

ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

Newsletter December 2024 No 6

Australian Garden History Society
www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au



BRANCH DIARY

27 FEBRUARY
NGA Sculpture Gardens &
Fiona Hall Fern Garden

15 MARCH, TBC
Duntroon House & Gardens

45TH AGHS ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
MT GAMBIER, SA
30 OCTOBER – 2
NOVEMBER 2025

THEME: BEYOND THE
GARDEN FENCE

BRANCH COMMITTEE

Robyn Oates, Chair &
NMC Representative
Sue Cassidy, Treasurer

Louise Gaudry
Rosanna Horn
Mary Johnston



CHAIR'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Dear Members

Our AGHS year was, once again, rich and varied. It has been a pleasure to meet so many of you at our events – at the talks, the lectures, the visits to historic properties and gardens, the guided walks and our movie in Gundaroo. What a wonderful year it has been.

I am sure you join with me in thanking our outstanding Committee: Sue, Louise, Rosanna and Mary. In August we said our official farewell to Nancy and to Anne, but just between you and me, they remain behind the scenes providing vital backup. Thanks also go to Judy, without whom the Newsletter and regular email communications would not happen.

We are excited that our early 2025 events are already in place and the dates are here in this Newsletter, ready for your diary.

Thank you, each one, for your support to the Branch throughout 2024. May your festive season be safe, happy and re-invigorating,

Best wishes
Robyn Oates, Branch Chair

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE

**NGA SCULPTURE GARDENS &
FIONA HALL FERN GARDEN**

THURSDAY 27 FEBRUARY, 5PM

The National Gallery of Australia has announced the winning tender to recreate its Sculpture Gardens. Join Ben Taylor, the NGA Landscape Manager, for our AGHS tour of the sculpture gardens and the Fiona Hall Fern Garden. Learn about their history and their proposed development.

Bookings Open early 2025. Information will be mailed when available.

SAVE THE DATE

DUNTROON HOUSE & GARDENS

SATURDAY 15 MARCH, 10AM (TBC)

Duntroon House is listed by the National Trust and on the Register of the National Estate. Join knowledgeable Duntroon guides for a tour of Duntroon House and gardens. Hear their stories and look out for historical plantings.

Bookings Open early 2025

RECENT EVENTS

CLEVER COUNTRY: ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ON LANDSCAPE SPEAKER MARGO NEALE

18 SEPTEMBER



Margo Neale's talk **Clever Country** was remarkably topical for AGHS members as the Society reconsiders its identity and future. Her presentation, the annual joint lecture of the ACT Monaro Riverina Branch of AGHS and the Friends of the National Library of Australia, was hugely appreciated by members and friends of both organisations in the Library's theatre and online.

Margo started with a series of positioning statements about the key concepts on which her talk was based: in Aboriginal Australia, land is viewed as Country, and history is written in the land. Country is an archive, where knowledge, law, and identity reside. Country holds information, stories and secrets, from medicine, engineering, ecology, astronomy to social mores and social structures.

She then explored some of these concepts visually through two case studies, the travelling exhibition *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, and the *Garden of Australian Dreams* in the National Museum.

The story of the Seven Sisters is known across Aboriginal Australia. At face value it is a tale of a chase across the country by the ancestral beings, but in reality, it tells of creation, and it has a critical educational function, teaching basic cultural values. Some of these are rules for gender relationships and marriage, and directions for proper behaviour; others are practical - where and how to locate food, water and shade. Because of the huge geographic distances in Australia, and the different

terrain in different places, the story has many manifestations and variations, but overall it has the status of other great oral epics like the book of Genesis, or the Iliad.

