. And had gardens everywhere, and irrigation systems: quite clever engineering. A few good ideas for a drying climate and certainly a few good ideas for managing historic sites. It was an eye-opener. And the whole tour was an eye-opener. Even looking at things like

[14] *Demi Sec: Spanish Lessons for Australia in managing dry-climate historic parks and gardens*, Report on Pratt Foundation/ International Specialised Skills Institute Overseas Fellowship, 3-4/2005 (report 9/2005), online at https://www.issinstitute.org.au/fellowship-report/horticulture%2C-conservation/australia%2C-spain/demi-sec%3A-spanish-lessons-for-australia-in-managing-dry-climate-historic-parks-and-gardens

new parks Barcelona or new Botanic Gardens: what are they collecting and showing? And that was partly about the environment and about climate change. And Spain has scraped a lot of its environment clean. It has urbanized and farmed it for a long time, so there's not much nature left. But boy, that was interesting too. And a few ideas for Australia. Who's doing the same things, making new Botanic Gardens? And you know - what's in those?

Have you been back since?

Yeah, I led a tour of Spanish gardens in 2010 which was picking the eyes out of that trip a bit. That was a lot of fun, and again, no one died and people had fun. Relief.

How did you organise that long distance?

Well, a lot of emails. Again, the hours of day are not helpful for phone calls, so yeah, and perhaps with my Spanish, it's probably a good thing a lot of it was written down. And we managed somehow. And yeah, it went well.

Did you enjoy it?

It was huge fun. I mean, a lot of worry with other people's health and, you know, well-being on tours but on the other hand, you know, on a good day and you know the sun shone and dear Spain did its best. Yeah, we had fun.

What other tours have you led?

Well, mainly local. And I mean New Zealand and Spain would be my international bit, I suppose. But mainly local, and by that, mainly New South Wales and perhaps ACT mostly. I've sort of gate-crashed other people's tours and interrupted on other people's tours in other states, but perhaps not organised them. To be fair.

So Stuart, just … just continuing that thread of your other … other activities before we return to the Society, one of the other things you want to talk about was dry stone walling

Oh right, yes, I'm just planning a trip to Wagga. We're having our annual general meeting of the Dry Stone Wall Association of Australia: who knew? There's a UK one but we've got a local one. Not sure if it's been around 40 years, it's certainly been around 30. Anyway I'm, for my sins, the Secretary on the committee – and getting off it, at the AGM. But yes, that's a lot of fun. And they run trips. It started in Victoria, but it's … growing and we've got stone walls in every state and some of them are Aboriginal stone walls or stone fish traps for that matter. They're not just a European import: every culture does this. Funny, that. So again, what should we be looking at? And, you know, it might have started looking at field walls on farms, say, in Western Victoria, but now we're looking at things like Brewarrina fish traps or, you know, Murujuga in the far northwest - a possible World Heritage Listing for Australia which is petroglyphs, carvings on rocks. But you know, every culture does rocks, and what do they do with them? The Incas, … up the Andes, interesting stuff.

So, would you be speaking at the conference?

Oh, only very briefly to say how many letters we've done this year and very dry. Other people will be much more interesting. But we're, for instance, having a field trip to go to Adelong Falls gold mining landscape. Which is pretty much intact, I think, 1860s gold

mining landscape on a couple of branches of a river valley, if you like, near Adelong, the nearest town. And what would you say … flash in the pan, absolutely heaving with people from all points of the compass, Chinese, Irish, you name it: because it 'there was gold in them thar' hills for a minute or two', but then abandoned. And that's a jolly good thing the abandoned. And I think it's been one or two floods down that valley. So, I think the dams, the what do you call them? … the tailings dams might have been destroyed by flooding but actually… everything else is still there. So lucky to have a couple of keen locals who are happy: (one's a dry stone waller, one's just an interested local) to show us around - and that'll be an absolute joy to get out there. It's one thing to read about these sites. It's quite another to be on site with an expert saying, well, 'look at this, and that's Cornish construction because of that headstone, or this is Irish. And don't you know the difference between Cornish and Irish?' … hell I don't, but you know, again, you're there with the right people and that's just a joy.

Where else would you visit on that conference?

Well, mainly that, and I'm the AGM itself will be in Wagga. So, I'm hoping to get in Collins Park, a lovely town park in Wagga: no dry stone walls, I don't think, but just a lovely old Victorian Park. I've only had a quick look at that once so I'm hoping to get back there at least. I missed a (DSWAA) tour: they did a wonderful Tasmanian field trip - they call them field trips - in the autumn, and I messed up. Out of practice with COVID about you know, you have to have your driver's license, Stuart, to have ID to get onto an airplane, let alone to pick up a hire car. So I didn't have my license on me, so we didn't go to Tasmania. But irritatingly, read about the fantastic field trip I missed in one or two gems of a dry stone description in that state. Yeah, it's good fun.

1 HR 20

How will you feel being … relinquishing being Secretary?

Oh, look, I'm looking forward to that. I'm probably on one committee too many at the moment and I'm getting a bit grumpy about it, so it's probably a good thing for all concerned if I pass the baton. And pleasingly there's somebody who's coming who looks keen.

You've also been a guest lecturer at the University of Sydney. You still in that role?

Look, I'm not sure. I put out some feelers to university chums lately and took a long time to get answers from some and some of the answers were a bit mixed I'd have to say, or a bit unpropitious, shall we say? I think that sector's undergoing quite a bit of change and contraction and certainly I've been busier on that front in the past than I have been lately, is a fair comment. And that probably has more to do with budget shrinking and people being nervous about, you know, what's marketable or saleable this week or might get through the next university budget cut, and so on. Sad to say. I mean, to be fair, we've had a Branch visit, a wonderful visit, care of Cameron Logan, who runs the Sydney Uni' Masters of Heritage Conservation course. He and Hector Abrahams, architect, hosted us in the Fisher Library, looking at a whole collection of wonderful books of drawings of early architecture, colonial architecture and gardens in New South Wales, mostly, and Tasmania by William Hardy Wilson and that was one of our branch visits to go and, you know, again, hear from the curators, the experts on what we're looking at and a joy. So I guess that was a community benefit from a link to a university - put it that way.

So they invited the entire Branch from Parramatta to go in and look at that.

Well, from Sydney and wherever, yes, and we did. Thanks very much.

It was a lovely exhibition.

Yeah.

Do you enjoy that when you have done it, have you enjoyed that, that lecturing?

Oh, good fun. Yeah, good fun. I mean, somebody asked me for contacts with Ryde, Ryde TAFE (School of Horticulture) the other day, and I used to give regular "what the hell's heritage and how does it apply to trees?", if you like, lectures to the senior arboriculture, the tree, tree people doing a tree course at Ryde. And boy, was that fun, because, you know, 'I'm good with a chainsaw but I don't, I can't spell heritage. You know, what do you mean, that tree is dangerous? It's got to go now! They have to deal with an irritating person like me who talks about nothing else, but, you know: could we keep that alive and perhaps we could propagate it? Perhaps you could shift your exciting road or garage or whatever. Yeah, I do. I love that interaction and I think people learn in different ways. And I think, to me, a conversation or asking questions or, you know, having someone you can get an answer from is a joy, and that works for a lot of practical, you know, chainsaw wielding people in particular. Not everyone.

So, you go to them. Do you ever invite them to your Heritage Office in Parramatta?

