Australian wildflowers formed popular subjects for postcards in the early twentieth century and such cards are now highly collectible. In contemplation is a special journal issue highlighting collections relating to Australian garden history. Do you know any unusual collections that you think we might consider for inclusion?

Cover: Detail of *Grevillea robusta*, painted in the 1880s by Australian artist Ellis Rowan (1848–1922): although correctly aligned to her signature, Rowan’s spray of foliage appears to have been painted upside down (perhaps drooping in a vase), with the orange-red inflorescences of this popular Australian species turned down rather than upwards (see story page 4). [National Library of Australia (nla.pic-an6722399)]
From the editors

Christina Dyson and Richard Aitken

It is a delight to introduce our twenty-first birthday issue of Australian Garden History featuring Australian flora. Astonishingly, it is already seven years since an issue of AGH was dedicated to Australian plants—see ‘Going bush by design’, 13 (6), May/June 2002—which followed earlier features in 1991 and 1998. Complementing other recent publications, including The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens (2002) and John Walter’s history of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (2007), these timely issues of AGH have helped place the growing appreciation and use of Australian flora in horticulture, gardens, and the designed landscape in wide national and historical contexts. These publications continue to provide relevant and valuable reference materials for Australian garden history research as well as resources for comparative evaluation. In turn these can support arguments for the protection and conservation of aspects of Australia’s garden and designed landscape heritage, which continues to be a central objective of the Australian Garden History Society. Yet there remains a great deal to explore, in particular aspects of Australia’s more recent garden history.

This issue aims to expand on the solid foundation established by existing publications by focussing on some of the key characters, ideas, projects, and larger-scale industry that have played a role in generating or demonstrating a widely-held appreciation and interest in Australian flora—whether for its economic, emblematic, aesthetic, or conservation value, or a combination of these or indeed other complex factors. Gardens as expression of wider meanings, such as the shifting relationship between Australian flora and broader society, are also explored, as well as the preoccupation of amateur and professional gardeners, garden-makers, and horticulturists for protecting and representing Australia’s flora and natural landscapes. By presenting a slice of Australia’s garden history as it intersects with Australian flora, we hope this issue will encourage further exploration of the history and meanings embedded in the use of Australian flora in the garden and in the wider landscape.

We remain gratified by the continued supportive and constructive correspondence from our readers. With this in mind, we are pleased to present our customary exchange of ideas with an extended response to Part I of the Landscape Design Primer series commenced in our last issue.

On a concluding note, as the new financial year commences, this issue also provides explanatory notes to some newly-effective wording proposed for the Australian Garden History Society’s constitution—which represent more a tightening of definitions for pragmatic reasons rather than any variation to the Society’s core objectives.

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‘This noble species’: Grevillea robusta

Joanna Besley

Tuggan tuggan or silky oak (Grevillea robusta) is a distinctive Queensland tree species, popular in cultivation for its jagged silhouette, soft grey-green foliage, and golden flowers, and also widely used as a cabinet timber, valued for its strongly patterned grain.

The tree we now call silky oak was known to the Aboriginal people of south-east Queensland for many thousands of years. It was called tuggan tuggan by the people who lived around the Brisbane River, auradi around Kilcoy, koomkabang around Bundaberg, and warra-garria by the Richmond and Clarence River peoples of northern New South Wales. It was named again in 1827 when the English botanist and explorer Allan Cunningham collected a specimen from a tree growing on the banks of the Brisbane River and gave it the scientific name ‘Grevillea excelsa’.

Cunningham was impressed by the size of the trees he found:

This noble species of Grevillea, in the thick, moist woods on the banks of the Brisbane River, rises in size and stature with the Flindersia, Oxleya, and other large forest trees: but by none is it surpassed in height except the Araucaria of those regions … Some aged trunks of Grevillea I have found to measure nine feet in circumference, so that it is probably the largest tree of the order yet discovered.1

Cunningham was correct in identifying the unique size of this Grevillea. When the English botanist Robert Brown published the first species description in 1830, the tree was re-named Grevillea robusta and acknowledged as the largest species in the genus Grevillea.

Colonial Botanist Charles Fraser recorded his impressions of the tree from a journey up the Brisbane River to Ipswich in 1828:

The south side of the Brisbane, as far as Canoe Creek (Oxley Creek), is covered with forests of Pine or Araucaria, to a considerable extent. The north bank, as far as Glenmoriston’s Range, is principally open forest, not reaching far, beyond which it is clothed with pine brushes, as on the south. These forests contain immense quantities of Yellow Wood (Oxleya xanthophyla) and Tulip Wood, with Figs of five or six different species, Grevillea excelsa (the Silk Oak of the pine cutters) and a great profusion of magnificent trees.2

Early commercial timber-getters were already familiar with Queensland’s silky oak by the time Cunningham had identified it. In 1828 Cunningham commented ‘from its deeply dissected foliage and the silkiness of the under-side, it has obtained the name of Silk Oak among the pine cutters of Moreton Bay’.

Characteristics and growth

There are over 260 species of Grevillea, in the family Proteaceae (which also includes Banksia, Protea, and Macadamia). The genus name Grevillea commemorates Charles F. Greville, an English patron of botany. The species name robusta derives from the Latin word robustus, meaning strong and firm, referring to the tree’s vigorous growth habits.

Grevillea robusta is a semi-deciduous tree that grows on average from 15 to 40 metres in height and 80 centimetres in stem diameter. It has dark grey bark, furrowed in a lace-like pattern, and distinctive fern-like leaves, dark green on top and silky, silvery-white underneath. The young leaf shoots are velvety and rust-coloured. Silky oaks drop large numbers of leaves during winter and spring and the leaf litter is slow to decompose. The tree grows rapidly in the first five to six years of life and bears fruit at this early age. It is a hardy tree that can withstand both frost and drought but prefers a warm, humid climate. In suitable conditions it may grow for more than 50 years. Many seedlings are produced from a single tree but few survive and it tends to regenerate singly or in small groves of trees of the same age.
The jagged silhouette and soft grey-green foliage of silky oak trees scatter the hillsides, valleys, and waterways of the Brisbane region. Silky oaks commonly grow together with black bean (Castanospermum australe) along the banks of rivers and streams in riverine rainforest areas, or beyond the rainforest with river she-oak (Casuarina cunninghamiana) in valleys and along creeks. They also grow away from water in the company of hoop pine (Araucaria cunninghamii) on the steep upper slopes of valleys and on undulating hills in vine forests and thickets, colonising the margins of rainforests and disturbed areas such as tracks, road verges, and cleared farmland.

Silky oak flowers spectacularly in late spring (October to November), when fiery golden masses of spiky inflorescences can almost obscure the foliage. The honey-scented inflorescence is rich in nectar and attract birds, bats, insects, and mammals. The inflorescences are long, slender and grow upwards, like a brush. The fruit are dark brown, woody, boat-shaped pods that split open to release numerous winged seeds. The fruit ripens in December and then breaks open suddenly around Christmas and New Year when all the seeds are shed swiftly. The woody seedpods remain on the tree.

Brisbane’s ‘scrubs’
Explorers and early settlers were captivated by the lushness of Brisbane’s timbered areas, known in colonial times as ‘scrubs’. Rainforest areas fringed the Brisbane River and its tributaries and large stands of trees were found on floodplains such as the present site of the University of Queensland at St Lucia and Seventeen Mile Rocks. Rainforest covered hillsides in areas such as Moggill, Brookfield, and Enoggera where the Three Mile Scrub was known for its rich timber. Smaller isolated pockets of forest were scattered elsewhere around the city in places such as Eagle Farm Flats and Sankey’s Scrub near Whites Hill. Silky oak flourished in these scrubs, growing beside creeks and waterways and along ridges and valleys.

In Brisbane, timber was first cut from the most accessible scrubs along waterways. Early settlers relied on local Aboriginal people who knew the types of trees, where they grew, and pathways for getting to them. Of the 86 Aboriginal people recorded as in paid employment in Queensland in the mid-nineteenth century, 11 worked in the timber industry and 16 worked as guides.

In 1867 Katie Hume, wife of the surveyor Walter Hume, described her visit to a scrub downstream from Brisbane:

I had never been into one before — how can I possibly give you an idea of the luxuriance and beauty of the vegetation? First of all you must entirely disabuse your mind of the ideas which the name is likely to suggest — anything less scrubby it is impossible to conceive.

Silky oak timber
The silky oak tree has long been used in Brisbane for a variety of purposes. Aboriginal people made sweet drinks from the inflorescence and used it as a calendar tree—its flowering was an indication that eels were at their fattest and best for eating. The first houses built by Europeans were constructed of pit-sawn timber or hardwood slabs, roofed with wooden shingles. William Pettigrew noted in his 1877 publication The Habitat and Peculiarities of some of our Timbers that silky oak was used for shingles. It was also popular for making barrels and casks, while in 1861 John Dunmore Lang had observed, ‘Silk oak is well adapted for the sheathing of vessels.

The 1885 Undue Subdivision of Land Prevention Act disallowed the sale of individual houses within a terrace, thus entrenching the Brisbane tradition of detached timber dwellings on their own blocks. In the 1880s the population expanded rapidly
and the demand for timber with it. Accurately milled and inexpensive framing and cladding timber enabled the construction of large numbers of timber cottages. The local, unique, timber house style emerged. Brisbane houses were built with timber stumps, stairs, verandas, railings, walls, floors, ceilings, windows, doors, and roofs. Silky oak was extremely popular for joinery—the moulded sections of timber jointed and glued together to form doors and windows.

By the late nineteenth century there were a number of furniture stores in the city and Fortitude Valley who were usually both manufacturers and importers. Cedar was the most popular cabinet timber as it resembled mahogany, then hugely fashionable in Europe. In keeping with this fashion, silky oak was often ‘ebonised’ or stained very dark to obscure its strong patterning. Not as abundant, nor as easy to work, as either cedar or the local pines, silky oak was used in moderation by local manufacturers.

Silky oak is of course not a true oak (of the species *Quercus*) but the common name given to a number of species of native Australian trees whose timber has a silky lustre and oak-like figure. The timber of around thirty Australian species is sold in the marketplace as silky oak. ‘There seems no reason why these Australian Oakes should not command a premier position as an ornamental, decorative and furniture timber,’ wrote Richard T. Baker in 1913, ‘as they possess all the desiderata such as supply, relative cheapness, and capability of sustaining a high polish, combined with a beauty in figure’.

Silky oak soon became known across Australia as a distinctively Queensland timber. In Brisbane it was often used to showcase the quality and richness of local materials and featured in many prominent buildings. Silky oak was included in the Queensland Government Offices constructed at Anzac Square in the 1930s, which were designed to highlight local products in line with the government’s ‘Queensland Made’ policy. City Hall, constructed between 1920 and 1930, was built almost entirely of local Brisbane materials and silky oak was used throughout for internal joinery. A great deal of the furniture designed specifically for the building was silky oak, including 2,400 chairs (with hat racks) in the main auditorium, as well as the Lord Mayor’s office furniture. Brisbane’s Masonic Temple (1928–30), Parliament House (1927), and the Forgan Smith building, at the centre of the University of Queensland’s Great Court complex (1938), all featured this distinctive timber in their joinery and furniture.

In addition to its use as solid timber, silky oak was used extensively as a veneer, or face timber, for plywood. The plywood industry was founded in Brisbane during the First World War with the establishment of Brims & Co. plywood mill at Yeerongpilly in 1916. Hoop pine was the timber most favoured for plywood production, but silky oak was an important secondary species, especially northern silky oak (*Orites sublimis*) whose large logs suited the manufacture of rotary-cut veneers.

The heyday of silky oak

Silky oak reached its peak in popularity when Queensland furniture makers embraced the Arts and Crafts style in the early twentieth century. The ostentatious forms popular in the Victorian era were rejected as this new style—with ‘truth’ as its guiding principle—gained currency. The Arts and Crafts Movement originated in England as a reaction against the mass-produced goods of the Industrial Revolution and promoted a philosophy of handmade, crafted products, simple forms, and
unadorned designs. It was quickly taken up by the mainstream furniture industry as a style and the decorative elements of Arts and Crafts were applied to manufactured furniture, regardless of the philosophy and theories of the movement. Cedar supplies had been virtually depleted and following the British trend towards oak and elm, silky oak became one of the most fashionable cabinet timbers as its intricate patterning harmonised with the simpler forms of Arts and Crafts furniture. Ironically, the Arts and Crafts style gained popularity just as the furniture trade in Brisbane was moving from a craft base to a mechanised industry. Manufacturers usually only promoted items known to be commercially viable, leading to the perpetuation of a limited range of styles and designs.

