



AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY
NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
ACT MONARO RIVERINA BRANCH



Photo: Roslyn Burge

Interviewee:	DR GREG I. JOHNSON	
Interviewer:	ROSLYN BURGE	
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SUMMARY

A LIFE OF PLANTS, GARDENS AND SCIENCE ...

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Dr Greg Johnson was interviewed at his home in Canberra, where he has lived since 1995. Born in Maryborough, Queensland (where earlier generations of his family had lived and worked since the 1850s – his parents and three of four grandparents were born there). He recalled his forebear, John Mann, a Chinese man from Amoy now Xiamen in Fujian province) who arrived in Australia in c. 1853 and worked as an indentured shepherd and bushman in Degilbo (near Biggenden) and later a market gardener and fruit seller in Maryborough. That Chinese heritage was not known by his family until about 2000.

In Maryborough his father worked in the engineering shipbuilders, Walkers Limited, until he injured his hand in machinery, retrained and the family moved around Queensland. After completing a Bachelor in Agricultural Science (Hons) at the University of Queensland in 1974, Greg continued to work in Queensland (vegetable pathology - Brisbane, tobacco and peanut pathologist – Mareeba, postharvest pathologist – Brisbane, and CSIRO Division of Horticulture in Brisbane) before moving in 1995 to Canberra.

EDUCATION

Awarded a Queensland government bonded scholarship and with his early interest in gardening, Greg completed a B. Agricultural Science (Hons) at the University of Queensland in 1973, and with few jobs for plant breeders, Greg majored in plant pathology. He described the career options for men and women graduates extending beyond agriculture – in teaching, farm management - *the advantage of doing agriculture is that it's a very broad course and you can specialise in many things. And those that specialised in economics or farm management had opportunities to move into the broader areas of business as well.*

He found pleasure in studying and research, in *the minutiae of detail .. and being thoroughly aware of the literature to make sure that what you're doing hasn't been done by somebody else.*

WORKING – QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Greg describes working at Indooroopilly at the science labs of the (then) Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI) where half the plant pathologists in the state were based ... and his supervisor who had been among the first generations of plant pathologists in Queensland: *you inherit both some of the knowledge and experience of your predecessor, and you carry the story forward. So I guess that's why it feels like a dynasty.* Greg recalled the first Director of Plant Pathology, Jack Simmonds, whose mother, Rose Simmonds, was a photographer and a collection of her works had been shown at the National Gallery of Australia. Greg recalled this group of people with interests in science and natural history.

I suppose that that group of people were ... university people, they were people of science. ... And that just fitted me ... that suited me ... The things that most interested me had been when we did some biology and in, in science so growing up looking at vegetation, they were the things that excited me. I had a friend in high school whose parents managed a sugarcane farm that was owned by Vera Scarth-Johnson and Vera Scarth-Johnson was

both a botanist and a botanical artist and even though I had very little to do with her, that was the first person I had encountered in my life who had lived a life of science.¹

Greg moved to Mareeba in 1977, living in Kurunda and back to Mareeba for almost a decade, working as a tobacco and peanut pathologist.

Plant Pathology is the study of plant diseases and diseases are one of the major causes of food loss, forest destruction and damage to the environment and so the study of plant pathology is very important, but perhaps under-recognised. ... the era that I lived in at that time was one of change. ... Jack Simmonds, who was the first Government Pathologist used to ride a horse when he visited farmers, he would go by train somewhere up into the country then ride by horse ... go by horse.²

Influencing his interest in gardening were magazines of the time ... *Earth Garden*, and later he refers to *Your Garden*.

The 1970s/80s when Greg was appointed tobacco pathologist in Mareeba, it was the end of one era. He recalled the lack of modern innovations – no air conditioning in cars, no departmental telephone calls *unless it was a national emergency*, and he recalled his boss would write a memo to say he was visiting Greg rather than telephone. Plant specimens would occasionally be sent in a wicker basket on the train, and the basket had to be sent back.