Well, I guess I've met quite a few of them through that … that job in Parramatta, you quickly learn who's, you know, say a developer or a manager or a contractor consultant to, (and) doing the work on. And you know, quite often you're having differences of opinion about a suite of works or an approach. You know, do we have to cut that tree down? And yes, I can see it's tipping that wall over, but do we have other options? Have those sorts of conversations all the time. So I guess in fairness, you know, the job gives me a wide idea of who's in the industry or might be a challenge or is an ally. And yes, there have been a few crossovers. I've tapped people on the shoulders to give talks or to lead, to chip in when we're having a walk around. The best person to talk is say the tree guy or might be the parks officer from the council. Doesn't matter, but who is that person, and would they be willing? And a lot of them … one just got in touch with me and landscape architect, long career in mostly Parramatta City Council, retired wanting to volunteer for AGHS. Thank you very much. So I just did an email introduction for him to another lady I've just met through giving talks on Paul Sorensen gardens, who wants to do a conservation plan for one in Wahroonga in North Sydney. She's struggling a bit with what needs to be in, what needs to be out, and again, issues like trees and walls. I said, well, perhaps you two could help each other and go for it. baby.

Wonderful to have someone volunteering to volunteer.

It's a good problem to have. Yeah, I was pleased about that,

Just in kindred with your community activities at a tangent to the heritage work you were a union delegate to the Public Sector Association.

Oh yes, happy days. I should have known better. I guess I … yes you inherit mantles at time to time. And you know, I guess it's not the sort of job - a union delegate - that people would rush to - most people: put it that way. It certainly wasn't something I dreamt of when

I was a child or imagined myself being, but I didn't find myself stepping into those shoes. We lost someone who was a union delegate who was marvellous and sensibly moved on and I can't remember why, but it was one of those, well, who's going to do it situations, and 'muggins' stepped in and did it. And helpfully, it was a time of change, so there was plenty to do. Oh, dear. We were restructuring again and shrinking or moving, I can't remember, but anyway, there were a few issues and people were nervous about change, of course. And really nervous about lack of communication and often it boils down to this, you know, will management … are they allowed to speak about X, or do we know about x yet? Or what is the budget or the timeline? Pretty basic questions but often there's no answers or you're not free to give the answer. So that was a bit delicate. It was a few good skills learned in there - about patience or about, you know, who actually controls which bit of what agenda here? But I guess I was that irritating person asking for an extra meeting with management or having a union members' meeting to say, well - do we have an issue here? Do we, you know, do you want to say something? Or have, you know, what is the question? I did that for a time and happily passed the baton later.

16 years, that's an achievement.

Oh, was it? I must have erased that from the memory, but golly.

And shifting back to a more … more your tack, you're a member of the Camden Park Preservation Committee, what does that involve?

Oh, that's good fun. And again, bit like clubs you can't join, you have to be asked to join. Happily, I was asked to join. We're meeting tomorrow actually as it happens. It's a group of, what would you say, knowledgeable heads who sit around a table three times a year, is it three? Something occasional, who advise the family, the Macarthur-Stanham family, who are the inheritors of Camden Park and live in Camden Park House. Give them advice about managing the place, I suppose. And when I say knowledgeable heads, all sorts of knowledgeable heads. It was - the Preservation Committee I think was set up by Quentin Macarthur-Stanham, and now John, his son is, if you like is the bloke and Edwina: they're the family reps. But there's historians, there's a museum person, there's myself who's sort of a garden person, I suppose, there's archives people, there's media people, there's volunteer, all sorts of angles of what is Camden Park and what is the collection, if you like.

They've got a huge … it's a family farm and a family estate with a suite of architecture from very grand to very modest, you know, it's got slab huts and weird, strange, you know, kind of cow shelters and whatever, all sorts of structures, a vine (what do you call it?) vineyard vats, underground slate lined with - they had a wine industry. Please explain. You know, all sorts of - one or two issues. But you know, how do they manage it? And also, practicalities, like the property hosts an open weekend each year in September, when the garden is peaking, if you like, in spring. So planning for that: will people be leading walks and talks and who and what and how are we going to manage x and y? Or special visits from time to time, they've just hosted Camellias Australia: who knew it existed? who've also just been having an International Camellia Conference, as you do, or a national one.

In Australia?

In Australia. Actually that's not true. I think the international one was Japan, but this was the national follow up. Anyway, they popped in on their day off the conference. They popped into Camden Park, but not just popped in, there was a display in the stables of, I don't know, about 120 historic camellia cultivar flowers including several bred in Camden Park and released into the industry from Camden Park from the 1830s - all labelled - wonderful and tours of the garden stuff, but it's who's going to lead these tours, and, you know, who's speaking on the day, and stuff. I mean, for instance, some of it gets fairly fine grained.

There's a fantastic library, family library in the centre of the house. There's a book inscription project and a subcommittee who are just going through those books one by one, to find out where they all come from. And that's delicious, because it tells you all about who the family knew or who'd been to stay and it's quite a project. You know, what are these tentacles? Who knows who? What are the networks that just one instance? I mean, digitising is part of it too: proper conservation care for some of the more delicate archives, you know, the paperwork and what not, artworks, but … but really, you're just being asked for advice. You know, 'what do you think we should do on this? Or who should we speak to? We need to get a trades person to do X'. I mean, there's a wonderful conservation, furniture maker, restorer on that committee, Ian Thomson, I'm hoping to scadge a ride off him tomorrow. But you know, he does a bit of work at Camden Park on delicate sort of restoration work, all that sort of stuff.

It must be so exciting Stuart to sit on a committee with that body of expertise.

Well, you learn – it's fun.

And the capacity to follow through, not just to provide the expertise.

Yes.

And advice. But for the family to have the capacity to … to fulfill those recommendations.

Look absolutely and I've got to say the Macarthurs are very open to - they're very clever I think, about tapping people for advice. But also, they take advice, and you can see, you know: actually it's used. John asked me to write a report on the trees in the garden, what was rare and what was kind of a priority list for propagation. And they're doing that, you know, the volunteers are onto it and that's so pleasing. This thing about Chilean wine palms is one thing, but there's all sorts of riches in that garden and the camellias are a good example. There's a whole project just on camellias, you know. Which ones did William Macarthur breed and do we have them all in the garden? You know. Can we find them in other old gardens, propagate them and bring them back? Terrific stuff going on, and positive stuff. And I think that's useful to sort of show to other people that you can do this. You know, it's not rocket science. It's just, you know, here's how it can happen.

Great example. What … do you … are you involved in doing tours, or any of that sort of on those open days, or when the garden?

Oh yes.

The Camellia group come?

Yes, for my sins, they have house tours, which are booked by the hour, and there's a lot to see in the house. But they have garden tours too, and it tends to be a tag team of either Trish Restante, who's the wonderful head gardener. Or often it's Euan Mills, who's Trish's sidekick, and Euan knows way more than me. Mr expert propagator, not least. And you know, can he graft a Bunya pine or a Wollemi pine onto a kauri? Of course he can, and here's an example. It's either Euan, Trish or me, and sometimes it's John taking a tour around the garden. But yeah, sometimes they book out too, which is pleasing.

So I take it you do the garden and not the house.

Yes, yes. Happy to be guided around the house. Really not sure what I'm looking at half the time … struggling in the garden sometimes. What's that? Never seen that before.

You … just talking trees and so forth and grafting, you did a project on Bidwill.