From 1910, silky oak was a mainstay of the local furniture industry. Most firms offered pieces in a choice of timbers and silky oak was always an option. From humble kitchen chairs and tables in silky oak veneer through to turned and upholstered drawing room suites, silky oak dominated Brisbane furniture catalogues—and Brisbane homes—until World War Two. Following the war, the popularity and availability of silky oak declined and it is now a boutique timber, used mainly in specialist cabinet-making and by hobbyists.

Silky oak disappears

When Europeans had first colonised the Brisbane region, silky oak grew plentifully and there were accounts of numerous mature trees of substantial size. As early as 1885, however, it was reported: 'already the *Grevillea* or "silky oak" has nearly disappeared from the limited region where it was once abundant'. By the late 1920s, supplies had dwindled substantially. ‘The two Southern silky oaks exist no only as odd occasional trees of the mixed jungles of the coastal watersheds of south-east Queensland’ stated Queensland’s Director of Forests E.H.F. Swain in 1928. By 1947, the CSIR (now CSIRO) reported that as a source of timber supply, *Grevillea robusta* ‘has been practically exhausted’.

From the 1940s onwards the silky oak sold in Queensland was almost exclusively *Cardwellia sublimis* from North Queensland. It was the mainstay of the local timber industry, making up 15% of the mill intake. By the 1980s the tropical forests of North Queensland had become a battleground between conservationists and foresters. In 1988, the Wet Tropics area was awarded World Heritage listing, effectively bringing the North Queensland timber industry to an end. Today, local stocks of silky oak are difficult to obtain and most is imported from countries such as Brazil.

Alarm had been raised about the depletion of Queensland’s forests from the latter nineteenth century. The State government’s vigorous land settlement policies promoted unrestrained clearing as trees were seen as obstacles to agricultural development. There was little understanding of the ecological necessity of forests. Settlers were paid for making ‘improvements’. An early forestry supporter lamented ‘when a selector had destroyed a few hundred pounds worth of superb pine, the Crown Lands Ranger would come and inspect and credit the selector with £2 to £2 10s of improvements per acre’.

In 1873 the Queensland Acclimatisation Society raised questions about forest clearance, leading to a parliamentary inquiry in 1875 that recommended forest reserves for long term management, not just the supply of timber. A second commission in 1890 put forward a co-ordinated plan of forest management, yet progress on conservation remained slow.

The first step towards a systematic assessment and management of forest resources in Queensland came in 1900 with the creation of a Forestry Branch in the Department of Public Lands. Within two years the area of forest reservation in the state doubled and by the end of 1904 over 3.5 million acres had been reserved. In 1906, the *State Forests and National Parks Act* was proclaimed and Crown lands could be reserved as State Forests or National Parks. The first National Parks including the Bunya Mountains, Tamborine Mountains, and Killarney—all in the heart of silky oak territory—were declared in 1908.

Seeds for the future

Silky oak was amongst the first Australian plants to be brought into cultivation. Allan Cunningham
collected seed when he first came across the tree in Brisbane in 1827 and it was planted in Sydney in 1828, where it flowered in 1835. Seed was sent to England and France in 1830 and it was cultivated in heated glasshouses, gaining popularity for table decoration and as an indoor potted plant. From the Sydney Botanic Gardens it was distributed to most English colonies by the mid-nineteenth century. Its fine, shapely foliage, and spectacular golden inflorescences have made silky oak a popular shade and ornamental tree in many countries.

The tree is planted in private gardens all over Australia and is commonly used for roadside plantings, borders, and avenues, and in public parks and gardens. In Brisbane, Harry Oakman, long-time Superintendent of Parks and pioneer of subtropical gardening, promoted planting silky oaks alongside jacarandas to highlight the contrasting colours of their gold and purple blooms in late spring.

Silky oak is also widely used as rootstock for the grafting of smaller, ornamental grevillea species. Its vigour and disease-resistant root system allow gardeners to plant species that are traditionally harder to grow.

In recognition of its importance in agroforestry, the CSIRO and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries have established a project at Neerdie, near Gympie, to study the genetic diversity, growth and stem formation of Grevillea robusta. In 1994, around 2000 silky oak trees from 115 families were propagated from seed, sourced from 23 locations across the native range of the species.11 The trees have been studied to see how the provenance of the seed influences their growth. The scientists managing the seed orchard hope that they will be able to provide a diverse genetic base of seed so that it can be used in breeding trials elsewhere in the world and sustain the growing worldwide market for seeds.

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2 Quoted in J.G. Steele, The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District, 1770–1830, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld., 1972, p.253.
10 Henry Tardent, Forestry in Queensland, Government Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, Brisbane, 1924, pp.1–2.
11 The word ‘families’ is used here scientifically but not taxonomically. In scientific terms the 115 trees are half sib families (meaning the mother tree is known but the father tree is not, as Grevillea robusta is not a self-pollinating species so the pollen could have come from a mix of father trees).

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Joanna Besley is Senior Curator at the Museum of Brisbane. The exhibition ‘Silky Oak’, on which this article is based, is on display at the Museum until 12 July 2009.
Tropicalian fantasies: discovering Australia’s rainforest gardens

Jeannie Sim

Rainforest gardens have been revealed during recent research into warm-climate garden design as an under-appreciated Australian garden style conforming to a wider style of tropical garden character. Within this tropicalian genre are several innovative and distinctive design approaches, exemplified by surviving examples in Queensland from the 1930s–1980s.

‘Rainforest gardens’ was a term in widespread use among Queensland native plant enthusiasts in the 1970s and this use has been adopted by nurseries, television programs, and many publications. I use the term here to describe a creation found in some large Queensland historic gardens that includes large, shady, warm-climate trees that have been under-planted with typical tropical species. The initial phase of establishing large trees may date from the start of Queensland colonial horticulture in the 1860s while the under-planting is often a second phase of development. Another type of rainforest garden is one that uses only Australian species and has been purposely developed as a concept from the outset, sometimes using advanced stock or temporary ‘nurse’ plants, and sometimes using staged planting schemes, or combinations of these approaches. In this latter sense, Australian native plant enthusiasts have created rainforest gardens within a broader design approach commonly known as the bush garden movement. Whatever sort of rainforest garden is observed, the end result is a lush, verdant, and complex landscape that captures the essential qualities of tropical jungles.

Rainforest gardens as an idea

Making a garden like a rainforest is an exciting challenge, a game in exotica for gardeners and designers. For the ecologist and botanist, however, a rainforest garden is an urban myth—rainforests are ancient, large in area, height, and diversity, and are endemically pure. There lies the difference in belief and perception between these groups, although it is possible to sympathise with both. A garden can be seen as a human creation, a product of interaction between imagination and a site’s physical capabilities and resources. There are, on the other hand, many sorts of natural vegetation communities that include the word ‘rainforest’ in the title. In Australia four types have received World Heritage recognition: Tasmania’s Cool-Temperate Rainforests; North Queensland’s Wet Tropics Rainforests; the subtropical communities within southeast Queensland and northern New South Wales (Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves or Gondwana Rainforests); and, the patches of rainforest on sandy soils on Fraser Island.
‘Closed-forests’ is the main term used by botanists to describe vegetation communities with dense plantations and closed canopies of over 70% foliage projective cover that allows little direct sunlight through to the forest floor. These closed-forests range in floristic complexity, becoming more diverse in warmer regions. The extent of these forests is also diverse: some exist over large areas, some in medium-sized or small patches and others remain close to rivers and creeks in linear riparian communities. While closed-canopy forests can be found in climates that range from cool though to very hot, they all receive good rainfall. Thus, rainforest is the name commonly used to describe these kinds of communities.

Making a garden look like a rainforest is an ideal—an imagined vision of a lush, tropical paradise. Typically, these rainforest gardens look nothing like the closed-canopy forests found in the wild. To many gardeners and designers, all the plants of the world are for the using, in whatever creative way suits the situation and their personal inclinations. To those who created Queensland’s oldest rainforest gardens, the joy of experimenting, collecting, and displaying unusual plants is evident in the surviving remnants of their creations. There was no purist idea of using only endemic plants (indigenous to that locale). More recent creations of native plant enthusiasts including professional landscape designers, botanists, and home gardeners are, however, based on other aspirations. Some of these rainforest gardens attempt to achieve endemic purity, including sourcing seed from local remnant forests, sometimes to revegetate damaged former rainforest sites. Other rainforest garden creations contain rainforest species from elsewhere in Australia, including plants approaching the limit of their climatic tolerance. It appears to be difficult to resist the collector’s obsession for experimenting and hoarding.

**Rainforest gardens within tropicalia**

What is tropicalia? In essence, it’s a garden that looks tropical. Hawaiian landscape architect Richard C. Tongg explained in 1960 that ‘developing gardens on the theme of “tropicalia”, [means] making gardens in the tropics look the part, instead of being pale copies of other styles’. So what makes a garden look tropical? In the 1930s, Richard Tongg and garden writer Loraine E. Kuck had provided the first clues to defining tropical garden character in three essential characteristics. These were

- a lush jungle-like density of planting (‘massed, crowded effects’);
- ‘the selection of large-leaved plants’ (macrophyll-type leaves typical in warm-climate rainforests); and
- ‘the enveloping growth of great-leaved creepers’ scrambling up tree trunks.

My later investigations into Queensland tropicalia (1999) revealed several other telltale signs to expand the description, which included:

- components of the ‘Exotic Aspect’ (especially tropical plants and materials with visually striking or unusual forms, and the use of bold, bright colours) including certain iconic groups such as palms, bamboo, tropical fig trees, epiphytes (staghorn ferns, orchids, bird’s nest ferns), and rainforest vines (lianes);

By 1930, when this map of Australia’s vegetation was published in Walter Geisler’s *Australian and Oceanien*, tropical rainforest was already confined to isolated pockets along the east and north coast (shown here in dark green). This map also reminds us of the continuing German interest in the region’s natural history (which had during the 1880s–1920s included German New Guinea or Kaiser Wilhelm Island, close to Australia’s tropical north).
factor that separates rainforest gardens from other tropicalian gardens is predominating irregularity of layout, often replicating the random naturalness of actual rainforest. Some contemporary tropicalian gardens can be very regular while some are reduced to the essentials and are thus minimalist creations with a tropicalian twist. Some specific qualities are revealed in the following explorations of five rainforest gardens in and around Brisbane.

Rainforest gardens as collections

The first sort of rainforest garden explored here is the intentional replica or regeneration of a rainforest vegetation community. There are numerous examples of rainforest gardens in home gardens, public parks, and educational campuses in warmer parts of Australia. Publications abound to aid Australian plant enthusiasts with a special connection to rainforests. A major source of information on rainforest plants has been the Society for Growing Australian Plants, founded in 1957. Its publications have been based on first-hand knowledge of plants in the wild and from practical gardening experience in propagation and cultivation. George Thorpe’s article for the SGAP journal *Australian Plants* (September 1978), ‘The rainforest: yes, it may be copied’, is still after thirty years featured on the Society’s website as a guide for enthusiasts. A series of well illustrated and informative booklets on Australian rainforest plants commenced in 1985 by Nan and Hugh

- a combination of traditionally ecologically disparate species (such as pines and palms);
- plant types that provide masses of colourful flowers and/or foliage (such as poinciana, jacaranda, acalypha, cordylines, and crotons);
- bold colour combinations (for instance, orange, hot pink, and bluey-purple, as in the flower of *Strelitzia reginae*);
- typical tropical shade gardening practices such as verandah, bush-house, and fernery gardening; and,
- possible components of the ‘Bizarre Aspect’ (orBizarrarie) including garden ornaments such as rustic constructions using giant clamshells and/or coral-stone, whalebones as giant arches, and *objets trouvés* (especially seaside flotsam/jetsam, such as glass buoys).