My immediate boss would ride a bicycle when he was visiting farms (in the 1920s). (no) air conditioning in our cars, and I didn't get air conditioning in my government vehicle until I made the case to the Director and it was only because of the plant specimens we were collecting that justified having air conditioning in your vehicle. Didn't matter about the humans who had to drive several hours, but the plant specimens, of course, were more important.

One of the main tobacco diseases was downy mildew - Greg did some significant research on controlling the disease and from his previous work in Brisbane he had built up a *knowledge-memory of the causes* of many crop diseases for the plant disease diagnostic service he was responsible for. He spoke of the trust built up between farmers and departmental staff.

Around this time Greg joined the Society for Growing Australian Plants (now the Australian Plant Society). He had married and living in Kurunda which was a more alternative lifestyle and with his wife had a stall at the markets on Sundays.

Whilst living in Queensland Greg completed his Masters in Agricultural Science and in the late 1980s moved to Brisbane as postharvest pathologist. This was another time of change with the diminution of the tobacco industry and those farmers turning to mango growing, continuing long relationships.

Greg explains the rationale for the reduction in tobacco production, and the need for improved transport systems for postharvest care of produce, particularly mangoes. At the same time high value export markets (such as the Japanese market) had disinfestation technology to eradicate fruit fly yet there were other requirements to improve marketability:

We had quality assurance which was to improve the whole chain from farm to market to try and ensure that the fruit or vegetables were of the best quality when they got to their destination.

¹ <https://www.cooktownandcapeyork.com/do/museums/natures-powerhouse>

<https://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/scarth-johnson-obit.html>

² <https://www.appsnet.org/Awards/Simmonds.pdf>

<https://appsnet.org/History/John%20Simmonds.pdf>

POSTHARVEST

The various systems approaches are now worldwide - labour efficiencies, product care, Value Chain Management; and are of keen interest to supermarkets. Greg describes *Freshcare* (aiming to get produce in the best possible state to the consumer and to minimise losses) and his responsibilities in mangoes and other tropical fruit focussed on the development of disease management approaches.

It is a huge business. ... so often people talk about ... 'we need to improve yields, we need to get more production and therefore we need to invest in production research' ... but for many commodities, 30% of the product is lost after harvest ... that's where the profit is. ... even today, you will read many accounts of research and they always forget about postharvest.

ACIAR – AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Plant Pathology collaboration was not only within Australia, but internationally through ACIAR, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (an initiative of the Fraser government). When Greg joined ACIAR in 1995 he commissioned and managed research in postharvest technologies for fruit and vegetables, and for grains, as well as supporting collaborations relating to *better management of cocoa and coffee problems postharvest in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and other work in the Pacific.*

Your Garden

In his teens Greg had ordered plants by mail and had been reading *Your Garden* – in the 1980s he responded to an advertisement in the *Courier Mail* for a new correspondent for the sub-tropics and wrote articles monthly – deepening his interest in gardening. Greg recalled his visit to Myall Park in western Queensland, developed by David Gordon, and writing about Gordon's passion for collecting and growing Australian plants.

Growing up the magazines in the family were *Woman's Weekly*, *Sunday Mail* – with gardening columns by Alan Seale and Ray Langdon (who was Greg's lecturer in plant pathology at University) respectively. His father subscribed to *Time* and *Life* magazines, and Greg took *Look and Learn*. At high school, Greg also subscribed to the State Library of Queensland's Extension service, which sent books of choice by train each week to Bundaberg where he lived 1960-1969.

COLLECTING EARLY GARDENING BOOKS

Collecting early Australian gardening books became a keen interest – starting with Edna Walling, and influenced by Trisha Dixon's writings; particularly appealing were Walling's photography and her warm entertaining writing style.

Many of the books in my collection I've only ever seen once in thirty years, and they very rarely become available ... often even thrown out because they're not particularly very big, not in particularly good condition ... (collecting became) an appendage to my interest in gardening generally, but also just an interest and fascination in what people wrote in those times.

Green is a colour: influenced by Walling's writings and her cottage style, Greg created *random stone paving in the entrance area* of his new home and later a circular path in the front garden made with random pieces of sandstone. Green is a colour too and Walling's successional plantings appealed to Greg.