Oh, yeah. Well, good example, people would know the Bunya pine, Bunya Bunya pine that came to commerce, if you like, or came to be named after Mr Bidwill: John Carne Bidwill, who was a chap from Exeter, England, but also, I suppose you'd say an entrepreneur, and yes, and a friend of the Macarthur family.

So actually, he had a few links with William Macarthur of Camden Park and there's quite a bit of Bidwill in that garden. Bidwill, amongst other hats, he very briefly had … was given the job by London of running Sydney Botanic Garden in 1848 and in the meantime, the local Governor, Fitzroy, I think it was had appointed someone else, Charles Moore. So by the time Bidwill got on a boat and got from London to Sydney it was “all over rover” and the local job appointment trounced the colonial one. So anyway, as consolation prize he was given Wide Bay, which is broadly Maryborough and that bit of Central Eastern Queensland. He was the, gosh, forgive me, Colonial Officer, I don't know, not the Governor, but the chap in charge of the colony of Wide Bay. And guess what? That's where Bunya pines, you know, were not discovered but certainly he came across them and did lots of (couldn't help himself) exploring the ranges looking at plants as part of the guy's makeup and sending them back to William Macarthur. So, guess what? There's Bunya pines and all sorts of strange Bidwill things in that shrubbery: of course there are.

But also to commerce. He was connected to the nursery trade, and there might be a buck in it, right? And Australia was exporting novelties such as Bunya pines. Tasmania had a Norfolk Island pine export craze from that East Coast, you know, from the Norfolk Islanders who washed up on Tasmania. You know, our stuff was interesting to commerce and there might be a buck in it.

So, yes, I got a bit obsessed with Bidwill, of course, and wrote a bit about him and argued with other Bidwill experts and macadamia experts and what have you. How delicious you know, do we have Australia's oldest macadamia tree? And where's it growing? Well, guess what? It's probably from Mr Bidwill and it's probably in the shrubbery at Camden Park and we've tested that. Oh dear. Ongoing debate.

I'm just going to pause.

1 HR 25 mins – end of audio file 1

Audio File 2

Stuart, clearly, you use the word "obsessed", but … but clearly there's a great excitement as you're telling that story. And there are a number of other themes that you've… you've provided your Chinese Australian landscape making. Tell me about that.

Oh gosh. Well, I mean, that's another world opening up, really slowly: a bit like you realise you know nothing about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal history. Chinese History in Australia is long and rich, and the more … you scratch, the more you find. I mean gold and gold fields is one, of course. Who was on the gold fields, and partly it was the Chinese, even the name, you know, new Gold Mountain, I don't know how to say it in Chinese, but that's what China called Australia for a while. And that tells you something, doesn't it? But, you know, I mean ancient culture, long maritime culture, and trading culture too. If you think about things like Indonesia and the islands, there's a chain of ports between, say, Shanghai or say Guangzhou and the north of Australia. Funny that. And you know, even things like trepang or sea slugs and the sea trade - might have been Indonesians but I'm sure there's a bit of Chinese influence there. So what are these cauldrons doing on a beach? Boy. And to me, who's interested in landscapes and also movement, that gets interesting, you know. And I've got colleagues who've worked on things like Chinese trading stores, Quang Hwa Chong. I think it is three story trading store in Chinatown, in the back of Sydney City. Possibly you know, full of collections and contents that may be going on the State Heritage Register.

This whole business about trade and who was in trade, doing what? - export and import. The Chinese were great traders and still are: even things like Chinese plants. You know, I love plants of course, so, you know, where's the Camellia come from or does tea come from? Well, funny that - China. I love magnolias, I've never thought about where they come from: well, think about it. A rich history of plant importation and sale and fashion. Thanks to that country even things like chinoiserie and architecture, we've had moments of fascination with China, and they continue, you know, what's … what's the east? and … what's the exotic, that applies to gardens and buildings?

And you also prepared the listing for the Chinese Garden of Friendship in Darling Harbour.

Oh yeah, that was my first State Heritage Listing, which was a nice one to get a garden and to get an interesting, if you like, cultural garden at that – a happy, you know, a happy outcome. We've even had a Branch Garden History visit of it, again with experts you know, who are behind the design or the management of the garden. Absolute joy to sort of tease out a bit what you're looking at and what it might mean to a Chinese person or to a person who's a bit more adept at the history or the philosophy behind. Why is that pine … or palm tree next to the pond? Or what do those rocks mean? They mean something.

When did you do that Stuart? Rough, rough.

Oh, a year ago. We did it in winter and there was such a good response: can we do this again in summer? And so, I'm hoping to do it again this coming summer, autumn maybe – it depends on other people, but that's in the back of the brain. It'd be nice to do it when the water lilies are out - the lotus blossom. And, you know, different effects in different

seasons and it's a garden of seasons. So, we hope. I mean I've also met young researchers who are Chinese/Australian oral historians or, you know, they're interested in that side of history because it's their history, through garden history and I'm quite pleased about that. So, I'm not saying that's mentoring but it's lovely to be having those sorts of conversations and realising that, oh, it's a burgeoning thing, this. You know, who's asking what questions? What is Australian, anyway? is a pretty good question, actually.

That's another interview.

Yes

And again, just continuing your community activities. You're also on the on the committee. I don't know what the title is, for Yaralla, Yaralla estate.[15]

Oh, this is through work, through Heritage New South Wales. Yaralla is a big suburban, was a country, now suburban estate of the Walker family, and it became a convalescent hospital later. And it's run by New South Wales Health and Health, I think, host and set up a community advisory committee - a bit like the Camden one - of helpful experts, slash knowledgeable heads. And I'm probably the irritating heritage person, because Yaralla is on the State Heritage Register - so 'does x need approval? Or, you know, who do we speak to about doing works or a grant or whatever?' There's a sometime committee of … of people like that who help Health navigate again, open days, they have an annual - a bit more often than annual, but they're to have open days or open weekends at Yaralla and managing the public, and that's often through volunteers. But who's going to do what on the day? Or it could be practical management, you know, XYZ? We just had a storm, 15 trees down and do they need replacement or not? Or, you know, who can do X? Practical management advice a bit.

Is that an onerous amount of time?

Oh no, hardly. It's a joy. There's another similar committee about Callan Park conservation area in Lilyfield in the inner west: the same sort of thing. It's good practice actually - government owners who, you know, they're not heritage experts but they're happy to take advice and … and helpfully there's a structure to do that, and that's good, actually.

It's wonderful to have these big chunks of land, like a Yaralla on the on the harbour … Upper Harbour, Lower Harbour and the journal, the most recent edition of the journal, had that story from Christine Hay about the Green Necklace.

Oh right.

And the listings this week of Ballast Point.

Yes, yes, I've got something for you. I did a little because I'm such a nosey bugger – a table of how long is the Green Necklace and what things on the harbour or riverside chunks of nature or chunks of park exist on the State Heritage Register, and from when? So I've done you a spare table here, but the blue ones are Green Necklace. Green Necklace came out of the Heritage Council of New South Wales – it commissioned the Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA, New South Wales chapter) to do a study and

[15] Dame Eadith Walker Convalescent Hospital (NSW Health-run), on the Yaralla Estate, at Concord, NSW

come up with 10 state heritage nominations. Okay, and what AILA came up with was this concept of the Green Necklace, which was basically harbourside parks, or parkland up Sydney Harbour. Some of it ex-industrial. Some of it had been covered with oil tanks for much of the 20th century, Ballast Point Park, and what's now called Carradah Park, Berry's Bay. They're two examples, also Badangi, what we're calling Badangi Wollstonecraft. They were all oil tanks. For most they cleared scraped rock, carving out holes and rocks to put oil tanks in, for much of the 20th century.