In 2017 the exhibition Songlines, curated by Margo, opened in Canberra. Putting the exhibition together had been a highly collaborative activity that had taken many years. It started in 2010 as a preservation exercise in response to a request from some aboriginal Elders, deeply concerned that the Songlines (the ancient pathways of aboriginal knowledge) were 'all broken up'. Scholars from the ANU and the National Museum of Australia undertook a preservation journey of some 7,000 km to communities across central and western Australia, recording many of the different accounts of the Seven Sisters stories, so that they would be accessible to coming generations once the current owners of the stories had gone. The forms in which the stories were presented and explained were diverse, and included direct instruction, site photography, paintings, weaving, oral stories, music, and dance. The episodes in the stories are full of violence, humour and sex, but presenting them with life, colour and drama was always central to the story tellers, and this was reflected in the exhibition. One unexpected outcome of the project was a cross-community interchange. As the artists saw works from other communities, they recognised and appreciated that there were other versions of their own story, and this sharing provided a particular richness for the artists and performers.

At the end, the outcome was creatively presented in the Songlines exhibition. Very many – perhaps most – of those at Margo's talk had seen the exhibition in Canberra in 2017 or 2018. Since then thousands of people across the world have also seen it. It will open in Tampere in Finland in October 2024.

The works themselves (paintings, dance, music) now have now the status of what Margo described as being portals to place. They are not about Country, they ARE Country she explained. If paintings for instance have been stored, they become dormant, but they can be revitalised, breathed or danced back to life.

As Margo explained, the Songlines project was about landscape, but not in the sense familiar to most Australians: for aboriginal Australians, nature and culture are not separate, but deeply interconnected: there is no nature without culture. For wonderful video footage and photos of the Songlines Exhibition, some of which Margo screened at the talk, see the NMA website:

<https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/songlines>.

Moving from landscape to gardens, Margo spoke briefly about the Garden of Australian Dreams (GOAD), in the central courtyard of the National Museum of Australia. Her discussion of it was a revelation to most of those at her talk. It is not just a space with growing plants – trees, lawn and shrubs – but is one full of objects and symbols of Australian life and culture, both indigenous and not. It has been contentious – how is it a garden? people ask, forgetting those mid twentieth century Australian suburban gardens with their tyre black swans, and pots, and garden gnomes.

Margo briefly identified some of the symbols of Australia's history and culture in GOAD – with its layering of history. You have to look carefully and then you "get" the connections. The more you look, the more you see. Huge braille messages spell out SORRY. There are surveyors' pegs, references to the tracks of Afghan cameleers and the dingo fence, to mining and Cyclone Tracey, and to the 1494 Pope's Line that runs north to south across Australia, now marking the eastern boundary of Western Australia. For Margo and now for us, this extraordinary abundance of references and allusions ties in perfectly with the aboriginal kind of learning. It is tangible, embodied and experiential

For an informed discussion of the Garden of Australian Dreams, see Margo's article No Nature Without Culture in the special garden issue of Museum, the NMA's journal, (vol 23, Aug 2024).

Nancy Clarke

44TH AGHS ANNUAL CONFERENCE BUNBURY OCTOBER 2024

PRE-CONFERENCE TOUR TO MARGARET RIVER & THE SOUTH WEST REGION OF WA

Knowledgeable plantswoman and experienced tour guide Julie Kinney shared her vast repertoire of tales as a local of Margaret River with a receptive group of thirty AGHS members from across Australia.

We were treated to three jam-packed days exploring historic sites and gardens in the South-West region of WA. Despite the visible evidence of the stresses of last summer's prolonged high temperatures accompanied by no rainfall, many areas of the countryside and gardens were still looking lush and green thanks to recent rain.



We visited a delightful range of gardens and historic homesteads, hearing countless stories of resilience in the midst of adversity. Survivors included awe-inspiring trees and hardy, often heritage roses, along with salvias, olive trees, succulents and plants unfamiliar in frost-sensitive settings, but thriving in the Mediterranean climate. We learnt how gardens are adapting to warming climates with greater inclusion of native plants while maintaining a connection with the past.

Of particular interest were the stories of pioneer settlers in the region and the remnants of hundred year old plantings such as the grapevine at Garthowen, planted by the Bussell and Terry families and the gnarled mulberry tree at Fairlawn on the Vasse River, first owned by John and Georgiana Molloy.