Victor Crittenden's collecting and his bibliography provided a reference for Greg's collecting. Early Australian gardening books are now rare but he would attend university book fairs and now the internet makes it easier to know what book sellers have. Greg set out to purchase the books listed in Victor Crittenden's Bibliography which led to him compiling a number of talks about garden history for the AGHS. Richard Aitken's *Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* was also an inspiration and an important reference.

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

He also discusses the ambition of the Australian Garden History Society to meet the broad interests of members through its talks and garden visits, and the ACT Monaro Riverina Branch's project for the AGHS 40th Anniversary to digitise early garden publications held by the National Library. Greg discussed his interest in *The Handbook of Australian Horticulture* by James (1892) and the *Flora Australasica*, by Sweet (1827); not only are the illustrations beautiful but the writing about the methodology of growing Australian plants is clear and simple.

Greg was also involved in the photographic competition during Covid as a means of engaging members. In 2016 the Branch had also organised and presented the national conference and though Greg was part of the committee organising the scientific program, he missed the first day because of other commitments.

The Branch commissioned an interview with Cedric Bryant and Greg was very helpful in fostering that process.

Asked about his four PowerPoint presentations to the Society (and other entities) the presentations may become a publication.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR PLANT PATHOLOGY

Greg has had a long involvement with the International Society for Plant Pathology ... 17 years on the Executive and he discussed the most recent Congress in Lyon in France.

As a member of the Executive, I had lots of roles including providing advice about the scientific program and I, with some colleagues in Italy, organised the session on social media. We conducted a survey through our membership, because the International Society involves sixty national and regional societies, representing about 26,000 plant pathologists worldwide. We had about 800 people respond to our survey, we reported on the use of social media by plant pathologists and we had some talks relating to other aspects of social media as well.

He also discusses his own social media engagement and his Instagram account which is for him a visual diary.

Through the engagement of Greg and others, the International Society for Plant Pathology established the ISPP Resilience Bursary to help plant pathologists initially as a result of the war in Ukraine, but that has expanded to other countries, and has the support of the Polish Phytopathological Society and the Society of Turkish Phytopathology in implementation.³ Speakers at the Lyon congress spoke about the challenges of saving seed collections and the destruction of germ plasm collections. Though urgent and important, the issue of plant pathology is rarely mentioned in the general media.

War ... affects the research progress but it also can cause things such as damage to stored grain and, of course, you then have problems with fungal decay of the grain and

³ Nine Plant Pathology Societies and numerous individuals have donated to the fund in addition to ISPP.

also contamination of the grain by the mycotoxins, which are toxins produced by some fungi. But of course historically both plant pathologist and entomologists have been involved in past conflicts. For example, during the Second World War plant pathologists, entomologists from Australia served in Papua New Guinea and they were mainly involved in the malaria management campaign. And the first Director of Plant Pathology, Jack Simmonds, was the head of that group and my former boss was also involved in the malaria control campaign in Papua New Guinea.

At the Lyon Congress Greg was appointed a Fellow of the Society and he describes his response and the importance of the friendships made and the mentoring possible – and how inspiring it is to continue that role:

an honour and a privilege, because it's recognising your contributions to the science of that discipline, but also the functioning of the Society. But I believe it's also a responsibility because as a Fellow you should try to continue to serve that profession in ways that you can. I remember I went to a conference once and someone, one of the keynote speakers, said he used to be a plant pathologist and I thought a medical doctor would never say they used to be a doctor, you know, they're a doctor for life. And I think in many professions we retain that interest and responsibility for our entire lives. I'm not going to stop looking at powdery mildew and knowing what it is or whatever.

He describes the ethos of working in international development: *you're there to do a job and you've always got to keep the focus on that.* ACIAR was established in 1982 with a 10 year sunset clause, but it continued with bipartisan government support to foster and support international agricultural research.

In conclusion Greg describes his travels to explore gardens and the background to writing his article in *Australian Garden History* about the Danish garden, *Sanderumgaard*, and his visit to the garden of Gertrude Jekyll.