Arguably the chief distinction between rainforest gardens and the current vogue for tropical-looking gardens is the amount of sunshine at ground level. Nearly all of a rainforest garden is experienced in the shade while many contemporary tropicalian gardens typically feature expanses of grassy lawn to offset sunny borders and island beds. Very soon, as trees grow quickly in warm climates, another important factor to be revealed is the large scale: rainforest gardens have tall canopies. A third

The books of Hawaiian landscape architect Richard C. Tongg and writer Loraine Kuck did much to promote tropical gardening internationally during the 1930s–60s. This copy of The Modern Tropical Garden (1955) was purchased by well-known Darwin gardening enthusiast Nancy Eddy in 1958 (and formed book number 1205 in her immaculately kept library).

Old Government House Rainforest Garden, developed within the grounds of Queensland University of Technology during the 1970s, possibly to the design of Brisbane landscape architect George Williams.
Nicholson celebrated the plants and encouraged their garden cultivation. The Nicholson's Terania Rainforest Nursery in northern New South Wales formed the background to their shared passion for rainforest conservation, as did the Yuruga Nursery on the Atherton Tablelands of tropical North Queensland of Ann and Peter Radke, established in the 1980s—Peter Radke’s article ‘Growing rainforest plants’ was published in Australian Plants (March 2000). A common thread through these publications was the desire to promote an awareness and appreciation of rainforest plants and their conservation by encouraging the use of these plants in home gardens, as well as to recapture the delight experienced amid a real rainforest.

The Boyce Garden, Toowoomba (1930): Perhaps the earliest known local example of rainforest regeneration to survive—and an early version of a rainforest garden—is the garden of Leslie and Margaret Boyce in Toowoomba on the edge of the Main Range. The pair established their house and garden in 1930 incorporating remnant rainforest trees within their property. They lived and gardened here until their deaths in the mid-1980s.

While there are now many home-garden examples of rainforest gardens, the two in Brisbane which follow were founded for teaching purposes at tertiary education campuses and created by professional botanists.

Westpac (formerly Wales Bank) Rainforest, Kelvin Grove (1976): Creating a rainforest from scratch was the intention of scientists at Kelvin Grove, in suburban Brisbane. Westpac Rainforest was established in 1976 as a teaching garden in the grounds of the Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education (now part of Queensland University of Technology). A monograph, Rainforest Gardens (1977) by the garden’s creators, Jack Marsh, Susan Quinnell, and Christine Castle, describing the design development was complemented by instructions on making and maintaining rainforest gardens. The Westpac Rainforest, covering 0.2 ha, was instigated by the Science Department primarily for teaching and research purposes, ‘to provide an on-site laboratory for students in ecology and biology’, and accessible also to interested visitors and institutions. The garden has now been enlarged slightly to include the buffer zone but has remained intact despite a recent threat from new roadwork. The biggest threat to the garden’s survival, however, has been the extended drought of recent years, which culminated in strict water restrictions and turning off the water circulation system that operated a running stream into a pool.

Alumni Teaching Garden, St Lucia (1978): This garden at the St Lucia campus of the University of Queensland has a more obscure past. It is possible that parts of the original riparian vegetation of Carmody Creek were left when massive landscape works were undertaken to create the playing ovals during the 1950s. However, a generous grant by the University Alumni Association in 1978 was catalyst to its current character. Initial investigations have revealed a proposed plan layout for this garden that contains both formal scientific beds and wandering paths through ‘wild’ plantings.

Rainforest gardens as a recent layer within older gardens

The second sort of rainforest garden examined here embodies a change in design or character around mature trees that now have cast substantial shade. The oldest of this sort are the creations found in the Old Brisbane Botanic Gardens and nearby in the former grounds of Old Government House, both on the promontory of Brisbane River at Gardens Point, in central Brisbane.

Old Brisbane Botanic Gardens (1950s): This botanic garden was established in 1855 and the oldest trees within the current rainforest garden date from the 1860s–1880s. Originally these specimen trees of Macadamia tetraphylla (Queensland nut) and Swietiana mahagoni (mahogany) were surrounded by lawns with seats, a few gravelled paths, and a modest timber bandstand (1878). Even by the 1890s, some shady areas were being used for planting warm-climate plants of the sort typically found in glasshouses of cooler climates. By the 1950s the shade had become more extensive around the old bandstand and curator Harry Caulfield’s solution was to under-plant the trees with tropical foliage plants, palms, and suchlike. Assisted by avid native plant enthusiast and gardener, George Trapnell, the pair transformed this area into a rainforest garden which incorporated large areas of mulched beds, typically retained by rustic rockwork and wandering walks. This appears to be the earliest local version of such a rainforest garden.

Old Government House Rainforest Garden, Brisbane (late 1970s): This garden dates to the late 1970s and its authorship is still uncertain—it may be the work of landscape architect George Williams. The large trees were originally planted between the 1860s–1890s on the hot western side of the building to shade and visually screen the house. These included Ficus macrophylla (‘cluster fig’), F. macrophylla (Moreton Bay fig), F. baileyana, and Agathis robusta (Queensland kauri pine)—all Queensland rainforest species. Underneath these
trees, bush-houses and gardener’s sheds were erected then gradually removed as the site was transformed into the first campus of the University of Queensland (1910). Also during the days of Government House residency, an ornamental water fountain (featuring three halves of giant clam shells) was created and fortunately this innovative design feature still remains. Recent ‘restoration’ works to the House and surrounds has resulted in a more open canopy, and alteration to some understorey plants. The 1970s water course has been removed and the lower ponds filled with rocks.

Valuing rainforest gardens
The common factor central to these places is a top storey of well established trees (shady rainforest giants like figs or mahogany) which are so evocative of a real rainforest. The epiphytes and orchids established the trunks are part of this atmosphere—many of these established naturally, without human intervention. The understorey plants—shade-tolerant shrubs and ground covers, herbaceous plants, and creepers—and the rough, rustic rocks complete the picture. Having this groundwork, as well as a water feature and the requisite humidity, the animal denizens of rainforests move in—frogs and lizards, scrub turkeys and ducks, mosquitoes and mites—creating a true rainforest experience. This urban refuge works for both humans and animals.

Old rainforest gardens are wonderful places in which to retreat and find refuge, even amid a busy city centre or university campus, if only for only a few moments. The seasonal changes are subtle but sure: when the big trees fruit, the canopies are full of birds gorging themselves, drunk with partially fermented juices, adding to the clamour and chaos of city life. What is a myth is that rainforests are silent—life happens noisily and abundantly in these places. Humidity and cicadas make for a noisy chorus, while frog ponds can be positively deafening (especially after dark during the breeding season).

Recognising rainforest gardens as worthy creations in the history of landscape design and horticulture is an important step towards conserving these valuable places. The rainforest gardens developed in Queensland since the 1930s discussed here reveal revealed two basic approaches: the replica rainforest and the exotic/native assortment within Tongg’s tropicalian genre of garden design. Sometimes the dividing line between these two approaches is indistinct as gardens grow and change. Established examples confirm the interlinking processes of designing and making rainforest gardens as ongoing.

Landscape designers can learn from these approaches—which combine active participation in the creation of a dynamic system—but this requires a shift in perspective about the role of the designer and their end-product.

Telling the story of rainforest gardens has begun, but further interpretations are needed. Promoting the concept of rainforest gardens as culturally significant creations must surely assist in protecting the ones considered truly important. Not all rainforest gardens are necessarily special, but the ones discussed here are exemplary and highly influential or have been so in the past. Perhaps sustaining old rainforest gardens requires more human effort of imagination and reflection, than physical activity. We should be painting them, drawing them, filming them, writing, and talking about them. These are the sorts of activity that truly sustain cultural values. We must engage with these places; ensure that we record and discuss their meanings and messages. Ignoring rainforest gardens, dismissing them as commonplace and bland, treating them as disposable backgrounds to the real ‘business’ of life, is what leads to their physical destruction. Our environment is physical and mental, real and surreal. Rainforest gardens can be experienced on all these levels.

Notes on sources

(Notes on sources continued on page 34)

Jeannie Sim is Senior Lecturer in Landscape Architecture at QUT. She has lived in Brisbane since 1974 but was born and raised in Proserpine, North Queensland. She learnt to garden in the tropics and continues her experiments in the subtropics.
In the aftermath of Depression and a second world war many in Australia held the view that 'life needed to be different'. Change was needed across the board—from updating primary industry to upgrading living standards—with the expansion of suburbia seen as a key to the nation’s development. The ultimate aim of the experiment at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens during 1949–57 to improve and develop Australian plants was to popularise them for use in ordinary domestic gardens. The benchmark for success in this venture was the garden variety, non-native Gladiolus. Success proved elusive, but the project is instructive. It reveals attitudes held within the Melbourne Botanic Gardens to Australian plants as garden subjects at a certain moment in history. In particular, in its use of Gladiolus as a yardstick, the project demonstrates the extent to which understandings of horticultural Australianness held within the institution were fashioned by the mores of suburbia as well as influences derived from elsewhere.

In 1945, as consideration was being given to national recuperation and advancement, the opportunity arose to improve Melbourne’s Botanic Gardens through establishment of the philanthropic Maud Gibson Gardens Trust. The founding committee charged with expending Gibson’s bequest comprised the University of Melbourne’s professor of botany, John Turner; Melbourne Botanic Gardens’ director, Alexander Jesse; Russell Grimwade, a wealthy industrialist who had served on the Botanic Gardens Advisory Committee; Frederick Mann, earlier Victoria’s Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor; and Fred Grassick, accountant to the Trust’s benefactor. Accomplished in their own fields, each shared interest and knowledge in gardens or plants, and in the Botanic Gardens themselves.

Committee members agreed that it was the Australian collection laid out along the southern boundary that was the ‘main deficiency’ in otherwise exemplary Gardens. In part attributable to the collection’s age (dating from 1887) and the original choice of plants (which included forest species grown to massive proportions, shading and out-competing smaller plants), other shortcomings inhered with the plants themselves. It was to these that the native plant project was addressed.

As well as being seen as a means of contributing to the Gardens’ overall enhancement the project was underpinned by another, more ambitious, agenda. Gibson Trust committee members appreciated the fact that while Australia was ‘famed for its distinctive flora’ and that there were ‘various species ... unsurpassed in any part of the world, and wild plants already exist, which, in many instances, are superior to the choicest imported cultivated plants’; this was not reflected in the nation’s gardens. The intention therefore was to ‘popularise’ Australian plants so that they would be more widely used.

The dearth of Australian species in Australian gardens was due to multiple factors. Supply was one. Several specialist native plant nurseries were operating in the eastern states by this time but generalist nurseries stocked few Australian species, leading to a ‘want of familiarity’. Difficulties in propagation discouraged cultivation of native plants, as did lack of predictability in vital characteristics such as flower colour, a factor vexatious in commercial contexts. A further problem confounding amateur and professional horticulturists alike was premature and often unexplained plant deaths. Not least amongst the factors hindering native plant cultivation was their visual characteristics. As well as having ‘a good habit of growth’ and ‘a life of several years’, a critical criterion for selecting species for garden cultivation was that they be ‘decorative throughout the year’. Often Australian species did not meet this standard. Yet another problem was the ‘untidy habit of growth’ of many native species, which even outweighed what could be an impressive flowering period to thwart their cultivation.
In light of these issues one possible project discussed by the new committee was that of ‘establishing Australian wild flowers as additions to the ordinary stock of the private and public gardens of the temperate zones’. Future references to the intended endpoint for domesticated Australian plants stressed their use in ordinary domestic gardens rather than in public landscapes, and problems the Committee wished to address through this scheme can therefore be understood in relation to the norms of suburban gardening in the post-war era. Typically, the suburban backyard served practical needs, while out the front emphasis was on display. Dominated by lawn, the front garden also comprised neat beds of flowers, a mix of shrubs around the perimeter or alongside paths and drives, and perhaps a couple of ornamental trees. Strong colours, bold textures, and sumptuous flowers characterised the plant selection. This style did not easily accommodate unimproved Australian plants. If to be found at all in domestic gardens such plants were more likely to be seen out the back, where show was less important. To be planted in the front, Australian plants needed reshaping to fit current gardening practices and tastes.