We saw the damage caused by the bushfires around Margaret River and subsequent regeneration and the impact of introduced pest plants such as the Arum lily on the beautiful Tuart, Marri and Jarrah forests.

What a wonderful opportunity to meet like-minded plant enthusiasts, sample local food and wines and 'be inspired'.

Sue Cassidy

Photos, Sue Cassidy Garden at Glenbrae & Ancient Mulberry Tree, Fairlawn

CONFERENCE: HESPERIA: LOOKING WEST

More than 100 AGHS members from “the east” accepted the warm invitation of the Western Australian Branch to not only “Look West” but to join them in person in Bunbury for the 44th Annual National Conference, and to experience some of the ancient and more recent history that makes this part of Australia so special.

The program in the mornings focussed particularly on the early European settlement of the south west corner of WA, and our afternoon visits gave us the opportunity to encounter some of these sites at first hand as well as experience some of the important landscapes and gardens of this region. To position ourselves, geomorphologist Peter Lane gave us an overview of the extremely ancient geological history that gives this region’s botany such a special character.

Leslie Thiele and Bernice Barry’s talks introduced us to some early English settlers – who they were, why they came, what they found and did. Georgiana Molloy is best known for collecting Western Australian plants that she sent to the English scientist James Mangles between 1837 and 1843, but in her talk, Bernice focussed on the plants in the two gardens Georgiana created near Augusta and Busselton in this region. She filled these not with native plants but those from “home” in England, and from other places like South Africa, which was the last port of call for most early settlers in WA and a rich source of plants that would thrive in the new colony. This tied in nicely with John Viska’s talk on the very many plants now common in Western Australian gardens that carry in their common names the prefix of “Cape” as they originated in South Africa, and with Des Donnelly’s presentation that demonstrated the catastrophic impact one of these South African plants, the arum lily, is having on the forests of the great tuart trees (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*). Other botanical imports from South Africa are also now identified as significant environmental weeds.

The Clifton family is highly significant to this region. In 1841 Marshall Clifton established a settlement near what is now Bunbury and we visited two properties with Clifton associations – the much loved and cared for Alverstoke, a farm complex taken up by Marshall and his large family in 1842 and still a Clifton home, and Leschenault Homestead, built for his son William also in the 1840s. There are historic plantings in both places. Margaret Sanders introduced us to Louisa, the oldest of the Clifton daughters, who kept a diary and made wonderful drawings and maps of the very early settlement and landscape. These are both charming and of huge historic value.

Other places with links to the early settlement were St Mark’s Church, Picton (dating at least partly from the 1840s), and the remarkable small 19th century township of Dardanup, set up by Thomas Little, farmer and wine producer, who brought a large contingent of Irish settlers to work on the property he was managing for Charles Prinsep. The National Trust property Wonnerup gave us a picture of some of the ambiguities associated with European settlement– its buildings dating from the 19C are significant, its grounds are spacious, its plantings notable, but it is also associated with the Wonnerup Massacre of 1841.



The south west corner of WA is well known today for its wines, but the wine industry goes right back to the early settlers, as Rod Cary told us, and it is also the location of the important Wellington Dam. Greg Keighery gave us an account the work of landscape artist John Oldham who designed a notable botanical precinct for the dam in the 1960s, based on bush garden principles. Some of the design and plantings are still there. We visited Caves House (popular in the 20C as a holiday location), and a truly spectacular fire-resistant garden belonging to Di and Bill Mitchell. And stretching our minds a little, Heidi Mippy told us about the indigenous enterprise she runs that involves local communities, and Yolanda Cool reminded us about our role in addressing the critical shortage of people with heritage skills, and how conversation can help deal with this problem.



Some lucky participants also enjoyed the longer day's travel on Monday, through state forest, up onto the escarpment, to Wellington Dam, Gnomesville, a fine tree park and the mostly modern and enchanting garden of Ferndale near Nannup. A brief final call at the Balingup cemetery with its remarkable sculpted hedges brought us neatly back to one of the people featured in the conference program: Jacob Horter, an enterprising Swiss born nurseryman and horticulturist, is buried there.