END OF AN ERA

Through Greg's interview *the end of an era* and collaboration are two recurring topics. In the 1970s when he worked in North Queensland it was the end of an era in the ways government departments functioned and engaged with technology in their day to day practice (rather than scientific practices). He also refers to the changing era when he undertook his PhD – working in the field and continuing to do his PhD about the topic without the requirement to travel overseas to study.

Collaboration locally as well as extensive international collaboration through ACIAR and ISPP, the International Society for Plant Pathology, which Greg helped guide from 1998 as Secretary of the Postharvest Pathology Committee to 2023 when he concluded his term as Past President; as well as the work of the Australian Garden History Society.



2011 Joined Australian Garden History Society – ACT Monaro, Riverina Branch
1974-2023 Australasian Plant Pathology Society (APS)
 2007-2009 President
 1991-1993 Treasurer
1998-2023 International Society for Plant Pathology (Executive)
 2006-2013 Secretary-General
 2013-2018 President
 2018-2023 Immediate Past President
1995-2006 ACIAR – Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
2006-2019 Horticulture for Development

This is an interview with Dr Greg Johnson who is being interviewed for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection, particularly the ACT Monaro Riverina Branch. The interview is taking place at his home in Aranda in Canberra, on Ngunnawal land on Thursday, 19 October 2023. And the interviewer is Roslyn Burge.

Greg, thank you for your time this morning for this interview for the Society. I'd like to start just with some early biographical details where and when you were born.

I was born in Maryborough, which I think is Badtjala country in Queensland, in 1952. My parents were born there, as were three of my four grandparents as well.

Goodness, there's a strong association with that place.

There is yes and some of the earlier generations were born there as well starting their arrival sort of around from around 1850.

And you have Chinese heritage too?

Yes, one of those early arrivals was what we know as John Mann. He came as an indentured labourer, probably in 1853, and he married a Scottish woman in Maryborough in 1863 and she had come from Edinburgh as a servant.

Did he come straight from China to Maryborough?

Those details are a little sketchy, but we think he came via Sydney and he worked at Degilbo which is near Gayndah. He unfortunately died in about 1888 and so the history of his early life has been lost. But he came from Amoy which is now Xiamen in Fujian province. And of course, it was a family secret: my mother didn't know about it until around 2000 when her cousin told her. I knew in the 1980s that he was born in China, but I assumed he was probably the descendant of a missionary, you know, a child of a missionary or something, because he was John Mann, but Man, spelt M A N is a surname in that area, and it translates as Wen, W E N, in Mandarin.

You've done a lot of work researching this.

Some of it yes. But of course, it's a little hard to trace these things. But I do have a copy of his naturalisation certificate in which he is called a Shepherd and Bushman.

And you don't know where he worked?

Well he worked ... it is said that he worked for the Walsh family in Degilbo. His address was there at the time he married as well but in later life they lived in Maryborough and at his death his occupation was recorded variously as Gardener and Fruit Seller, so he probably had a market garden. At one point he got fined for not having a permit to a Hawker's licence, so he probably might have also sold fruit and veg door to door.

And your ... you mentioned he married a Scots woman. You've also got a lot of Scottish.

Yes. Particularly on my mother's side. Elizabeth Smith was orphaned, she was trained as an umbrella maker and glove maker and that came down through the family. They were seamstresses, but it was always family lore that both that person (she didn't die till 1930) was an umbrella maker and also her daughter-in-law could make umbrellas as well. And that's on mum's father's side. On her mother's side, I'm descended from the Scottish gardeners from Aberdeen. various generations of John Roy.

It must be marvellous to have all that history, to know your own history. You mentioned that your mother didn't know until 2000 about your Chinese forebear, but you knew in the 80s, you didn't want to mention that or ... ?

No, I knew in the 80s that he was born in China because her aunt had told her, but we hadn't imagined that he was Chinese but when you look at a picture of him, his son ... (looking at photo) you can see, that is Mum's grandfather and you can see the Chinese features.

What a wonderful photograph

That's from 1926. So he was the second son of the family.

Marvellous. What is this big building?