What was variously called the native plant breeding project, the plant improvement project, the native plants scheme, or perhaps—most often—the native plant project, was to take a two-pronged approach. Firstly it sought to breed new forms of Australian plants that would be aesthetically suited to garden cultivation and secondly to learn about their ‘controlled propagation and culture’. It was envisaged that once the plants had been improved they would be displayed in the Botanic Gardens and ultimately passed on to commercial nurseries where they could be mass produced and sold for use in the ‘ordinary’ or ‘average’ garden. The intention was not to reinvent the garden as such, as others strove to do. Rather, the onus for change was on the plants themselves.

It was only ‘the more ornamental of the Native Plants’ that were deemed worthy of experimentation. Foliage had to meet minimum standards but flowers were regarded as by far the most important aspect of a plant’s decorative potential. The plant which epitomised this aspect of the native plant project was the non-native *Gladiolus*, and the scheme itself shaped by unabashed gladioli envy. With gardening journals promoting ever more spectacular plants, flowers like *Gladiolus* became ‘almost a mania’. According to gardening writer P. J. Hurley, ‘The Gladiolus is now a universal favourite [and] ... in the forefront of the decorative’. Given what ‘an army of retired Generals, Admirals and Bishops’ had achieved in fifty years with what had begun as a diminutive bulb from the African veldt, Russell Grinwade felt there was every reason to believe that ‘our native flora’ could compete with other enhanced plants and ‘contribute to the temperate garden to the same extent’ as that of other continents. Eucalypts had been exceptional in making a horticultural contribution that measured up in world terms; it was ‘hard to believe that with proper methods the smaller flora would do less’.

The project began in 1949 with a false start at a site in suburban Oakleigh, where nursery proprietor Bernhardt Schubert began propagation with assistance from amateur Australian plant enthusiast Jack Seaton, who was engaged to obtain seeds and other propagules from other amateur growers. Seaton’s efforts yielded little and early in 1950 the project was transferred back to the old Melbourne Observatory site, adjacent to the Botanic Gardens. The trial ground comprised rectangular shaped beds laid out in several rows, with narrow walkways between. An experimental plot rather than a display garden, it was not open for public inspection. By the middle of 1950 there were some 235 plants growing in the plot, including several species of *Boronia*, *Micromyrtus*, and *Anigozanthis*, and several different forms of *Eriostemon obvallis* and *Grevillea alpina*. At times progress seemed promising, but for each step forward there were two backward. In September 1950 it was reported that a couple of *Anigozanthis humilis* were expected to burst into flower, while a virus had appeared in plants of *Boronia megastigma*, which therefore would be

![Image of magazine cover](image-url)
removed from the plot. The *Olearia pimeloides* (Australian daisy bush) grew very well but, it was reported, 'after flowering it has too long a period without attractive foliage.' On this basis it was 'rejected from the garden'. Despite making headway with some species more often it was sheer survival of plants that was uppermost in the concerns of those overseeing the project. An inexorable combination of insect pests such as cabbage moth, drought, a seemingly pathologic soil, viruses, weed infestations, as well as unexplained plant deaths, dogged the project from early on. In May 1957 the experiment was all called to a halt. An Australian plant that could emulate the success of *Gladiolus* looked as remote as ever.

The known records do not divulge the committee’s views on eight years of horticultural trial and error. It is possible, nonetheless, to conjecture as to how the wildflowers managed, temporarily at least, to resist domestication. From its beginning there was no proper definition of the project, no focussed aims, and no defined method—so hampered by ad hoc implementation, serendipity governed. In the failure to secure the services of a suitably trained geneticist or plant breeder of more traditional means, the project lacked appropriate expertise. This professional vacuum was compounded by insufficient funds having been allocated to the experiment, leading to low staffing levels. Another factor exacerbating the situation was the limited knowledge and interest of the Gardens’ horticultural staff in native plant horticulture as well as a dearth of published material on the subject. After the brief involvement of Schubert and Seaton, those involved seemed apprehensive about consulting the scattered but dedicated network of individuals outside the organisation who were working resolutely to build concrete experience in this field. The combined effect of these conditions was that the project was being run in the dark.

Success also appears to have been hindered by a failure to consider the possibility that a unique flora might require a fresh approach. The experiment had been founded on the unquestioned assumption that the plants ought to be fashioned in accordance with established horticultural and aesthetic conventions, rather than thinking outside the plot. Finally, in miscalculating the size of the gap between perceptions of native plants as wildflowers and the imagined ideal suburban plant (epitomised in *Gladiolus*), project protagonists appear to have set unrealistic expectations about what could be achieved with the plants themselves.

Despite the knockback the committee would not be deterred in its ambitions to give Australian plants greater prominence in cultivation. It would go on to successfully pursue the establishment of a native plant annexe, now known as the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, thereby combining the aims of the original native plant project with the objective of developing the institution’s collections, displays, and research into Australian flora.

As a stepping stone in this longer term endeavour, the native plant project also gives a sense of how Australian plants were conceived as subjects for cultivation within the Melbourne Botanic Gardens in the post-war years and how such thinking was shaped by the broader cultural milieu. This connection is captured in the use of the highly popular and horticulturally enhanced *Gladiolus* as the project standard. In the experiment Australian plants were imagined as components of the house-and-garden package, promising the addition of regional flavour to the domestic garden, but with a proviso: only if the plants could be domesticated and modernised in line with other accoutrements of suburban life, such as ‘the Gladic’. The high aspirations for the project set by *Gladiolus* also betray the scale of the Committee’s ambitions for boosting the cultivation of native plants, as well as its confidence in Australia’s potential to contribute ‘to the general stock of the world’s gardens’. This reflected a more general concern with the part that the nation would play in the post-war world, epitomised in Melbourne’s bid in 1949 for the 1956 Olympics, and the preparations made in the anticipation of world attention that was expected to ensue from this event. The inspiration provided by *Gladiolus* also reinforces the role of ordinary household gardens in establishing the experiment’s albeit vague parameters. Such emphasis was in line with wider recognition of the increasing importance of suburbia in post-war development and in an evolving national identity, and a reminder of the extent to which the country’s post-war destiny was enmeshed in the outside world.

Notes on sources


8 Memo from Grassick to the Maud Gibson Trust, 20 October 1947: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02550).


10 A.W. Jessep, ‘The plant improvement project carried out by the committee of the Maud Gibson Trust’, internal report, 22 April 1952: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02549).

11 For more detail on this issue see McMahon, ‘Improving Australianness’ (2005), op.cit.


13 Handwritten notes (first line commences ‘In advance of our position by aiming to appoint a geneticist’), probably by Jessep, c.1945: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02550); ‘The native plants project of the Gibson Garden Trust’, probably by Jessep, c. November 1954: RBGM (Series RBGS0015 File RBGV02549).

14 ‘Brief note on the native plant project’, no author, c.1954: RBGM (Series RBGS0015 File RBGV02549).


16 Morrison, Melbourne’s Garden (1957), op.cit., pp.92–94—this book had been commissioned by the Maud Gibson Gardens Trust and therefore its views can be assumed to some extent to be commensurate with those of the Trust committee.


20 ‘A Memo from Grimwade to Trust’ (27 July 1945), op.cit.

21 Ibid; ‘Memorandum by Professor Turner on Policy’ (29 September 1950), op cit; ‘The following comments are submitted on current projects’, no author, n.d. [c. September 1953]: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02549).

22 ‘The following comments are submitted on current-projects’ [c. September 1953], op. cit.

23 The Miss M.M. Gibson Trust, ‘Annual report of the Advisory Committee to the Trustee, Fidelity Trustee Co. Ltd., to the Minister of Lands, Vic., and to Miss M.M. Gibson’, c.1953: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02549).


26 Letter from Grimwade to Stoate, c.1949, in Poynter, Russell Grimwade (1967), loc.cit.; for an extended discussion of Grimwade’s views on the issue see ‘A Memo from Grimwade to Trust’ (27 July 1945), op.cit.


28 For more detail on the establishment and implementation of the project see McMahon, ‘Improving Australianness’ (2005), pp.64–67.

29 Minutes of MGT meetings, 7 June and 9 August 1950: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02550).

30 Minutes of MGT meeting, 6 September 1950: RBGM (Series RBGS0015, File RBGV02549).


34 ‘A Memo from Grimwade to Trust’ (27 July 1945), op.cit.


Philippa McMahon is currently researching the use of Australian plants within the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne as part of her study in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne.
Thistle Harris reflects on a trip to Melbourne (1964)

John Walter

This is the first of an occasional series in which manuscript or otherwise elusive documents are reproduced alongside modern commentary. The intention is to make available significant polemical, critical, or descriptive documents of Australian garden history.

Thistle Yolette Harris (1902–1990), the author of this letter, was a tireless promoter for the cause of Australian plants, especially their conservation and garden use. Writing here following presentation of the 1963 Australian Natural History Medallion, she describes in typically engaging style her drive from Melbourne back to Sydney and her many byways to see gardens, nurseries, and bushland, and to visit like-minded colleagues. The letterhead of the David G. Stead Memorial Wildlife Research Foundation recalls the work of her mentor and husband, David George Stead (1877–1957).

Stead maintained a wide range of natural history interests and published widely, including general editorship of the ‘Shakespeare Head Australian Nature Books’, which had included his own offering, The Tree Book (1933), and Constance M. Le Plastrier’s The Story of Our Plants: first steps in Australian botany (1933).

Harris had graduated with a botany major from the University of Sydney, followed by a diploma of education, twin passions that she linked and promoted throughout her long career. Her early interest in Australian flora had apparently also been further developed when she met Albert Morris (1886–1939) while she taught at the school in Broken Hill during 1929–30. Morris was chief metallurgist with the Central Mine of the Sulphide Corporation and from 1936 commenced the revegetation of mine-workings at Broken Hill which brought him lasting fame, a project Harris later featured in her book Australian Plants for the Garden (1953). Writing was a major means by which Harris communicated her conservation and cultural message, starting with her first book Wild Flowers of Australia (1938), through her editorship of such educational journals as the Junior Tree Warden (from 1937) to her last articles, written in the final years of her life. Harris was by no means the pioneer in growing Australian plants, but she was certainly amongst the movement’s most vocal and effective campaigners during the 1930s–70s.

The recipient of this letter, Enid Rose Bowman (1916–1999), was honorary secretary of the Victorian group of the Society for Growing Australian Plants, the organisation founded in Melbourne in 1957 by Arthur James Swaby...
Dear Sister Bowman,

Thank you so much for supplying me with the names of the Tasmanian members so promptly. I shall look forward to seeing as many of them as I can early next year.

I did enjoy renewing old friendships and making some new ones during my visit to Victoria last week. The meeting at the Field Naturalists' Club was warm and friendly and I appreciated very much the honour of the occasion. Not less pleasant was the meeting the following night. I would like to thank you all for your rich welcome and a most interesting evening. Perhaps I might add a special word of thanks to the very kind members who saved me from the clutches of the police and helped me out of a real dilemma when I found myself outside the hall with a flat battery in an automatic car.

Although I could only spare two days in Melbourne, I was so well looked after that I crammed a tremendous amount into that brief time. I have to thank Ivo Hammett with his new eyes for much of this. We spent a few hours in the Brisbane Ranges finding a number of interesting things including some magnificent carpets of Pultenaea pedunculata and then a quick but exciting inspection of a bonsai nursery at Geelong. I am amazed on each visit to this nursery at its growth—most of all here I admired a lovely plant of Hymenocallis floribunda.

A quick inspection of Mr Hargrave's garden left me in a maze that one man could cope with such an extensive backyard nursery as well as an extensive and well cared-for garden. Thence to Maranoa Gardens which always makes Sydneysiders green with envy. I was told, of course "you should have been here last month". But this month was good enough—there was plenty that was new and interesting and very lovely. At Nigel Quick's I was introduced to the new offspring and rejoiced to see a well established stock plant of the double form of a beautiful Boronia (pinata or thunbergii) from the Myall Lakes area in N.S.W., the only one of a batch of
Edward Morton Murray Boddy (1903–1973), the nursery was nearing its peak in 1964, by which date Edward had been joined in the business by his wife Mollie and son Ralph. (In 1966 the firm’s mailing list reached 30,000 with one million plants produced by a staff of twenty.)