But that industry's moved on and they've become parks. Or we talked about Yurulbin, or Long Nose Point at Birchgrove, another example, but actually covered with buildings … ship building and that stuff. Industrial Sydney had sort of taken over from natural Sydney at these strategic points, but some of it has turned back into parks and that was AILA's interest. And slowly, those 10, six out of the 10, have now gone on the State Heritage Register, including Ballast Point, sorry, Ball's Head Reserve at Waverton, and just across from Yurulbin. Those are the two last listings that are just in July, and they're in blue on this but the yellow ones are older, and other listings up and down the harbour, including places like Callan Park, all sorts. Some of them are defence lands. It might be Middle Head, or George's Head, or North Head, which is a quarantine station, and St Patrick's Estate at Manly chunks of or South Head cultural landscape, you know, sort of the gates of Sydney Harbor onto the ocean.

They're all on the State Register, which I think is terrific. And some of them are natural, (quote, unquote), there's bushland. Some of them are highly, you know, scraped clean and industrial and not natural at all. So, you could say they're not that green, but actually, they're landscapes. And I think collectively, that's interesting. It's not to say that other, some of the things on here and in grey, and they're in the wrong harbour, they're in Pittwater, you know, they're outside Sydney (harbour): does it matter? You know, where does the buck stop, Stuart? But I'm interested in landscape listings and the lack of them. You think: actually it's not such a lack when you look at a list like this: we're making progress.

Progress.

Yes, it might be latter progress.

Progress nevertheless. And the AGHS is front and centre of all of that.

Well, funny thing, isn't it? I mean, the three authors of the AILA study were Colleen Morris, Christine Hay and James Quoyle, all ex-Branch chairs of the Sydney Branch and Colleen ex-national chair. So, who did the work and came up with the ideas? Actually, AGHS members did, for AILA and for the Heritage Council, but thank you very much. You know garden history members.

So does the Garden History Society punch above its weight?

Oh, look, I think absolutely. And I think we're probably too modest about our achievements. You know, we're a bit don't like to bang our own drum, perhaps that's an Australian thing anyway, and perhaps Australian … and AGHS's culture has been a bit a bit modest, a bit reserved. I think that's probably an inheritance from Victoria and some very well-behaved people in Victoria, for that matter, too. I won't name them, but, you know, there's a culture of politeness and perhaps restraint. And perhaps I'm not guilty of this myself, but I think we've got plenty to be proud about even that 40 years thing was

amazing hearing from people who, you know, kept the Society alive at pinch points when it might have died or, you know: crunch points of growth.

10.00

Amazing for a bunch of volunteers to actually be national now, to have a journal of such quality, you know, whatever times a year it is, have a website and run a conference. And, you know, it's not bad, actually. We don't have masses of money, don't have masses of members, but all the same. I mean, you look at the *Oxford Companion*, two- or three-inches (book thickness) worth of … I mean, the only other country in the world to have an *Oxford Companion to Gardens* is the UK (and so they should) but Australia, I mean, who knew it's got, you know, three inches worth of data? Quite good, and you can get very distracted and waste whole hours of your day (in that book), you know. 'What's a fernery and, oh, grottoes and ha ha's?' I was trying to explain to a young person what a ha ha (is), there's an entry on those in the *Companion:* that's all AGHS. That's all done at midnight, thank you, Richard Aitken, or volunteers in WA. Not bad.

Do you consult the *Companion*?

All the time. It's just there, see that fat one up there with all the inserts.

And did you … did you make an entry? Write an entry.

Only one.

On what topic?

Oh. Max Shelley, who was a garden designer. Just over the road from here is a place called *Boomerang*, a 1926 garden for Frank Albert, the sheet music zillionaire. Anyway, lovely garden by a chap called Max Shelley, who is off the radar, and I put about an inch worth of text on Max in there.

It's one of those volumes that you want to have if you're stuck on a desert island.

Totally, yeah. And I think people don't know it exists, and that's a shame, because I think we should be immensely proud of that. That was a miraculous, but a wonderful, you know… I point colleagues to it in our library at work all the time. Look, this has been, you know, someone's thought about this conundrum, have a look at the hospitals entry and the *Companion* has one, or on public parks and … and also a bit of a who's who: who wrote the entries. You know, Chris Betteridge, is there. Colleen Morris, of course, they are wonderful, but we've got them in print and we've got the distillation of that expertise. You know, it irritates me: the things that are not in the *Companion*, but, '*oh, get over it, Stuart, like we need another one*'. But, you know, that's an amazing achievement.

Is that something you'd take on, volume two?

Well, I've written in the margins rather too much, I don't think I'll ever be able to resell that book full of scribbles.

So, the Garden History Society funded … contributed to the production of that and through the Kindred Spirits has contributed to a number of publications that also speaks to the strength and scholarship of the Society.

Oh, yes. And I think generous philanthropy too, from the beginning, even people like Elisabeth Murdoch giving the Society seed money so that there would be a Society, or so that there would be a journal, there would be a conference, and wonderful, you know. And just to quietly, not, not tub thumping, you know, 'I did this, and give me a ra ra', but just, you know, a quiet tap on the shoulder or here's, you know, a bit of money to make sure … wonderful … Nina Crone Fund, you know, I mean, I think again, we punch above our weight actually and perhaps we could do more, but we've done pretty well.

It's marvellous to hear back from the people to have a piece from people who've won the awards.

Well, that's right, a lot of talk at the moment about getting young people to conferences and the cost of things, and, you know, scholarships and again, quite … quite generous donations to make sure that young people can go, some: but should there be a payback? And I think yes, there should. You know, that's actually a leg up for a young person. So it's not unreasonable to say, well, can you write something for the journal on it, or for the website? Sure, they're young people and they're busy going through exams and other things, but I don't think that's unreasonable.

And the journal, I noticed this edition, has a slight twist to the design. And the editor, Francesca Beddie, made reference to that. What do you think of that new tweak?

Oh, I think it's good. I put, I put six spare journals on the table at the Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society last Tuesday and they were snapped up in minutes. Can I have that? – pounce! And I don't think it's because the intellectual reading within looked pretty sexy - they nabbed it.

What did you talk to them about?

Paul Sorensen, life and career. So designer and Danish and best known for Blue Mountains, but really, he did about 100 gardens right across the state, including in snowbound Glen Innes in the north, yeah.

And do you prepare a powerpoint to go with all of that?

Yeah, yeah. I was giving that talk somewhere else, and some bossy person told me it was far too long with far too many slides. I had to cut to it. Oh, but yes, that was good advice for that audience, actually.

But all of those things take a great deal of time to … to conjure up in a way that's professional and tells the story or that you're speaking.