It's the ... they were window and door manufacturers in Maryborough. I think it's Hynes and Son, or Fairlies, (it's Fairlies) and also my grandfather is in that picture there.

So they worked there.

They worked there. My great-grandfather worked there for over 60 years⁴, starting as a boy of 12.

It's a wonder you ever left

And that ... that is a copy of a picture that's in the John Oxley library.

It's a marvellous, just the composition, we might include that.

And my ... when I spoke to my mother's cousin, she told me that the photos were in the John Oxley Library. I ordered the photo and I puzzled over it and I showed it to my mother and she said, "Well, that's granddad, and that's great-granddad." She recognised both of them, of course.

How marvellous.

And granddad and my cousins who are direct male line descendants have straight black hair.

All the signs are there.

Yes.

How do you feel about having that strong heritage both the Chinese and the gardening?

Well, you know, it's, you know, I'm quite happy about it. When I left university, I actually enrolled.

Pause in recording University.

Okay, so when I left university, just intuitively I enrolled to do Chinese ... Chinese language but I only lasted about six weeks or something I didn't last very long. But, you know, there was obviously an interest there. And, of course, you know, I've always been interested in gardening right from when I was a child. So there must be some gardening genes. I've got no sporting genes at all.

You mentioned that on the phone and seem very proud of that fact. Yet your father was very, very involved in the sporting community.

He was yes. But I guess sometimes these things are a result of where you grew up, what opportunities you have and dad was, dad was a keen footballer. That interest wasn't there for me.

⁴ [Maryborough Chronicle 17/7/1939 p 6](#). 60 YEARS OF SERVICE - Fairlies Honour Old Employee Mr. J. Mann Severs Connection With Firm.

And you said your mother was a football widow. So

Yes, that's, you know, perhaps earlier on anyway.

So who fostered that gardening interest for you?

Well, I guess, you learn by observation and, you know, some of my early memories would be of Mum and Dad doing gardening and, you know, being allowed or given some ground in which to grow things.

So, your parents grew their own ...

Well they gardened in the way that the 'neat and trim' era was and, you know, grew vegetables and of course, Dad's father was a very, very keen gardener. He was a labourer but in their small house in Tinana on the edge of Maryborough, he had a very large vegetable garden in front of the house, in the sort of English cottage style, I guess, I would have realised now, but of course, they had a double block because in earlier times they had a horse which was for the sulky and granddad was a very keen gardener after he retired, he grew more and then he used to work down the road for nursery until he was ... virtually till the day he died in his 80s, he was about 80. Mum's father also gardened, but that was also the Depression era. Mum had a lifelong dislike of silverbeet because she had her whole life's quota as a child.

And do you have any passions or distaste for the things that you were forced to eat as a child?

10.37 Don't know about being forced, but I don't like rock melons, I used to call them rotten melons. You know, it's just the flavour that I don't like. But everything else I like.

And you move to round a great deal in in your childhood.

Yes, well that that worked for Walker's he did his apprenticeship there as a turner, but he got his hand caught in the machine and as part of the rehabilitation he trained as the Manual Training Teacher and so then we moved as he had various posts until we came to Bundaberg just at the end of grade three for me. We stayed there for the rest of my high schooling and then I went to university when I was 17. But before that I'd lived in Maryborough, Ingham, Bundaberg, Brisbane and Townsville.

There's a lot of moving about - so the whole house moved not just your father with his work?

Yes, but it was you know, two to three years in each place. Of course those days you'd be moving by train, you know, you'd have long journeys in the Sunlander. We didn't get a car until I was in about grade two in Townsville. So only the latter moves were by car - always before that it was in the train.

And you mentioned Walkers Greg, just for someone listening to this, what is Walkers?

Walkers is shipbuilders engineering works in Maryborough and I think they still ... they're still operating. Of course Dad was working there during the war and they were building boats. One of the boats that he worked on is in Maritime Museum in Brisbane, it was a Corvette I forget its name [HMAS Diamantina] but they still continue as far as I know Walkers. And of course Maryborough is getting more business in that area for example, manufacturing I think rail carriages.

Pause

Bundaberg yes from grade three. I went to Walkervale school and then Bundaberg state high and finished school in 1969.