Hammet enjoyed a wide circle of like-minded colleagues, including Albert Lyth Hargrave (1890–1970), whose garden at Camberwell Harris so admired. Bert Hargrave was for over twenty years a committee member of Maranoa Gardens at Balwyn, which provided a public focus for Australian flora in suburban Melbourne. Maranoa Gardens had been established during 1901–26 as the private Australian-plant garden of J.M. Watson, and then transferred to public ownership. It was—and remains—an oft-cited showpiece for the Australian plant movement and many of those prominent in FNCC and later SGAP were also closely involved in its management. Nigel Quick (1928–2002), Harris’s next contact, was a founding member of SGAP’s Verticordia research section (with Alf Gray), as also of the Pimlea section. (Alfred John Gray (1896–1981), although not visited by Harris on this trip, was of a horticultural family and had worked for the Forests Commission of Victoria, from 1946–55 at its Wail Forest Nursery near Dimboola, a pioneering arid-zone nursery.)

Links between propagators, growers, and gardeners were especially strong during this energetic phase of the Australian plant movement. The next call for Thistle Harris during a hectic schedule was Schubert’s Nursery in Noble Park, then on Melbourne’s south-eastern outskirts. Established in 1947 by Bernhardt Schubert (1914–2002) and his wife Dulcie Schubert (1918–1990), the nursery boasted a fine display garden where the ‘Schubert method’ of planting (using a thick layer of hardwood sawdust) could be seen in situ. (Like Edward Boddy, the Schuberts had been inspired by the Wail Nursery and for a time the couple operated their own nursery in the Grampians.) Nearby at Braeside Harris visited the nursery of Geoffrey Echberg (1915–2007), a keen promoter of SGAP in Victoria and of the Society’s recently established Federal Council, but an outspoken personality who had an often acrimonious relationship with SGAP founder Arthur Swaby.

After a few days in Melbourne, Thistle Harris headed back to Sydney via the Princes Highway, taking advantage of the journey to visit two leading Australian plant propagators, Bill Cane and Leo Hodge. William Lancashire Cane (1911–1987), a beekeeper with special knowledge of and interest in eucalypts, had maintained an interest

(1887–1979). A trained nurse and known to many as Sister Bowman, the redoubtable Enid Bowman became assistant secretary of SGAP Victoria in 1958 and secretary in 1959. She remained in that position for just over thirty years and while her sometimes terse manner upset some people, she was the mainstay of the Society in Victoria throughout that period. Harris had been a founding member of SGAP, and was a leading light in its New South Wales group. While it was the older established Field Naturalists’ Club of Victoria (founded in 1880) that had honoured Harris with its 1963 Australian Natural History Medallion—a nomination that Swaby had declined—it was Bowman and the widespread network of SGAP members who formed the content of this particular letter—the names mentioned form a roll call of many of those most prominent in Victoria’s burgeoning ranks of Australian plant growers.

Thistle Harris was an inveterate motorist—like her contemporary Edna Walling—and so her whirlwind tour of Victoria should not surprise. The first local leg appears to have been a trip to Geelong and the nearby Brisbane Ranges at Anakie with Ivo Charles Hammet (1896–1975). An officer in charge of publications within the Customs Department based in Melbourne, Hammet maintained a life-long interest in collecting Australian books and growing Australian plants. His garden at suburban Ivanhoe, established around 1930 (the year he joined the FNCC) was a local showpiece for Australian plants.

The stop en route by Hammet and Harris at Boddy’s Nursery in East Geelong acknowledged the leading role of that nursery in the supply of Australian plants to farmers and gardeners across the state and beyond. Established in 1951 by
 Nine or ten parcels which I sent off some two years ago, I am glad to know that this will soon be established as a garden plant. It is a vigorous type in its native habitat and a very lovely one. I was more than amazed, too, at the tremendous size of the flower of the improved form of *Helichrysum bracteatum* which Nigel Quick developing has succeeded in growing from the already large Cunningham's Gap specimen.

Ivo Hammett's interesting collection offered some precious cuttings.

A call in at Schubert's nursery was interesting as ever; I found their very large and colourful form of *Ajuga australis* particularly attractive and their window boxes and potted plants more interesting than ever; a group of *Rhododendron lochi* should make a fine display next flowering. A few minutes at Mr Eckberg's nursery not far away was not enough to cover the extensive selection he has.

The way through Gippsland I took a detour to look at the stand of *Boronia muelleri* at Labertouche and rejoiced in it, but not more than in the abandon of the best form of *Dampiera stricta* I have ever seen, though Jean Galbraith told me there are much better ones.

Bill Cane's nursery had more new plants than ever before (that is new to me) and it was a deep satisfaction to see healthy plants from W.A. cuttings which I had sent over last year. I have a fine selection of healthy young plants in Sydney now, the hot journey not having affected them adversely. Leo Hodge's garden at W*tree was a sheer delight, as ever. I think among all the many gems a little creeping hybrid *Leptospermum* of Cane's took my fancy even before the fantastic array of new Poorinda hybrid *Grevilleas*.

From Gippsland to *Bega* - with a friendly call at Bega on the way - a hot but friendly talk at the High School and a ramble with a young and enthusiastic teacher in a bit of rain forest with
Travelling via Nowra and Shoalhaven, Harris detoured home to Sydney via the high country of Brindabella (east of Canberra) and thence to the property Wirrimbimba, near Tahmoor and Bargo, south-west of Sydney. Harris was in the process of establishing this property as a sanctuary in memory of her husband David Stead, to preserve the original ‘Bargo Bush’ and to promote the use and propagation of Australian native plants.

This brief commentary has merely sketched some of the personalities and places mentioned by Harris, without at all attempting to begin to explain the complexities of the Australian plant movement. Strong personalities clashed heatedly—Harris, for instance, was refused honorary life membership of SGAP by the New South Wales group only to receive the award from the Victorians!—and these stories are related at length in SGAP: the story of Arthur Swaby and the Society for Growing Australian Plants (2007) for interested readers. Suffice to say that Harris was at the very forefront of promoting Australian plants and that her work has had a lasting impact on those who followed.

**John Walter** lives in central Victoria and is an avid grower of Australian plants. He has undertaken extensive research into the horticultural history of the Australian flora and is the author of the jubilee publication SGAP: the story of Arthur Swaby and the Society for Growing Australian Plants (2007).

(Copies of this history are available for purchase for $29.95 plus $10 postage—enquiries to john.walter2@bigpond.com.)
majestic cliffs covered with orchids and ferns rising to a richly covered sandstone plateau. At night I talked to the Shoalhaven Branch of the Garden Club and found an enthusiastic response to suggestions for more natives in gardens – and an appeal for seeds.

I was due in Brindabella next day to have a look at the high country around the Blue Waterhole and so took the road through Braidwood. Except that friends were waiting for me in Brindabella and the road to the property a little hazardous I doubt if I would yet behold the magnificent display of Leptospermum rotundifolium that met me at Sassafras. In every shade from delicate lilac to the deepest purple, with some with darker blotches on a single petal, a lovely double white they were unbelievably beautiful and to crown this glory a charming straggling specimen of Darwinia grandiflora which I had not seen before.

Quite an amount of time was take up on finally reaching Brindabella with attention to plants and cuttings, much unpacking and watering. But the Blue Waterhole as at last reached, an interesting high moor where the Currawongburr Rives rushes through deep, narrow gorges and the buttercups dance on its doorstep. But we could not tarry as rain threatened and very little makes the road impassable.

A call in at "Wirrimbirra" at Bargo on the way home completed a short but exciting adventure. My deep thanks to my Victorian friends and fellow conservationists who stimulated me to undertake the journey though it is true that they had no difficult task.

With best wishes,
Sincerely,

Thistle Y. Stead
Profile

Garden writer and editor, Christine Reid, is a long-standing member of the Australian Garden History Society’s National Management Committee and convenor of the editorial advisory board of the Society’s journal.

Your background is wider than purely gardens and garden history. Could you explain this breadth?

Armed with a degree in history I began what was, for the time, a fairly standard career trajectory in journalism—working for The Herald and Weekly Times on both its daily newspapers. From there I moved to Montreal, where I lived and was foreign news editor of the now-defunct Montreal Star. I then travelled, returning to Australia where I moved from newspapers to magazines to fit in with the demands of family life.

What inspired your decision to pursue a career in journalism and motivated your shift towards a greater emphasis on gardens and garden history?

My involvement with Farrago, the University of Melbourne student newspaper, was the catalyst for my career in journalism. With Farrago, I relished the editing and production side of journalism; getting the paper on to the streets. Much later, the focus of my writing and editing abruptly shifted to gardens and garden history through a chance encounter on Melbourne’s Flinders Lane which resulted in a five-year spell as production editor of Your Garden. Since 1993, I have enjoyed working as an independent garden writer and editor, and am currently the garden editor of Australian Country Style magazine. So, on reflection my initial shift towards a greater emphasis on gardens and garden history was somewhat serendipitous—although the garden gene runs deep, inherited from my parents and grandparents.

Could you describe briefly the nature and extent of some of your garden writing?

I contribute regularly to publications in Australia and the UK, with recent articles in Hortus and Gardens Illustrated, for example, highlighting to a world-wide readership the importance of, and challenges associated with, Australia’s gardening heritage. In terms of books, I have contributed to The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens (2002), all the Australian entries for the revised edition of The Oxford Companion to the Garden (2006), and in 2007 contributed numerous entries to the garden guide 1001 Gardens you must see before you die.

Do you think popular culture of today is important for the garden historians of the future?

Absolutely! These types of publications, although relatively ephemeral, provide valuable evidence of widely-circulating ideas and fashions in plants and garden design. They also reflect a great deal about the broader society for whom these publications were or are intended and the preoccupations of particular periods. For example, water, sustainability, and a return to the growing of organic food in the suburban garden have largely replaced earlier yearnings for deep-green lawns. In addition to published material, as a journalist you build up a substantial archive of primary sources—recorded interviews, notes of conversations, and the like—that are, in themselves, a potentially rich cache of research material. Over the years I have had the good fortune to gather such materials from interviews with a number of important landscape designers and influential garden-makers including Penelope Hobhouse, David Wheeler, Neil Robertson, Gordon Ford, Jocelyn Mitchell, and many, many others.

On a final note, what has been your most special or privileged garden experience?

There have been several, the first of which relates to seeing familiar garden plants in their natural habitats, which gives you a much greater understanding of the conditions in which these plants thrive. For me, the most unforgettable of these experiences were the pre-industrial-revolution meadows in Transylvania, largely untouched other than by sheep grazing, and the spectacular understorey displays of woodland bulbs (trilliums) seen when camping in deciduous woodlands in the Appalachians. Also, visiting the Moghul gardens in the north of India (especially those off the beaten track) was an incredible experience.
For the bookshelf


Arranged chronologically, from antiquity to the nineteenth century, Gardens in Art explores visual representations of gardens, both real and imagined, and the layers of meaning embedded in specific works of art which depict such gardens. Impelluso’s raw materials are quite diverse, ranging from tapestries, frescos, murals, and illuminated manuscripts, to paintings. Her analysis and annotated illustrations embrace a reading and understanding of the signs and allegories within these works of art, as clues to both their use and the values of the cultures within which they were created and circulated. The book provides intricately detailed analyses conveyed by disarmingly simple yet clever graphics, providing a rich and rewarding journey of garden, social, and cultural history through art spanning three millennia. The publication is part of the Getty’s A Guide to Imagery series, translated from the original Italian edition (2005) published by Mondadori Electa S.p.A., Milan.

Art historian Nils B. ttner looks at a similar range of works and time span from an art historical perspective. Less diverse in terms of raw materials, the focus of The History of Gardens in Painting is, as the title suggests, Western landscape painting—as opposed to the designed landscape. The emphasis of ttner’s analysis of each work is primarily descriptive, although it does touch on wider historical and cultural contexts. The principal allure of this publication is its folio size and the quality of the majority of the reproductions, including the details, many of which occupy full or double pages, and are utterly sumptuous.

Christina Dyson


Without doubt, Joseph Hooker was one of the most fascinating botanists of the nineteenth century. As Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, he used his prodigious talents to augment the reputation of that institution, and to make short shrift of any one who threatened it. As a consequence, a number of biographers have found him an irresistible subject. Jim Endersby is one of them, although in Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the practices of Victorian science, he has produced much more than just another biography.