Oh, look, I think talk … talk giving, is quite a quite an art, and I'm not saying I've got it, but even … you need to know who you're talking to and to what audience. You know, audiences vary wildly, and that's so helpful to have a bit of an idea. I've been wooing this chap to talk to the Society about Japanese gardens. He's had a career designing Australian Japanese gardens and he's agreed to do it, thank goodness. But now we're having a delicate negotiation about what the actual theme or the actual content and he came along to another talk, another event Sydney Branch had, I think, to test out who the audience was and I thought that was very clever of him, because, you know, what are these people like? What? What kind … how do I pitch it? It's very hard as the speaker. You get invited to give and you may or may not know a thing about the audience. And

actually, that's so useful. I mean, I gauge a talk by do I get any questions? And are they good questions? But it's a bit late by then, Stuart. It would be nicer to know, you know, "oh, well play this up and forget that". You know actually, that's good advice – 'cut those 20 slides, they'll all be asleep by then'.

Or press faster.

Yes, yes.

Now there's no manual on … on how to present a presentation but coming back to manuals, as we've spoken earlier, there is the advocacy manual that the Society has just produced.

Oh look again, we probably are overachievers as a Society. There is an amazing sort of AGHS manual for the whole Society and all the stuff we do. And it's quite a lot of stuff. I mean conferences, for example - just on conferences, is a manual helpful? Because we've done quite a few and we've learned along the way what works what doesn't So, it's really writing that down and trying not to repeat mistakes or trying to learn from each instance. Even things like newsletters or, you know, branch events or lot of collective wisdom, I think, and some branches, what would you say, have special specialties? So, you know, they might have done a lot of publications so, how's an easy way of doing that? Or, you know, what works, what doesn't? Useful. And it's a bit daunting when you get given the manual, toto. You think, 'oh my goodness!', but you don't need to read or know all of it. You know, you might only be interested in writing a newsletter or, you know okay, I'm involved in a conference. Well, okay just concentrate on that chapter, forget the rest. You know, it doesn't have to be daunting. It's just supposed to be helpful.

I mean, Peter Valder, I mean, we probably - that *Browned Off* conference in Sydney, he was the conference dinner speaker in the QVB: the lovely tea room upstairs in the QVB. And Peter, wonderful man. I was his host for the table at the dinner, and I don't think I introduced him, or something. But anyway, a quiet aside from him, during dinner (he said) was 'when people are laughing they're more open to new ideas'. And I thought, what an excellent quote because you were laughing the whole time when he was talking, he was non-stop funny and witty. And you don't know how much information that man was very cleverly putting across while you were roaring with laughter. You know, he might be talking about rhododendrons and big trusses and busty women on English National Trust visits of shrubberies and following the Morris Minor with the Lord and Lady around the estate - roaring with laughter. But actually we're learning a bit about estates and rhododendrons along the way. Very clever man.

Very dry.

So, he was a manual of giving talks actually, in his own way.

I remember when, when he did those, those sessions on those got that gardening show, that man, whose name escapes me.

Don Burke.

But he did … Don Burke … but he did cooking sessions.

Please explain. Who knew? Very modest, but those wonderful books of his on China. You know, Chinese gardens, or plants - wonderful, you know, full of wisdom.[16] And he'd travelled to China. It wasn't secondhand, it was first. Delicious.

So Stuart, just resuming. We've just had a small break, and one of the things we were talking about before were the various manuals and the advocacy manual that you have … have prepared with Anne Claoue-Long is that … that was the climate change one I brought with me, but … but, tell me about your work on the advocacy.

19.55

Oh, okay, look, Anne. To be fair, Anne did most of the work I just was irritating and suggested a few things to add. We tick tacked a wee bit. But she's a quiet, quiet warrior for the Society, I think. And we owe Anne a lot of credit. She's pulled together a bibliography or updated and enlarged a bibliography of garden history and cultural landscape books and studies, terrific, which is online and the same with the Advocacy Toolkit.[17]

I think it was a bigger project than we imagined when we set out. But who did most of the work? Actually, Anne did. I'm interested in advocacy, so I couldn't help myself, of course, but I mean she's an experienced bureaucrat, like, she was another colleague in the Heritage Commission days: an historian, extremely good brain, extremely quiet and a bit reserved person. And AGHS is full of people like this, and they, you know, quiet heroes. They do the work. They don't jump out in front of the microphone, you know, just in the background, and it … it's a Toolkit, you know.

And people are a bit, what's the word … mystified about advocacy or a bit frightened off, ''I couldn't do that'... Rubbish, you know. I mean, we wouldn't have environment legislation, or we wouldn't have heritage laws in Australia without grumpy you know, the housewives of Hunters Hill, who gave us, you know, Kelly's Bush? Let's team up. An unlikely alliance. You know, National Trust matrons plus builders labourers' federation, our first green ban. Please explain… But you know, where did we get all this stuff? Actually, we got it from protest, or we got it - from planting trees on the North Shore off irritated housewives with dirty washing because, you know, there are no trees to lap up the dust on my white sheets. Beware of angry housewives, you know. So, of course you can do advocacy and everyone does, actually. Some of it's very politely done, very quietly done. There are many ways to skin a cat. But how do you do it? That's what the Toolkit is about. And bless her, Anne's done it. Thanks very much.

What's the pickup rate been like with that?

Look, patchy? I don't really know. I mean, I think the National Management Committee would have a better idea. And it's been a while now, and it'd be worth perhaps doing a pulse check with the branches, you know. Is it useful? Is it mystifying? I'm not … I'm not aware of that. You put this stuff together and you put it out there, and it goes a bit quiet. So, you could read that either way.

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16 'The Garden Plants of China', 1999; and 'Gardens in China', 2002, both by Florilegium.

17 Bibliography is at Projects & Reports - Australian Garden History Society – and
The 'publicly visible' advocacy page is at: Garden History Now - Australian Garden History Society

Good to know if the if the manual is working.

Look, absolutely. And I think that's healthy. And it sometimes takes people time to digest. And a bit like we're talking about the manual being a bit, a bit big and a bit sort of, what's the word - scary? You don't have to use it all, read it all. It's really to answer questions. And you might only have one question and that's on page 19, so you know, you might use it just for your one question and be quite happy Jan. So, no harm in doing a pulse check, I think.

Stuart just coming back to some of the other organisations with which you've been involved, the National Trust. Of course, the Society has the benefit of meeting there in Sydney.

Yeah, it's a particularly close link in Sydney. I think there's a fair to say, a relationship between AGHS and the National Trust nationally, and there's different trusts in each state, right? So South Australia: they run their own shop fair enough, but there's a lot of overlap. A lot of members that are shared … properties that are run by the National Trust who generously host AGHS visits or maybe volunteers in the garden in Riversdale, Goulburn or whatever it is, who happened to be Garden History members.

I was lucky to be … I've been advising somebody who's a student, heritage graduate, looking for a job lately. I said, "Look, you could do a lot worse than volunteering to help the Trust through its committee system and did you know it's got committees, and one of them is about landscapes." It used to be called Parks and Gardens. I think it got out of hand, the title was Parks and Gardens Classification Committee, because it's all about classifying when I joined it, but it's now the Landscapes Committee, which tells you a bit of change, but wonderful work. You know, that's how I met Colleen Morris, people like that, you know, who are really doing the same stuff. You know. What? About gardens or parks statewide? Are they heritage? Should they be on lists? Of course, you know, is there a conservation plan or, you know, what's special about this one or that, and putting out publications.

There's a lovely book called *Interwar Gardens*. It's the only book on gardens of that era put out by the National Trust in New South Wales.[18] So pretty handy, actually. The Trust does wonderful work and has a suite of gardens of its own, and has interests. So that's been helpful. I think, still is, between those two organisations.