We all very warmly thank John Viska, Conference Convenor, and his team for their welcome and wonderful program.

Nancy Clarke

Photos Nancy Clarke, Woonerup and Looking West from the garden of Di & Bill Mitchell

COOTAMUNDRA AREA GARDEN TOUR

9 & 10 NOVEMBER

A group of AGHS members and friends from Canberra, the south coast and Sydney visited Cootamundra and three gardens near the town in a self-drive tour. The weather was perfect, the roads clear and despite some interesting navigation directions from Google nobody got irretrievably lost.

The *Bramshott* garden at Wallendbeen was exceptional in both its layout and plant range, including many new unusual exotic tree plantings. It had benefited not only from the everyday care of owners Sue and Vaudan from 1984 (and Sue's parents Mary and Ted before them) but also featured input from professional gardeners and landscapers Kath Carr (a close friend of Edna



Walling) and Joseph Corkhill. The site also paid homage to Italian gardener Mario Deberadis, a World War II POW assigned to *Bramshott* who returned in the 1950s, and the many other skilled contractors and gardeners who helped to establish the landscaped garden over the years.

Sue gave us an informative guided tour explaining how the garden has changed over the decades both in layout and colour schemes. Deliberate curves including sinuous lavender hedges, a trademark Corkhill touch, and newly established vistas out to the surrounding agricultural landscape were notable features that Sue stressed. These complemented different character areas surrounding the house that dated from 1927 with successive extensions to cater for a growing family. Of particular note was the stone pathway leading between driveway and front door with its circular pond and fountain half way along acting as central feature and focus in the front lawns.

After morning tea in the sun room and a guided tour of the historic house and garden, the visiting party drove off to Cootamundra to either eat in one of its several cafes or picnic in the park under the shade of huge old trees. The Cootamundra Garden Club then warmly received us to their town with an organised bus tour narrated by local history authority and gardener Betty Punnet. From the height of the bus windows we could appreciate the green of the many well watered parks, reserves and playing fields in the town and its tree lined streets with a range of rose filled or quirky succulent gardens. We had several Cootamundra wattles (*Acacia baileyana*) pointed out to us but no one dared to tell Betty that in Canberra they are considered weeds. Of course after such exertions we had to be revived with a generous country style afternoon tea in the rose filled Anzac garden before retiring to our various hotels.

Sunday saw us visit two more gardens. *Rose Vale* in Illabo has seen six generations of the family work on its land since it was first occupied in 1874. The current garden is mainly only about 25 years old but no less interesting for that. Co-owner Fiona led us through pointing out 50 year old camellias, how the roses formed a boundary to the farm land, the privet hedges



(not politically correct but very functional), the difficulties of establishing trees in such a dry environment, the point where a bushfire stopped far too close to the house for comfort, the brick bottle shaped well built by Chinese miners working in the area with spare individually marked bricks used to create garden pathways.

After morning tea Andrew led us on a guided tour of their house that dates from 1909 to see the immaculately conserved original interiors with carved wooden screens at bay windows and pressed metal ceilings featuring original paintwork. It was beautiful. Fiona also showed around us her studio workshop built from recycled materials from where she runs her business *Rowdy Crowd* of personalised plastic stemless drinkware, perfect for picnics. To date some 159,000 plastic *Tritan* "glasses" have been shipped out of *Rose Vale*. It was an interesting modern counterpoint to the history-rich house and garden experience.

We then departed for lunch at the *Olde Schoolhouse T-house* at historic Bethungra village – a converted plant nursery site – before driving onto our final garden destination *Ferndale*. Owner Debbie met us there and led the group through the grounds around the historic 1892 house with its stone verandahs. This garden was



nestled under a ridge and more sheltered than the other two we had visited. The lawns were lush green and the grass deep to walk on as we were accompanied on our garden tour by the property's two little household dogs. We enjoyed viewing the variety of trees, shrub and herbaceous border plantings, rose garden, orchard trees and vegetable garden with beautiful clematis growing on the wire fence. The cooling view of the dam with picturesque island and the variety of sculpture in the garden added to its ambiance. Yet another afternoon tea was taken in the shade of a wide veranda before we set off home. We would all have to do extra gardening on our return to work off the calories!