Did you think automatically going to university because that was your next point, wasn't it?

I think my parents always obviously recognised that I was good academically. They only thought about me perhaps becoming a teacher and it was only when we spoke to career

advisors that they suggested that I could have other opportunities and I was fortunate to be awarded a State Government Scholarship to do Agricultural Science at the University of Queensland. So that's how ... and of course because I was interested in gardening that was something that attracted me.

Was the scholarship specifically for agricultural science?

The scholarships you would apply and you would indicate your preferences. You know, my first preference was agricultural science, second preference was dentistry. And there was I guess some scholarships allocated for different agencies. But my year was the last year to be awarded State scholarships. After that, at least in agricultural science there were no more. Of course there were still Commonwealth Scholarships but the job opportunities for agricultural scientists were fewer perhaps – but don't know the reason, it could have been change of government policy - but ours was the last year and there was ... I think there was three of us in first year and another three awarded to three other boys, of course, in second year. Having said that we had the most girls of any year in agricultural science, we had about 12 or 14 out of something like 95 and one of those had been awarded a nationally competitive scholarship.

So it was a ... it was a competitive group that you were in.

It was yes, there was a lot of very bright people in our year. A mix of people who had come from farms, people who'd come from agriculture, sorry, from country towns like me, three of the girls in our year came from ... they went to All Hallows in Brisbane, a Catholic girls' school, and it happened that the one lecturer in ... in agriculture who was a woman [Joan Tully], went to their school and spoke very glowingly of agriculture, that's how three of them decided to do agriculture.

Do you keep up with any of those people?

We had our 50 year reunion just a week ago and I think there was 45 people graduated and there was 35 of the graduates came to the reunion along with I think about 24 partners or spouses. So there was I think, I think it was 69 people altogether. So it was great, because people who had been good friends who I had lost touch with we've reconnected and people who I'd never spoken to ever before I know more about them now than ever knew. But it was interesting to see what they had done, what they had experienced and we had a discussion group on a week ago with the idea of what we would like to write something about how agriculture should be taught better based on our own experience. It's yet to be seen whether it eventuates but it certainly was interesting to have that discussion and each of us had written a one or two page account of our life so far and you know, lots of experience from all of those people.

Have they all stayed in agriculture?

Well, of course, many of them didn't ever go into agriculture, because there were few jobs, particularly the women in our year. You know, some of them became teachers. And then there was a variety of jobs for the men. Some people went on to do masters degrees and later PhDs. Quite a few of the women in our year did economics and farm management and some of those came to Canberra for one or two years after they graduated working in various departments. But the advantage of doing agriculture is that it's a very broad course and you can specialise in many things. And those that specialised in economics or farm management had opportunities to move into the broader areas of business as well.

It's really quite a huge field and just looking at your CV, the realms of possibilities are extraordinary. You didn't stay ... well, let's not jump ahead to your work, let's finish your university, you went to university did ag science, and then where did you head to?

Well I majored in Plant Breeding and Plant Pathology, because within the DPI, we would meet each year with the Head of Plant Industry, Gordon Miles, and have a discussion about where our future may lie. He said there was no vacancies for plant breeders so it was in perhaps third year, it was decided that I would major in plant pathology. And I was the only student from my year to major in plant pathology whereas there was maybe half a dozen who majored in entomology. But looking back at that was a good choice because I initially was based in Brisbane, which I very much wanted to be, and then I went out into the country.

Why did you particularly want you say that with great emphasis, why did you particularly want to be in Brisbane?

20.00 I guess it was because my friends from university were going to be there. So you I wanted to continue those friendships, if I could. And so it was a good step to have that initial experience and training in Brisbane before I went to the country.

And your extracurricular life at that time, this was the early 70s, a time of great tumult as you mentioned and social change. And what were some of the other activities you're involved in outside the university?

Well I guess when you are at university, particularly in a large city like Brisbane, you are exposed to many ideas and thinking that was the time of Vietnam War protests, it was the time of Springbok tour protests, there were many people came to speak, Ralph Nader came to speak – he was very influential at that time.