And like the Society also has a strong advocacy plank.

Oh, look, absolutely, and it's national, so that's useful. I mean again they run their own shop in each state, so some of the states are more … active than others, but good thing.

And also, I wanted to come back to your publications as well, because you contributed a chapter to the wonderful book on *Gardens of History and Imagination*, such a title.[19]

And the subtitle, *Growing New South Wales*.

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18 *Interwar gardens : a guide to the history, conservation and management of gardens of 1915-1940,* The National Trust of Australia (NSW) Parks and Gardens Conservation Committee, 2003

19 *Gardens of history and imagination : growing New South Wales,* edited by Gretchen Poiner and Sybil Jack, Sydney University Press, 2016

And what was your chapter?

Oh, mine's about marine villas. What's a marine villa? And you know, it's got to have water basically, or be approached across or seen across or from water. That's the gig. You know, villas are common, but not marine villas, or even where they were common, they're rare to survive. Or, you know, we've subdivided off the beach, so actually, it's cut off from that, sort of thing. That was my chapter. It's an interesting book because it was, again, a broad church, a wide number of voices, different chapters on different things. Worth buying the book just for the chapter on comparing Japanese gardens, imagination and aesthetics to Aboriginal land management, things like cultural burning. It's worth buying the book just to put those two concepts into one chapter and think about it.

They're put together by two editors, Gretchen Poiner and Sybil Jack, two historians: wonderful creatures. But we were all … the authors were members of something called ISAA which is Independent Scholars Association of Australia, an interesting organisation of all sorts of people who might be of all sorts of backgrounds and interests, but like writing or like researching. And in this case, about gardens or landscapes. And again, the focus restricted to New South Wales. So, it's not pretending to be national, but delicious and quite rich reading about our state.

Why did you pick marine villas?

I think because they're threatened. I think because they're getting rare. It didn't used to be rare when we used to travel by water but now that we've got obsessed with land and perhaps with real estate (perhaps we were obsessed with real estate from get go), but they're shrinking - the amount of garden they have. Some have no garden left in places like Lindesay, at Darling Point. You know, it's really a marvellous house, but it's lost any connection to the harbor that's, sadly, quite common. So any that survive, and we've mentioned Yaralla and Broughton Hall, other examples. They're rare now and people don't appreciate that rarity, I think, and it should be part of every discussion about future development because they're disappearing. We're just not careful enough of this.

And of course, within a small stone's throw from you … from where we are now, you have …

Elizabeth Bay House, yeah. I mean, my whole bay was a 54, 55 acre garden of one chap who was running the colony. He had a house, but he had a 55 acre whole valley garden. I mean, one of the Green Necklace nominations, number 10, let's call it, was the landscape bits that are missing from, you know, Elizabeth Bay House on the State Heritage Register. Of course it is, but what about the Grotto and what about the service drive, which is my street, and you know the orangery, which is over the road, it was an estate, right? So where's that landscape gone? Case in point.

Another conversation. Just, just returning to the Society. No, before we, before we come to the Society, I wanted to return to a few people whose names you've mentioned as we've met together for the preliminary and today, Stuart.

John Adam was one man you mentioned.

Oh yes, taciturn, grumpy New Zealander, but a marvellous creature. He's kind of The Great Garden Historian of New Zealand, based in Auckland. He has a company called Endangered Gardens, which says it all, doesn't it? And I'm happy to say John and I've

been corresponding for years and years and I'm delighted about that, usually with curly questions. “Now, Stuart, what have you got on x?” “Now, John, how many of these have got New Zealand?” irritating questions, but generous, you know. And sharing drafts, even flirting with giving conference papers together but just sharing knowledge really, and I guess a shared approach. I mean, I'm a Kiwi, I'm still interested in that country, even if I'm here, you know. I think that's interesting and he's been a very good mentor, as well as colleague and friend. I'm happy to say.

James Beattie is another younger example. You know, I think you'd say these days, the Great Garden Historian Coming of New Zealand - and he's chairing, amongst others, he's given papers for AGHS at conferences, wonderful papers. He writes for international - he edits an international journal on garden history. He's a bit of a polymath but he chairs something called the New Zealand … hang on … New Zealand Garden History Research Foundation, which is a bit of a mouthful, but it's a sort of council of elders, if you like, on that subject, on that country.

30.21

Mostly who are living in that country, but I’m a blow-in from across the Tasman and I've got to say, an underachieving blow-in compared to some of them in there. But wonderful, you know, sort of saying, “Well, how do we talk up this subject in this country?” You know, they don't have a New Zealand Garden History Society, but they do have this foundation, which is a good thing. And he's pushing that a bit and then pushing again the subject matter, you know, what about the Chinese in New Zealand? you know, other subjects or you know - widening the subject outside the garden fence a bit. They both are.

And also John Hawker.

Yeah, I'm fond of Johns! I mean another influential John is John Hawker, who's had the good sense to retire now, but he's been a long time working for Melbourne Botanic Gardens and Heritage Victoria. Sort of my equivalent over the Murray River: I'm Heritage New South Wales, he has been Heritage Victoria. I think he's about to or just has given a talk on trees in Wombat Hill Botanic Garden, wonderful Daylesford, a Victorian upland mountains botanic garden. An absolute guru on trees. He's a member of the Dendrology Society so I like to bump into Hawker in shrubberies arguing about trees and do. But again, you know, a generous and helpful colleague about, you know, “Stuart, how many of this tree have you got in NSW?” “Well, John, you know, what about that?” Practical, same … dealing with the same problems, you know, management or listing, or arguments with owners, road extensions through whatever same sort of issues. But another calmer brain to consult and, you know, a generous brain at that. Yeah.

I think it's impossible to overstate the value of those networks for people working in an area as broad as this church is, and perhaps that's part of the work of the Society, the formal work of Companions and the *Companion,* singular, but the also the networking that carries on below the surface.

Oh yes. And the shifting questions, right? And John Adam was writing something about a Māori Drystone Landscape … here we go … in South Auckland and it's a volcanic landscape of what would you say, moraine or anyway, dry stone walls. Potato cultivation is of a foreign, imported crop but who were the expert cultivators? The Māori, actually. Was it protected? No. Who was studying it - our John Adam. So interesting liaisons about

new questions about old landscapes, or, you know, off the radar landscapes, even. Same with Hawker, you know, he keeps on in retirement getting asked to advise on this or that management problem in bits and pieces of Victoria and jolly good thing, because you couldn't get a good, better brain on, you know, what … what suite of plants was available in what era? or who was managing or designed that garden? Who's this Guilfoyle chap? He's your man, talk to Hawker. You know, you couldn't go better, actually to meet people like that on a casual basis. You know, on a on a walk around a park: that's a joy.

And David Mabberley is another one.

Oh yeah. I mean, I'm a bit of an unashamed Mabberley fan, but he's a poly … again … a polymath and a total overachiever, a bit like a James Beattie with a few extra decades under the belt. A botanist and a fine international botanist at that, I mean, he has for five minutes been manager, director of Sydney Botanic Gardens, but … but a publisher and a writer and a researcher and a great communicator, a bit like saying about Peter Valder and laughter, you don't realise how much information is getting across.

I'm obsessed with single issue plant books, right? And he's done a few, you know, story of the apple, and it's an international story or citrus, you know, a world, a global history of citrus.[20] Wonderful. I was reading a review of it in the bath last night.