As the title of his book suggests, Endersby is interested to see how the details of Hooker’s life illuminate some of ongoing debates in the history of science; such as the reception of Darwinism, the consequences of Empire, and the emergence of professional scientists. Hooker was in the thick of all the changes that took place on these fronts in the second half of the nineteenth century, and in no small part responsible for them. The opening and closing chapters in Imperial Nature that deal with this material are scholarly in style, but also form a critical guide to other literature in this area.

In the middle of Imperial Nature, Endersby focuses on the question of how Hooker practised botany, in a series of chapters on Travelling, Collecting, Classifying, and so on. ‘To begin an analysis of Hooker with his ideas is’, Endersby argues, ‘to stand him on his head; focusing on practice is my attempt to set him back on his feet.’ There is much to interest readers of Australian Garden History in these chapters, especially those concerning their own herbariums, and familiar names such as Ronald Gunn of Tasmania and William Colenso in New Zealand.

Endersby argues that there is an important interplay between the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ in Hooker’s science. To give just one example, Endersby is able to explain why Hooker was so ambiguous about Darwinism in his publications, when everybody now knows the two men were great friends. The answer, in part, may lie in the fact that Hooker could not afford to offend his collectors, some of whom were pro- and others anti-Darwin.

It is a little odd to see so powerful a scientist as Hooker concerned for his reputation, but Endersby makes clear that for all his prodigious talents, Hooker was at least as worried about how he was perceived, as what he achieved. The Hooker who emerges from Endersby’s book is still a formidable scientist, therefore, but also a little more human. If this is your first biography of Hooker you will find him fascinating, and if you have previously read about him, Endersby ensures that you regard him with even greater fascination.

Sara Maroske
Gender politics of plants

If you’re quick there’s just still time to catch American historian Londa Schiebinger at the Adelaide Festival of Ideas. An authority on gender and science, Professor Schiebinger’s books include *Nature’s Body: gender in the making of modern science* (1993) and *Plants and Empire: colonial bioprospecting in the Atlantic world* (2004). On Friday 10 July she speaks at Elder Hall on ‘Exotic abortifacients: the gender politics of plants’ and is a panel member in several later sessions.

www.adelaidefestivalofideas.com.au

Copland Foundation

We note with sadness the death of Nina Stanton (1948–2009), for ten years the director of the Johnston Collection in East Melbourne. Nina was also the founding chair of the Copland Foundation, established in 2006 to aid the study, management, acquisition, and interpretation of collections in Australia. She was instrumental in establishing this Foundation to honour the memory of the late Alex Copland, a life-long devotee of museums, galleries, and kindred cultural institutions, and now through his exceptional legacy, a welcome source of philanthropic funding for special projects.

www.coplandfoundation.com.au

Adelaide’s Museum of Economic Botany

The Museum of Economic Botany within Adelaide Botanic Garden was officially reopened on 30 May 2009. The historic building has been fully conserved internally and now features a beautifully crafted assemblage of interlinked screens and associated cabinets, by noted local designer Khai Liew, to facilitate the accommodation of changing exhibitions. Original nineteenth-century display cases have been beautifully filled with the economic botany collection—historic and new—while at the west end, like a shrine, is a striking cabinet of curiosities (including a delightful zoetrope) by artist Fiona Hall entitled ‘Grove’. The refurbished building’s inaugural exhibition features a celebratory collection of exhibits coalescing through the linking theme ‘Harvest’. The whole effect is exquisite and is just one more reason to visit Adelaide very soon.

National Trust of Australia (NSW) Heritage Awards

The 2009 National Trust of Australia (NSW) Energy Australia Heritage Awards saw several important garden and cultural landscape–related projects recognised. In the Education category the award recipient was Lost Gardens of Sydney by Colleen Morris, recognising the book written by our national chair and published by the Historic House Trust of New South Wales (with the generous support of the Australian Garden History Society) and the accompanying exhibition at the Museum of Sydney. In the Conservation Management Plan category, the Meeting Place Precinct Conservation Management Plan by Context Pty Ltd was the award recipient. The Meeting Place Precinct, within Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell, embodies a complex story of outstanding national and symbolic importance—that of the encounter between Indigenous Australians and the expedition of Lieutenant James Cook in 1770. We also warmly congratulate Meredith Walker as the worthy recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award. [I should add that AGH co-editor Christina Dyson was a joint author, with Context principal Chris Johnston, of the Meeting Place report.—RA]

‘Orange Blossoms’ exhibition

‘Orange Blossoms’ at Orange Regional Gallery, NSW, explores the history of gardening in the Colour City and its environs from the pioneering days in Fredericks Valley and gazettal of the town shortly after the discovery of a gold at Lucknow in the 1850s to the tree-lined garden city of today. Local gardeners have been stimulated by four distinct seasons, fertile soils, and the usually reliable rainfall precipitated by Mount Canobolas—a picturesque extinct volcano. The history of Orange’s institutional gardens, parks, and botanic gardens, is crowned by the renowned Cook Park—an attraction in its own right. The exhibition opens on Saturday 16 September 2009 and Orange Regional Gallery is open Tuesdays to Sundays.
Recently released


This is a significant work on a neglected aspect of Australia’s botanical history. It places in context—amongst many things—the role of Aboriginal guides in European exploration (coastal at first, then inland), use of Indigenous knowledge *in extremis* by early colonists for the preparation of bush foods and medicinal remedies, and the role of Aboriginal language vocabularies in plant nomenclature (which were ‘crucial repositories of environmental data’).

Clarke’s book is based on extensive archival research and field investigation, written in plain language, well illustrated, and meticulously referenced. It conveys an empathetic and largely non-judgmental account—this is no heavy postcolonial analysis and will be welcomed as an invaluable resource by those in Clarke’s wake.


There can be few readers who did not catch at least some of the splendid BBC television series which spawned this publication. The book is no substitute for the thoughtful and enthusiastic observations of the ebullient Don as he weaves his way on camera through the selected gardens, but it does form a complementary guide for those wishing to extend the enjoyment. A more lavish publication is contemplated—watch this space.

Rudy J. Favaretto, Jacob Weidenmann: pioneer landscape architect, Cedar Hill Cemetery

Foundation in cooperation with Wesleyan University Press, Hartford, CT, 2007 (ISBN 9780819568472): hardback RRP US$49.95

Somewhat belatedly we notice a fine monograph on the work of this neglected American landscape architect, whose practice began in New York in 1856 following his migration from Switzerland. Weidenmann (1829–1893) worked closely on many projects with Frederick Law Olmsted, but also maintained an extensive individual practice and is remembered as the author of *Beautifying Country Homes: a handbook of landscape gardening, illustrated by plans of places already improved* (1870). This career of almost forty years paralleled decades of intense urbanisation in both America and Australia, and Favaretto’s book provides useful comparative context for Australian garden historians seeking detail on American practitioners beyond the canonical figure of Olmsted.


Lavishly illustrated with photography by the author, this book will appeal to the armchair traveller as much as the seasoned garden tourist. A handful of Australian gardens complement better known overseas examples. With gardens linked by loose themes, each site is accompanied by brief historical details, some atmospheric prose, names and descriptions of featured plants, and—sensibly grouped at the rear—brief contact details.


George Raper’s name may be unknown to many Australian garden historians yet his natural history drawings are amongst the earliest European images of our indigenous plants. This splendidly illustrated book is part biography, part detective story, part portfolio, telling the story of these lost works—rediscovered only as recently as 2004—and their acquisition for the nation.


This reissue of a rare Australian classic from 1861, in which the author provides much useful information on local horticulture of the mid-nineteenth century, is a welcome and inexpensive addition to our shelves. The text has been reset rather than reproduced in facsimile, but the several illustrations are faithfully reproduced.

Sydney-based science writer and broadcaster Peter Macinnis has produced a social history of a neglected subject that is both breezy and fact-filled. Spanning Australia, Britain, and North America, Macinnis embraces the status question along with a host of more technical issues of maintenance, with moving and chemical use to the fore. This isn’t the last word on the history of lawn in Australia, but it’s a bright and quirky start.


This book sits well with the re-opening of Adelaide’s Museum of Economic Botany (see page 26) since its subject matter concerns the timeless imperatives of plants used for medicine, food, fibres, dyes, and a host of life’s other necessities. Sydney-based Newton has crafted a work of global relevance, enlivened with early botanical illustrations, and divided to permit an appetite-whetting browse or a complete cover-to-cover feast.


If you’ve already bought Monty and Holly why not go the whole hog with Graham, Sandra, and Linda as well. Covering similar ground to the other authors this production is much more of a travel guide, with an emphasis on how and when to see such glorious gardens. As a trio, these books cover most bases for the garden tourist; intellectually, aesthetically, and logistically.


Hot on the heels of Richard Bisley’s splendid 2008 assessment of William Robinson comes another generously produced biography from Frances Lincoln, this time of British landscape designer Thomas Mawson (1861–1933). As well as design, Mawson was the author of several influential books on park and garden design, and it is now over thirty years since his last biographical treatment. Mawson had planned a lecture tour of Australia in 1912 but sadly a large (and unexpected) new commission in Greece precluded the visit.

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**Dialogue**

**Exploration in landscape design theory**  
Concluding our Dialogue for this issue John Dwyer responds to the first part of Jeannie Sim’s Landscape Design Theory series. Having elicited such a detailed response we have decided to hold over the next part of this series until our next issue. If you thought a definition of ‘landscape’ was problematic, wait until we tackle ‘garden’!

**Snow White at Buda**

Meg Breidahl writes in relation to Mandy Stroebel’s article ‘Ernest Levy’s unreallised dreams for his Castlemaine villa’ in our last issue (pp.9–11) with thanks for the reminder of her youth, spent in Castlemaine, during which time she came to know well the Levy family home, Buda. In 1939, as a child, she played the role of Snow White at a garden party there. She was also familiar with the Kaweka property through family connections with the Thompson family who built the house Kaweka—her father worked as an engineer at Thompson’s Foundry and Engineering Works for some time—and continues a connection to the place through her extended family.

**Bombala, Bobundara, Kerry, and the Monaro**

Delighted by the 1915 *Petit Larouse* map of Australia in our last issue (p.31)—with Bombala mistakenly represented as the national capital—Trisha Dixon writes requesting a copy of said illustration for inclusion in her illustrated talks on the Monaro district and Bombala-born photographer Charles Kerry (1857–1928) and his connections with both Bobundara and the Bombala district.

**Defining landscape: a response**

The landscape literature is vast. Jeannie Sim’s thoughtful exploration in the last issue of *Australian Garden History* selected from its four versions of the definition of landscape. This comment takes issue with two of the definitions, and raises concerns about the use of natural in the definitions discussed by Sim.

Subject to a concern about the word *natural*, the definition from William A. Mann (1993) seems reasonably satisfactory to me. It accepts the range...
of interrelated meanings, covering place, prospect of place, and image of a view of place, which landscape bears; and is generally consistent with the concepts developed by the leading American landscape theorist J. B. Jackson. The quotations from Eugene J. Palka (1995), which sought to combine several of these meanings in a single proposition, did not add much of substance, and do not call for comment.

Jeannie Sim also refers to suggestions by writers such as Nuttgens and Relph that the concept of landscape should extend beyond place to ‘everything I see and sense when I am out of doors’ (Relph 1981) or even to ‘the moral and intellectual climate in which we work out our destinies’ (Nuttgens 1972). To be sure, our senses are involved when we experience a view. Effects of light, for example, have been regarded as central. As the great American landscaper Frederick Law Olmsted wrote: ‘Clouds, lights, states of the atmosphere, and circumstances that we cannot always detect, affect all landscapes’ (Cooper 2006, p.52). But the definitions by Nuttgens and Relph are so wide that they confuse rather than enlighten and should not be accepted.

A difficulty with defining landscape as experience of outdoors is that the definition fails to include landscape as place.

Although Edward Relph is a distinguished Canadian geographer, we should not take too seriously his definition as quoted by Sim. Relph, who would include as ‘a part of landscape’ such things as ‘the smell of gasoline fumes, the feel of the wind and remembered experiences’, acknowledged that ‘I am being eccentric in this for landscape has a number of conventional definitions and they are all much more technical and narrowly prescribed than mine, usually referring only to the fixed and enduring objects of the world we see.’