All three gardens exhibited a common feeling of a calm and sheltered green oasis against a backdrop of dryer agricultural lands. Another common element was the importance of social home entertainment in swimming pools and tennis courts near all the houses, and equally water either as ponds, fountains, wells, windmills or dams was incorporated into the gardens. While all three gardens were different, they provided AGHS members with an illustration of country abundance and beauty quite different to the small suburban gardens most of us cultivate at home. Thanks to Rosanna Horn for organizing this excellent trip.

Anne Claoue-Long

Photos Anne Claoue-Long, *Bramshott, Rose Vale & Ferndale*

BRANCH NEWS

AGHS NAME BADGES FOR BRANCH MEMBERS

It's a great idea to have a members' badge to wear to AGHS events – and our Branch has arranged to have badges made for ACT Monaro Riverina Branch members who wish to purchase them. They are plastic, on a bright white background and have the AGHS logo on them as well as your name. They have a magnetic backing so they can be used safely on clothing that might be easily damaged by a pin.

The AGHS no longer provides a printed badge for new members. They are available for members through the AGHS website login page to print yourself and put in a pin on plastic sleeve or lanyard. But if you are a new member, or misplaced your badge why not order one of these new options.



They cost \$15 each (plus a 50 cent TryBooking fee) and you can place an order with us at <https://www.trybooking.com/CSBHL>

MEMBERS' CONTACT DETAILS

Please note that you can update your address on the AGHS Website but if you are wanting to change Branches you need to contact Sarah at the AGHS National Office (info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au, 0417977 703).

This is not something that occurs very often and it seems that some members who are changing location prefer to stay with their original branch.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The committee would like to welcome the following new members who have joined since the last Newsletter.

- Carolyn Forster, Canberra
- Gail Allen, Canberra

ADVOCACY

The Branch has written to the Director of the NGA to express our interest in the heritage aspects of the design for the recreation of the Sculpture Gardens and the Fiona Hall Fern Garden.

We have also written to Assistant Director Programs, Urban Treescapes, City Presentation, ACT Government to express our interest in the heritage aspects of the new tree plantings to replace felled Radiata pines at Albert Hall.

Anne Claoué-Long

NATIONAL NEWS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

No doubt you have listened to some of these fascinating interviews and would like to hear more, or to read the transcripts:

https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/publications-projects/#filter=-iso_29 .

The AGHS Oral Histories Committee headed by Patsy Vizents requests that all Branches submit a list of potential interviewees which can be presented to the NMC. The list can include those who are not AGHS members, for example owners of historic gardens, gardeners at those gardens, nursery operators, landscapers from within our ACT Monaro Riverina Branch area. If you have a suggestion, please contact Anne Claoué-Long annecl@icloud.com .

OF INTEREST

OPEN GARDENS CANBERRA

<https://opengardenscanberra.org.au/>

Each Spring and Autumn, Open Gardens Canberra opens a diverse range of interesting and beautiful open gardens in Canberra, Queanbeyan and surrounds. I notice that the Autumn program is not yet available. You can check the website nearer the time for details

NATIONAL TRUST

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au>

NATIONAL ARBORETUM CANBERRA

www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au

For details on walks, workshops and other events visit the Arboretum website.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS

www.anbg.gov.au

Friends Thursday Talks – held at 12.30 pm every Thursday from February to November. Bookings can be made 30 days in advance. The next program starts on 6 February. For program details and for bookings go to <https://www.friendsanbg.org.au/calendar>. This calendar also provides information on other talks, walks and activities in the Garden.

HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF CANBERRA

<http://www.hsoc.org.au>

CANBERRA MUSEUM AND GALLERY

[HTTP://WWW.CMAG.COM.AU/](http://www.cmag.com.au/)

LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN GUARDIANS (LBGG)

<http://lakeburleygriffinguardians.org.au>