Laughter **– in the bath!**

Just a casual piece of work that Mabberley's pulled together. You know. And it's actually the work of, I don't know, 100 experts around the world about, you know. Who knew that Australia has native citrus and how is that useful to the global crop and economy that is citrus fruit? Which is based on a very narrow, little genetic, dangerously narrow base, you know, could fall over tomorrow with a new disease. And has fallen over, in places like Florida. So how do we breed in diversity and resilience? Perhaps Australian rainforest fruit or desert limes could be the answer there, actually.

And do you have a correspondence ongoing with him as well?

Oh, erratic, yeah. I like to pose difficult questions for Mabberley and one of my pleasures … I went to a talk once Friends of Botanic Gardens Sydney, about Madagascar, a flora of Madagascar, which is a total eye opener, not a country you hear about every day.

And the chap giving the talk, bless him, kept on saying, 'and in Mabberley, it says X'. And I said, What's this "in Mabberley business"? So I pestered the guy with a question and the answer was, *The Plant Book*. You need *The Plant Book* at your elbow at all points. So of course, I've got *The Plant Book*.[21] David Mabberley, thank you again. Three inches thick, you know, A to Z starts with whatever, Arum and finishes with Zantedeschia.

But wonderful, and again, distilled wisdom and even the brain and the organisation to get a book like that together, or current and botanists love renaming plants, so you've got to hang on, you know, I grew up with *Datura*, now it's *Brugmansia*, or give me a break, you know. But actually, it's up to date botanically and that's quite a piece of work too. Amazing guy to even be wrangling a network. I mean, I'm surprised he answers my pesky

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[20] David J. Mabberley, *Citrus: a world history*, Thames & Hudson, 2024; Barrie E. Juniper & David J. Mabberley, *The extraordinary story of the apple*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 2019

[21] *Mabberley's Plant-book – a portable dictionary of plants, their classification and uses,* 4th edition, Cambridge University Press, 2017

questions really. I must be very irritating, but maybe I ask the odd one that's good and I love to find things that are not in Mabberley to say, “oh well, David, for your next edition of that book, when you've got a moment”!

Does he welcome those helpful comments?

He goes quiet for a while. Oops!

And Philip Simpson's another one you're fond of?

Oh yes, he's a kind of Kiwi Mabberley and wonderful man. I'm hoping he does more books before he drops off the coil. But single tree-based histories, I suppose, and New Zealand trees, but a lot of New Zealand history and cultural richness tied in. It's not just botany. It's not just, you know, physiography … what's a Tōtara tree, what's … what's a … the English call them the New Zealand Yew. The Māori call it the Tōtara. You know a tree … about that tree which is absolutely fundamental to the Māori and - what's the main posts of their meeting houses in the middle, you know, carved, wonderful Māori carvings on Tōtara. A book on Rātās, and Pōhutukawa, the Christmas tree is a coastal version of the Rātā - a forest tree. Single tree books but actually, there's a lot in there about the Māori or about migration or about use and the interrelationships of humans and plants.[22] Absolutely delicious reading. So I hope he pumps out a few more books. Please. Right up my street.

How do you have time for all this?

Oh, well, I can't say I'm reading every word and irritating, you know, the digital world is useful, but it's also very distracting. So, I'd like to say I've read all my books, but haha, for a surname like Read, there's plenty of reading to do around here. Perhaps I should pray for power cuts and internet failures. So, I've got some hope.

Stuart, as you talk about these single-issue writings, it reminds me of John Dwyer, who's also written in the latest edition of the journal with his passion for weeds.

Oh, I know, isn't he wonderful? And I mean, boy, there's a good, healthy retirement you know: for a retired gentleman, he's pumping out the work. And I guess, you know, we you pick a world right, and perhaps a practical person narrows down that world a bit, but I mean the world of weeds keeps on expanding. What might jump a fence in Australia and even the history of weeds - can be daunting!

I had a job for five minutes in the biodiversity unit of the National Heritage, sorry, National Environment Department, researching weeds you know. Rubber vine’s taken over Queensland and is breaking into the Northern Territory.... And what is it next, and frightening, but I guess a lot of them were innocent introductions to plant … of plants of interest, and then not of interest, that jumped the fence. We don't know what's going to do it next. And you never get there, I suppose, with the world of weeds, or Australian plants which are a jolly weed in parts of the world, you know.

Eucalypts are jumping the fence in Spain and Portugal. Jolly nuisance, thanks. Or what's a eucalypt doing in a War Memorial Cemetery in Malaysia? But there it is jumping the fence so, or (the Philippines) hybridising with the local.

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[22] Philip Simpson, *Pohutukawa & Rata - New Zealand’s iron-hearted trees*, Te Papa Press, 2005; & *Totara - a natural & cultural history*, Auckland University Press, 2017

And this edition is a bigger weed with the London plane trees. Not that I see it as a weed.

Ah, well, that's a major, important tree. You know, lot of Melbourne streets are lined with plane trees and a lot of our classic parks, you know. It was a very much a favorite thing for a long time, and practical, around the world - not just us. You know, it was sort of indestructible street tree that was promoted in much of Europe and America. So that's interesting. I didn't realise they're a weed risk.

Now, no, no, I'm not saying there are, a weed risk. Sorry, I'm thinking that his for some people, there are … there are … it's a point of contention.

40.00

All right.

He's not saying that.

Right?

Let me not, not rewrite his article for him. Stuart, perhaps we might return to the Society and one of the innovative things that the Society has done, most recently is the podcast, its first podcast, thanks to Francesca Beddie.

Yeah, yeah.

Ticket to Ryde.

Wonderful. About Ryde School of Horticulture in Sydney yeah and really, not just about the school, but who went there and … and what was the school's influence over time, through those people. Delicious. We hear a lot from Victorian members about Burnley and Burnley College of Horticulture, which is now part of Melbourne University. Ryde was Sydney's equivalent and full marks to Francesca and all the people involved in doing this. It's such a good idea, you know, getting people on tape. And there's, again, not much written down about Ryde.

Melbourne's done a history of Burnley College and even updated it, they're quite organised, those Victorians. New South Wales - we're too busy, you know, rushing around looking at sunsets, or something. But it's not written down. So actually, it's clever. Putting a microphone in front of people and getting them their own words. You know, this Shirley Stackhouse person: who are you? And you know, what's your career? Of course, you know, it comes from Ryde, or, you know, she retrained halfway, or who were these people and what was that career but in *their own words*, and it's lovely to hear those voices, but also to tap into it. I think it's a … it's a bit challenging. It's a new format but a useful format for the Society and perhaps, you know, with a bit of training, some dummies like me could … and we could do more of this. I think it's a good format, actually.

Stuart returning again to the Society, one of the other things I want to ask you about was the Future Directions paper last … which emerged last year, and what are your thoughts about that?

Healthy, and how we were talking about strategic plan and 2020 to 25 I think very … Sounds a bit corporate, doesn't it? But I think it's actually a bit practical: how will we last another 40 years? Or what might we be in 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 years? I think there's no

harm speculating and planning and investing like, if we're not doing something, should we or can we drop something, you know? Is not no longer wanted or no longer so useful? Your question about take up: you do a toolkit or put a publication out - did it hit the mark? You know - is it what people want or what is needed or not? I think that's healthy to ask.