A difficulty with defining landscape as experience of outdoors is that the definition fails to include landscape as place. It is not surprising that, in his extensive discussion of landscape through history, Relph often uses landscape in the conventional sense. Assertions such as ‘A landscape is always an aggregation of objects and organisms arranged in a singular pattern which is the product of the interaction of physical, ecological, historical, economic and random processes’ (p.171) are not consistent with his definition. The difficult concept of landscape is, after all, grounded in place and prospect for Relph, despite his suggested definition.

The passage quoted by Jeannie Sim from Patrick Nuttgens, when taken in context, should be seen not as a definition of landscape as such, but rather as he says, of the ‘Landscape of Ideas’: a figurative expression used to encompass his study of ‘the effect on the physical environment of certain ideas at different periods of history’ (p.13). Ideas may well be seen as part of ‘the moral and intellectual climate in which we work out our destinies’, and Nuttgens provides many insights into ideas (such as what he called ‘The Metaphysics of Light’ as expressed in mediaeval cathedrals) which have influenced buildings and landscapes in different ages. His book contains, however, many examples of the use of landscape in the conventional sense. To take one instance, he summed up his first chapter as isolating ‘certain factors that seem to be characteristic of satisfactory landscapes of a functional kind. Essentially there were two contrasts—the contrast of enclosure and open space, and the contrast of natural and man-made’ (p.28). Nuttgens gives examples, in other words, of how buildings and landscapes reflect the cultures in which they are created. The ideas and preconceptions which we bring to bear when we look at a landscape may well shape our perception of it. As Meinig put it ‘any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads’ (Meinig 1979, p.34). To say that ideas are part of the landscape itself is, however, to move from description to metaphor.

Understanding the different usages of landscape may not be a simple task. As Edward Relph noted, ‘The word (landscape) has a multiplicity of meanings and making sense of them depends mostly on the context in which it is being used’ (1981 p.58). The task is, however, made more difficult by references to definitions which were made using the word as a metaphor for effect in one case or to express an idiosyncratic view of the author in the other.

Jeannie Sim writes of ‘the most general definition of “landscape” as representing so-called “natural scenery”’ and provides an image of the plateau of Mount Wellington. Her other image is of a cultural landscape: a beautiful depiction of a roadside near Metcalf in early morning light, reminiscent of a Hans Heysen painting.*

Definitions of landscape in terms of natural scenery, such as Mann’s, invite enquiry as to the sense in which natural is used. A distinction is sometimes drawn between natural and cultural

* The illustrations and their captions were inserted by the editors and were therefore not the responsibility of the author—eds.
The sudden, late afternoon burst of sunlight which illuminates this autumnal Canadian scene demonstrates the importance of light to our response to landscape.

Landscapes: natural landscapes being the work of nature unaffected by humans, whereas cultural landscapes result from the interaction of humans and nature. Sim may well accept this distinction. But _natural_ is also used to refer to designed landscapes such as New York’s Central Park, constructed to provide contact with nature, as J. B. Jackson reminds us (1984, p.127).

It is troubling that _natural_ slips in and out of the definitions Jeannie Sim discusses, without attention being given to it or to its potential to restrict natural scenery to remnant areas of native vegetation to the exclusion of cultural landscapes. In much contemporary discussion in Australia, references to ‘natural’ scenery or ‘the natural environment’ exclude human modified landscapes. Although the word _natural_ may seem convenient to describe landscapes that support ecosystems having a native vegetation cover, a more balanced view would be to see the whole environment and not just any surviving elements of pre-European landscapes as natural. Human-influenced landscapes are not essentially different from so called natural environments. Humanity is within nature, and human influences are one of the many natural agents of landscape change. Human modification of landscape is not unnatural. In many of the definitions Sim discusses, natural is used in this more inclusive sense: views of countryside shaped by human processes and agents are often regarded as natural scenery.

When we speak of cultural landscapes we refer primarily to landscapes which have been modified by humans as part of their way of living and which thus express their civilisation. Most if not all landscapes are cultural landscapes. As Simon Schama (1995, p.7) observed ‘it is difficult to think of a single such natural system that has not, for better or worse, been substantially modified by human culture’. In Victoria, human interaction with the environment for some 50,000 years suggests that all landscapes are cultural landscapes.

The nature–culture divide has long been a feature of the cultural construct of nature, part of the way humans think about the world around them and their relationship to it. There is a sense, however, in which natural landscapes are also cultural, because our understanding of them (including the very notion of _natural_) is a feature of our culture (Heyd 2005).

As Schama put it, ‘Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product’ (1995, p.9). The distinction between cultural and natural landscapes may be useful for some purposes, but ultimately breaks down both in logic and in experience.

To avoid these difficulties I suggest that Mann’s second definition would be improved by removing the word _natural_. That would make it closer to the conclusion reached by J. B. Jackson, who preferred ‘to remain loyal to that old fashioned but surprisingly persistent definition of the landscape: “A portion of the earth’s surface that can be comprehended at a glance”’ (1984, p.8).

John Dwyer

**REFERENCES**


Relph, E., _Rational Landscapes and Humanistic Geography_, Barnes & Noble, Totowa, New Jersey, 1981.

Diary dates

JULY 2009

Charles Lane Poole and the growth of trees
ACT/Monaro/Riverina

Wednesday 8
Dr John Dargavel presents this lecture on Charles Lane Poole as part of our winter lecture series. 6pm, National Library of Australia. Cost: $10 members, $15 non-members, includes drinks. For information contact nclarke@grapevine.com.au or Judy Pearce expertco@ozemail.com.au

The history of the rose in our gardens
South Australia

Wednesday 29
AGHS member Merilyn Kuchel will present an illustrated talk on the history of the rose in our gardens. 7.30pm, Lecture Theatre, Goodman Building, Adelaide Botanic Garden. Cost: $5 members, $10 non-members. Queries and bookings to Louise Bird on (08) 8447 7316

The Italian garden
Victoria

Thursday 16
Dr Jane Drakard, Senior Lecturer, School of Historical Studies, Monash University, will present the second in our winter lecture series, looking at the impact of non-Italians on well-known Italian gardens in the 20th century. The talk explores historic and contemporary examples including those with dry-garden relevance in an Australian context. 6pm for a 6.30pm start, Mueller Hall, Herbarium, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra. Cost: $15 members, $20 non-members, $5 students. Enquiries to Pamela Jellie on (03) 9836 1881

Brisbane Quaker Arboretum
Queensland

Saturday 18
Guided tour of this inner-city sanctuary with over 100 grand hoop pines and revegetated native woodland, including species named in honour of Quaker naturalist James Backhouse. 2pm, meet at 10 Hampson Street, Kelvin Grove. Cost: $10 members, $15 non-members, BYO afternoon tea. Register with Gill Jorgensen on (07) 3341 3933 or jorgenk@picknowl.com.au

William Kent, the 18th-century English landscape garden (and AGM)
Victoria

Tuesday 18
Dr Gerard Vaughan, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, presents the third of our winter lecture series on William Kent, a key initiator of the English landscape garden, the new ‘natural’ style that revolutionised garden design in the early to mid-18th century. AGM 6.30pm, Lecture 7.00pm, Mueller Hall, Herbarium, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra. Cost: $15 members, $20 non-members, $5 students. Enquiries to Pamela Jellie on (03) 9836 1881

AUGUST 2009

Bruce Mackenzie (and AGM)
Sydney and Northern NSW

Wednesday 5
A short AGM will be followed by a talk by well-known landscape architect Bruce Mackenzie—exploring six gardens, five houses and one apartment. 6.30pm for 7–8.30pm, Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill, Sydney. Cost: $20 members, $30 non-members, includes light refreshments. Bookings essential. Bookings and enquiries to Jeanne Villani on (02) 9997 5995 or Jeanne@Villani.com

Brisbane’s fig trees (and AGM)
Queensland

Sunday 9
A short AGM, followed by Lyndal Plant from Brisbane City Council presenting an illustrated talk on the origin and history of Brisbane’s many spreading fig trees. 2pm, at the Herbarium conference room, Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens. Cost: $10 members, $15 non-members, includes afternoon tea. Register with Gill Jorgensen on (07) 3341 3933 or jorgenk@picknowl.com.au

Southlea & the Antarctic garden (and AGM)
Tasmania

Sunday 25
Held at the National Trust’s property Blythewood, Pinjarra, this seminar provides an opportunity to learn how to read the elements of historic gardens and record them on paper. 11am at Old Blythewood, Pinjarra. Cost: $20. Participants should bring a picnic lunch, notebook, pencil, eraser, clear 30cm ruler, a long tape measure, and digital camera. For bookings contact John Viska on (08) 9328 1519 or John.Viska@challengertafe.wa.edu.au or Joy Hill on (08) 9386 7438 or joyhill@bigpond.net.au
**Perth’s native gardens (and AGM)**

Western Australia

**Sunday 23**
The 2009 AGM will include guest speaker Ruth Morgan discussing factors influencing the rise of native gardens in Perth in the 1970s. 2.30pm, Falls Farm, 41 Cagney Way, Lesmurdie. For bookings contact Caroline Grant on grantspc@iinet.net.au

**Harvest at the Museum of Economic Botany (and AGM)**

South Australia

**Sunday 23**
The AGM and light afternoon tea will be followed by a tour of the exhibition ‘Harvest’ at the Museum of Economic Botany, Adelaide Botanic Garden. 2pm, Lecture Theatre, Goodman Building, Adelaide Botanic Garden. Cost: TBA. Queries and bookings to Louise Bird on (08) 8447 7316

**Catherine O’Neill, garden designer and illustrator (and AGM)**

ACT/Monaro/Riverina

**Thursday 27**
The AGM will be followed by guest speaker Catherine O’Neill, garden designer and illustrator. 5.30pm for AGM, 6pm speaker, Discovery Centre, CSIRO. For information contact Judy Pearce on expertco@ozemail.com.au

**Cremorne Point to Mosman Bay**

Sydney and Northern NSW

**Sunday 30**
Joan Lawrence will lead a walk from Cremorne Point to Mosman Bay wharf, including Ruby’s garden in Cremorne. 2–4pm, meet at Cremorne Point Wharf. Cost: $15 members, $20 non-members. Bookings essential. Bookings and enquiries to Jeanne Villani on (02) 9997 5995 or Jeanne@Villani.com

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**Sherwood spring walk**

ACT/Monaro/Riverina

**Saturday 12**
Sherwood spring walk. 10.30am–3pm. Cost: $5 members, $10 non-members. For further details contact Judy Pearce on expertco@ozemail.com.au

**Prince Henry Hospital**

Sydney and Northern NSW

**Sunday 20**
A guided walk and talk through the Prince Henry Hospital site, lead by Chris and Margaret Betteridge and James Adcock. 2–4pm, meeting point to be confirmed when booking. Cost: $15 members, $20 non-members. Bookings essential. Bookings and enquiries to Jeanne Villani on (02) 9997 5995 or Jeanne@Villani.com

**Eskleigh and other gardens at Perth**

Tasmania

**Sunday 20**
Visit Eskleigh and other historic properties in the Perth area. 11am, meet at Baptist House, Perth. Cost: $30 members, $40 non-members. Bookings and enquiries by 11 September 2009 to Rex Bean (03) 6260 4418 or rex.bean@bigpond.com

**Cornucopia**

South Australia

**Sunday 20**
We will be viewing Carrick Hill’s latest exhibition ‘Cornucopia’ followed by afternoon tea at Hayward’s Café and the chance to stroll around the beautiful twentieth century garden. 2pm, Carrick Hill, 46 Carrick Hill Drive, Springfield. Cost: TBA. Queries and bookings to Louise Bird on (08) 8447 7316

**Exeter and Cherry Dell garden**

ACT/Monaro/Riverina

**Sunday 27**
This visit to Exeter will include the garden at Cherry Dell. Times and cost are to be confirmed. For further information contact Judy Pearce on expertco@ozemail.com.au

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**SEPTEMBER 2009**

**A day in the Chittering Valley**

Western Australia

**Sunday 16**
Set aside this date in your diaries for a BYO picnic at AGHS member Diane Pope’s historic property, Enderslea. Further details and directions will be provided in a future issue of the WA Branch newsletter. Contact Caroline Grant on grantspc@iinet.net.au

**Annual National Conference, Geelong**

Victoria

**Friday 16–Sunday 18**
The pastoral legacy of Victoria’s Western District plains will be explored in lectures and excursions at the Australian Garden History Society’s 30th Annual National Conference. The Victorian Branch looks forward to welcoming you to Geelong, a city that was once the major exporter of wool to the world.
2009 Annual General Meeting notice

The 29th Annual General Meeting of the Australian Garden History Society will be held on Saturday, 17 October 2009, at 8.30am at the Geelong Conference Centre, Adams Court, Eastern Park, Geelong, Victoria. Items to be included on the agenda should be posted to the AGHS office. Branches are asked to nominate their representative to the National Management Committee and to inform the Secretary, Sarah Lucas (c/- AGHS office) by 28 August 2009.