Even talking about podcasts, right, or new technology does it … AI taking minutes of meetings - ghastly but actually, taking minutes is a drag. So if that saves somebody a drag and means that meetings can be minuted and mostly it gets it right, is that a good thing? Maybe it is. So, I think it was impossible to predict in 1980 what sort of things you might be putting on an agenda in 2025: of course it was. You know, can we know what's going to be happening in 2050? Probably not, but we can … get inklings? And I think any healthy organisation does no harm in asking itself those questions. You know. Where would we like to be in 10 years' time, or five? How do we get there? What, you know, what are we missing? What's missing? That's useful.

One of the … discussion points in that paper, Future Discussions, was contemplating a potential name change for the Society. Tim Entwistle said at the Tasmanian conference that he asked when he might be able to introduce the Society as the Cultural Landscape Society of Australia, particularly given the Society's mission for promoting awareness, etc.

Yes.

How do you feel about a name change?

Oh, look, good luck Tim. I don't think we need to. I think there's been a lot of agonising, internationally about the phrase cultural landscapes and there's still a lot of national and local agonising about cultural landscapes as a concept, let alone what the hell are they. So, I think gardens (as a name or term) is a lot better-understood internationally and nationally, than landscapes or cultural landscapes. I think that's confusing to a lot of people. I think if you look at our mission, it mentions cultural landscapes and *that* was a fight, but I think they're in there, actually. So maybe we just need to remind people of our mission regularly, and we'll be doing that. And if you get a question, 'what's a cultural landscape?' Great, let's have a conversation about that. But I think having a name that might be confusing or of off-putting even, or 'I'm just … I'm just a gardener, you know', 'what do I what do I want a landscape society for?' - that sounds a bit, might be a bit frightening. I'm not convinced.

That's a very nice segue, because one of the things I wanted to ask you about was … was the profile and the people of the Society, how that's changed over time? Where it is now?

Well, even patrons. I mean, you mentioned Tim Entwistle. I mean, wonderful to have a patron like Tim who's generous and smart and is giving us the benefit of his skills and … and they're multiple, but he's a scientist too. So, I mean, the fact that we've got a climate change adaptation project. What about gardens and climate change? Thank you, Tim. He championed that project and I think he's promoting it. We're lucky to have patrons but he's a very different creature from patron number one, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch. You know Rupert's mother, and I'm not knocking the woman, she was marvellous. But I mean, she's not a scientist, you know, she didn't run a botanic garden. A pretty amazing woman, but we're a different beast than we were in 1980.

Perhaps our members are different beasts too. Even, you know, getting dangerous things like young people and *(gasp*) landscape designers along or (*gasp*) contractors and concreters and whatever. I mean, I'm not saying we didn't have them in 1980, but I wasn't terribly aware of them. And, you know, perhaps our membership mix has shifted over that, and it will shift if we're talking more about landscapes, or even you know running walks and talks that are pushing the envelope about what … is a garden? I came to this garden thing, and it was all about landscapes and archeology - maybe that's putting some people off. Maybe that's attracting other people. So that could be a good thing in terms of breadth of subject or, you know. What is it? What do they mean by gardens? You know, actually Aboriginal people have gardens, they don't have fences around them. Perhaps they're different looking, but they're gardens cultivating, yeah…. what's a yam daisy? Who knew before Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu*, but wonderful.[23] You know, the whole idea of landscape scale gardens, actually, or underwater ones: I mean, please explain that. You know, what's a garden actually? That's a conversation.

So does that suggest that the Society is relevant today?

I think it is. Yeah. I mean, people have been, what's the word, lobbying to use the word 'heritage' in our in our name too. I think heritage can be confusing and off-putting to some people too. I think history is a bit scary to some people, but better understood actually than heritage is, or perhaps less contested. And that's been a controversial thing to say. People do contest history. But I don't know, in terms of trying to be understood by the most people who may or may not join or may or may find us worth lifting the lid on, I don't have problem with the words garden or history. I think they're useful. I think it's just how you elaborate on what do you mean by history, and what about recent history? You know: can it be contemporary? Of course, it can. You know, what we're creating today, in 20, 30 years, will be history. And what's a garden? Actually, when you live in a flat like I do, I've got a garden, but it doesn't have earth involved.

I'll come to your garden in just a minute. Perhaps like the podcast, there's … there's scope for the Society to … harness the methodology of how you tell the story.

Look, absolutely. And to harness the many stories it already has and perhaps package and sell them to different audiences that we hadn't thought of five or 10, 20 years ago. What a good idea, and we've got a lot of richness perhaps that we are not aware enough of – or potential.

I'm intrigued you mentioned concreters, how many concreters are there in the Society?

Well, I couldn't say for members, but certainly the odd event, you're sort of surprised who comes. What are you doing here? Often it's related to work they're doing at the moment. They want to know what these heritage people over the fence are arguing about, so they're along to listen. That's all right. They're welcome.

Now your own garden Stuart. Well, first of all, before we come to your garden, you've been incredibly generous about the Society and your engagement. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to include?

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[23] Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?*, Magabala Books, 2014.

Oh gosh, can't think. No, no, I think probably covered the … covered the gamut.

So, so do you have a garden?

Oh, yes, well, you've battled your way through it to get to that side of the table, actually. I tell people I've got a … it's not really a balcony, back in the day it might have been a balcony, but now it's been glazed in, so a sunroom is a generous way of putting it. But yes, that's lined with plants and I get sunlight in the mornings till about 11 o'clock, because the building next door, a block of flats next door, that blocks the sun at 11. So I get morning sun and I fancy myself as having a sort of mini rain forest. So you know that that bunch of Davidson plums ripening over your shoulder, it doesn't mind a bit of shade after 11 in the morning - that Eucharist lily in the corner keeps on pumping out flowers.

This is the Davidson?

50.00

Yeah, that's a Davidson plum (*Davidsonia pruriens).*

That must be almost a meter and a half tall, yeah?

And it's got my first bunch of plums on it, too. A bit thrilled about this. It's taken forever. And finally, I got a strange looking bud and thought that might be a fruit and it is.

How long have you had this?

Oh gosh, five or six years or something. And sometimes you get a new leaf a year. Sometimes you get three or four a year. It's a bit sporadic, a bit Queensland: it's having a lie down.

There can't be too many indoor Davidson plums.

Why not? Fantastic plant, and that Eucharist lily was a present from Brad, a friend. It's the best present, because you just water it and it flowers. It's an Amazon thing, comes from Brazil or somewhere, but white, sort of tall, hanging bell flowers with a lovely scent, beautiful thing.

Glorious. And you've got them all perched on … on ... pots?

Yeah, when they're trying to get to the light, poor darlings.

And you've got a pot here with all your garden implements.

Oh yes.

And … and to my … to the left of my feet, you have a little…

Oh the seedling collection which is not … not doing much, you notice.

All beautifully labelled.

Yes, waiting for action. And there's a few orchid cacti, they're not looking terribly happy. And a few cycads, a few strange, weird cycads bought through the Botanic Garden. So, yeah, I've got a garden little *Begonia* here that's struggling away on the table.

And … and you … yes, this is beautiful, dainty. You share a lot of these with other people. I've been the recipient of some.

Oh, that's right. Soon as it grows too well it's got to be given away. There's no space.

Well, Stuart, to be surrounded by your … your garden and your huge library, it's been a great pleasure. And thank you for your time today, thank you.

Thank you – what fun!

50.40

End of Interview