National Management Committee nominations

There will be two vacancies for elected positions on the National Management Committee this year. Current National Chair, Colleen Morris, has served a maximum of two terms of three years and must retire. Christine Reid has decided to stand down after serving one term of three years plus a further two years. Nominations to the National Management Committee open on 3 August 2009 and close on 8 September 2009. To obtain a nomination form, contact the AGHS office on (03) 9650 5043 or toll free 1800 678 446 or via email info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au

Elections offer an opportunity for members to participate in the management of the Society. Each year the National Management Committee holds three face-to-face, full-day meetings in February, June, and prior to the annual conference. These meeting are interspersed with three one-hour telephone link-up meetings in April, August, and December.

Elected members serve for a three-year term and are eligible for re-election for a maximum of one additional term. An allowance to alleviate travel costs for the meetings in Sydney and Melbourne is available if required.

Proposed amendments to AGHS Constitution

These explanatory notes (with amendments shown in italics) will be the subject of a motion at the forthcoming AGM. Here AGHS vice-chair John Dwyer explains the proposed changes.

1. Object 1 be amended to read:

1. To promote interest in, and research into, significant cultural landscapes and the systematic identifying, recording and restoration of historic gardens, as an important component of Australia’s heritage.

There are two alterations. 1. In Object 1 as it stands, the words ‘cultural landscapes’ are followed by ‘(within the meaning of Australian Heritage Commission (2000) Overview of Identification, Assessment and Management of Cultural Landscapes)’ with a footnote stating that ‘The Overview was prepared for the AHC Commission Meeting 148, 13 June 2000’. This definition by reference has now become obscure, because the reference is no longer readily available. Further, it is suggested that the expression ‘cultural landscapes’ is sufficiently understood, so that the reference is unnecessary. 2. The words in italics have been added by reference to the words used by the Australian Tax Office in granting the Society exemption from tax on its income. The basis for the Australian Tax Office ruling that income of the Society is exempt from tax is that the activities of the Society (‘the systematic identifying recording and restoration of gardens’) are considered a science. To better secure the exemption it is desirable to have the words in our Objects.

2. Object 6 be amended to read:

6. To administer and maintain a gift fund for the advancement of education, and the scientific, literary and artistic work of the AGHS and other purposes beneficial to the community.

The words in italics have been taken from the Kindred Spirits Fund Policy, a copy of which is available on request; and which by a later amendment itself becomes part of the Constitution as Appendix 1. It is desired to better secure the Fund by tying it more closely into the Constitution. These words have been added as part of the bundle of changes to that end. Changes to Rule 35 considered below have been made to the same end.

3. Rule 35 be amended to read:

(1) Subject to any resolution passed by the Society in general meeting the funds of the Society shall be used in pursuance of the objects of the Society in such manner as the committee determines.

(1A) Donations made to the Society may be received as general donations or as donations to the Kindred Spirits Fund. Donations must be:

a) invested only in accordance with guidelines for public funds specified by the Australian Tax Office; and

b) used only to further the Society’s objects under the Rules; and

(c) distributed to members or office-holders only to the extent of reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses necessarily incurred on behalf of the fund.
(1B) The Kindred Spirits Fund must be administered in accordance with the Kindred Spirits Fund Policy (Appendix 1) and the recommendations of a subcommittee, the majority of whose members have, because of tenure in public office or other professional standing, an underlying community responsibility, as distinct from an obligation directed solely to the cultural objectives of the Society.

(1C) Donations to the Kindred Spirits Fund must be deposited into a fund separate from the other funds of the Society, and known as the Kindred Spirits Fund.

(2) All cheques, drafts, bills of exchange, promissory notes and other negotiable instruments shall be signed by 2 members of the committee or employees of the Society, being members or employees authorised to do so by the committee.

When the Kindred Spirits Fund was established, Rule 35 was amended by the insertion of Rules (1A) and (1B). It is now proposed to make further amendments as part of the changes to better secure the Kindred Spirits Fund, and also to clarify Rule (1A). 1. As it stands, Rule (1A) may have the unintended consequence that all donations to the Society must go into the Kindred Spirits Fund. This is unnecessarily restrictive. The words in italics make it plain that donations may also be received as general donations for the Society’s objects. The words formerly in Rule (1A) (a) have been removed to a separate Rule (1C). 2. Rule (1B) is amended by adding an express reference to the Kindred Spirits Fund Policy as something by which the Fund must be administered. 3. Rule (1C) has been added to make provision for Kindred Spirits Fund deposits, using the words previously contained in Rule (1A) (a).

4. Clause 5 of the Kindred Spirits Fund Policy be amended to read:

5. That the fund be used to foster education and the scientific, literary and artistic aspects of the Australian Garden History Society for the benefit of the Australian community.

This change is also proposed by reference to the basis, as noted above, for the Australian Tax Office ruling that income of the Society is exempt from tax, i.e. that the activities of the Society (‘the systematic identifying recording and restoration of gardens’) are considered a science. The insertion of the word ‘scientific’ into the Kindred Spirits Fund Policy ensures that the Fund may be used for the scientific work of the Society on which the tax exemption depends.

5. The Constitution be amended by adding to it Appendix 1 the Kindred Spirits Fund Policy

The Policy as amended would become part of the Constitution under this amendment. It could then only be amended by following the procedure under the Constitution. This secures the Policy against casual amendment, and ties it in formally with the Constitution.

Journal packers
A critical part of ensuring Australian Garden History arrives in members’ letter boxes is the dedicated group of AGHS members who generously volunteer their time packaging the journals ready for posting. For the previous issue we specifically acknowledge the contributions of Fran Faul, Shirley and David Goldsworthy, Anna Howe, Pamela Jellie, Jane Johnson, John and Beverley Joyce, Rosemary Kellерup, Laura Lewis, Anna Long, Susan Reidy, Sandra Torpey, Georgina Whitehead, and Kathy Wright.

21 (2), October/November/December 2009
The second issue of volume 21 (October/November/December) will be sent out to members at the start of October 2009—the deadline for this issue is 7 August 2009. We plan to take garden history and archaeology as a central theme. Contributions of articles, news, and notes are always welcomed for the consideration of the editors.

Notes on sources (continued from page 13)

The Boyce Garden at Toowoomba is listed on the Queensland Heritage Register (ID #601311) and a citation is available online from <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/cultural_heritage/>. For the Westpac Garden see Jack Marsh, Susan Quinell, & Christine Castle, Rainforest Gardens, Kelvin Grove Monograph Series, 2 (2), Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education, Kelvin Grove, Qld, (1977), revised edition, 1982. The books of Loraine E. Kuck and Richard C. Tongg include The Tropical Garden: its design, horticulture and plant materials (1936) and The Modern Tropical Garden: its design, plants materials and horticulture (1955); the quote on tropicalia is taken from the dust-jacket publisher’s blurb of the 1960 edition of The Modern Tropical Garden.
Historic Banongill station and garden

Christine Reid profiles this historic Western District property, a highlight of the garden visits as part of the forthcoming Australian Garden History Society 30th Annual National Conference to be held at Geelong in October.

Discreet green-painted signposts, neatly lettered in cream, are subtle indications of change at historic Banongill Station in Victoria’s Western District. Stewart and Sue Gull bought the renowned sheep and cattle property almost four years ago and an early decision they made was to identify, through the signage, where particular paddocks—all 138 of them—are located. Stewart explains: ‘Young jackeroos would arrive here to work with the sheep or a truckie would come with a delivery and they wouldn’t have the faintest idea where to go!’ It’s not hard to imagine feeling totally lost on this 5800-hectare property on the Western District’s windswept plains, studded with fantastic shapes of extinct volcanoes and where one sugar-gum plantation looks exactly like another.

Beyond these minimal additions and small extensions to a stone wall here and there, the Gulls have no plans to make any large-scale alterations to the magnificent 835-square metre homestead and immaculate garden set beside the windsing Mount Emu Creek. They are fully aware of Banongill’s historic importance and they are thrilled to be the current owners, intending to nurture it for future generations. Through the titles and other records, the Gulls have found a great inconsistency in the spelling of Banongill over the years; however, they have settled on the spelling with two ‘l’s’, as it appears in early Fairbairn family records.

Before their recent purchase, Stewart and Sue first visited the property in 1975, when the property was last on the market before 2006. Sue says: ‘We came to look with Stewart’s Dad, who was a stock and station agent at that time, and we both thought it was absolutely wonderful. Any rural property we have looked at since never quite measured up. Banongill lived on in our memory and was always our benchmark.’ Sue says she couldn’t quite believe it when Stewart told her he had finalised the sale. For Sue, it’s the house and garden that has most appeal; for Stewart it’s the challenge of the land and keeping it one of the Western District’s great wool-producing stations.

However, the Gulls have found that when you buy such a well-known property, ‘you don’t buy an island, you buy part of the district’s history. There are nine houses on the property and over the years, many people have lived and worked here and it lives on in their memory, too. Every now and then, people expect to be able to visit,’ says Sue. In recent years the garden has been open infrequently which makes the AGHS visit particularly special.

The tradition of garden visiting at Banongill began early last century, soon after Charles Fairbairn built the existing large house, greatly extending it from its origins as a tiny bluestone shepherd’s hut. Some garden historians believe that William Guilfoyle, designer of Melbourne’s Royal Botanic Gardens, was called in to redesign the front garden, although no plans or letters survive to support this opinion. However, the huge lawn sweeping on a broad front from the house down to the creek is characteristic of Guilfoyle’s style as are the several palms on the lawn.

The Fairbairns lived at Banongill from 1895 to 1975 and in the 1930s, Charles Fairbairn’s son, C.O. Fairbairn, with his English wife, developed a keen interest in daffodil breeding, becoming famous as a grower and hybridiser. Between the wars, it was they who added the remarkable terraced daffodil garden and made Banongill arguably Australia’s premier daffodil garden.

Massed plantings of bulbs provide a seasonal display in the outer parts of the Banongill homestead garden.
Banongill’s location on Mount Emu Creek provides a splendidly picturesque setting of ancient river red gums which contrasts with the formal gardens closer to the homestead.

Today, after sensitive and thoughtful restoration and embellishment by Michael and Diana Lempiere between 1975 and 2006, the cultivated garden, spread over 5.6 hectares, is still a springtime mecca. The long entrance driveway winds through native parkland and windbreaks, across the creek and terminates in an elegant sheltered courtyard. From the front of the house, facing north, there is an uninterrupted view across the vast green lawn dotted with exotic trees to the paddocks beyond. Water is no problem at Banongill and the lush lawn is almost a shock. ‘It is also our firebreak between the creek and the house,’ Stewart is quick to point out.

The garden has retained its essentially Edwardian character, especially in its scale and proportions. There’s a formal rose garden, beds filled with massed hellebores and lilies, a wisteria-draped pergola and, of course, a croquet lawn. A row of splendid hornbeams marks an important path and neatly detracts from the tattiness of the rose garden in winter. The many exotic trees, clipped box, and yews complete the picture. Colour is the most important element fusing house and garden together in a cohesive picture. The shade of terracotta used on the house is echoed on the paths covered with the dusty red of the local volcanic stone; dark-green tough foliage of escallonia hedges is picked up in the house shutters and paintwork on the gardeners’ shed and again in the elegant little bathing hut down by the creek.

Banongill’s custodians over the years have adapted different ideas to suit the unique site and conditions. The magnificent garden, with its sweeping lawns and generous flower borders, its feeling of space and the clarity of the light out on the western plains, is always a magical place to visit.

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**Mission Statement**

The Australian Garden History Society is the leader in concern for and conservation of significant cultural landscapes and historic gardens through committed, relevant and sustainable action.