Did you hear him?

Yes, I went and listened to Ralph Nader⁵ and you know that was a pretty seminal influence and of course, in my fourth year, we had the Aquarius Festival at Nimbin. I went to that for a few days and I was I guess very much influenced by the sort of social issues associated with the things that I heard and talked about and also my friends were interested in whether it ranged from, you know, organic agriculture or simpler living lifestyles to being more ecological to things that you would think of as more spiritual, such as meditation. And I guess those things sort of just sat comfortably with me even though I continued to work for the Department of Primary Industries, going out into the country. And when you deal with farmers, of course, the salt of the earth, but very fine people as well.

So the things that you learnt or encountered at Nimbin were they vastly different from your growing up in your, your family experience?

I guess they were things that my parents hadn't thought about, but of course, at that time, there were things also like the beginning of *Earth Garden* magazine so there were things that I was reading and of course, being interested in gardening from my earliest days, it just jelled, I guess. And ...

It has a reputation as quite an alternative in experience, event, "happening", at that time too.

Yes, there was certainly that element of it. I was sharing a small accommodation built out of picture frame wood and tar paper and I think there was about half a dozen of us who could sleep there lined up, you know, in sleeping bags. My memories aren't so ...

No, no, but I'm intrigued that you put it on your CV.

It's, I think it's an area of history that perhaps hasn't been well enough documented. Maybe it's because many of the attendees have ... can't remember!

So you left university and where did your first job take you?

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Nader

So my first three years were at Indooroopilly one of Brisbane's suburbs which was where the science laboratories of the Department were located. And perhaps half of the Plant Pathologists in the state were based there as well. My supervisor was in charge of vegetable research diseases and he had ... he was near the end of his career. He had been one of the very first, perhaps the second generation of plant pathologists appointed in Queensland. His name was Jack Aberdeen, J E C Aberdeen.⁶

You mentioned that that's important ... you mentioned it in a way that suggested that was important ... you saw yourself as part of a dynasty, as it were.

I guess you have the lineage of scientists and in Queensland the first Vegetable Pathologist was appointed in the 19th century, that was because of problems such as rust in wheat; that was Henry Tryon, and he was the Vegetable Pathologist appointed, as I said, in the 19th century. He subsequently appointed one person who continued that work and he specialised in Tropical Fruit Research and there was that sort of knowledge and growth of understanding of how to manage these diseases, you inherit both some of the knowledge and experience of your predecessor, and you carry the story forward. So I guess that's why it feels like a dynasty. And of course, at the time I was there Jack Simmonds,⁷ who was, I guess, the second generation, as I said, was still wandering the building. And in a later time in my career, I continued some of his Tropical Fruit Research. And his ... his mother, is named Rose Simmonds⁸ and just recently, there has been an exhibition here at the National Gallery of Photography including many of her photographs. So he came from a family who, of course, that was late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, who were interested in the arts, but also very interested in natural history.

So there must have been, what was the feeling at that time to be immersed in your career? And your work in ... that stumbling question Greg about that whole environment?

I suppose that that group of people were, you know, they were university people, they were people of science. Of course, you know, they were ... perhaps some of them had come from that background, particularly those who lived in Brisbane, you know, there had been interesting things like natural history. And that just fitted me, you know, that suited me, and that was the area that interested me when I had been at high school. The things that most interested in me had been when we did some biology and in, in science so growing up looking at vegetation, they were the things that excited me. I had a friend in high school whose parents managed a sugarcane farm that was owned by Vera Scarth-Johnson and Vera Scarth-Johnson was both a botanist and a botanical artist and even though I had very little to do with her, that was the first person I had encountered in my life who had lived a life of science, I guess.⁹

What a lovely phrase. So where did you get to after Indooroopilly?

So after three years in Brisbane I was appointed to become the Tobacco Pathologist in Mareeba, in far North Queensland. So I transferred by train, I got stuck in Townsville through floodwaters, spent a week at the University College in Townsville before I finally got to Mareeba and began working for nine years on diseases of tobacco and peanuts.

My boss at the time was Bill Pont, who had been in North Queensland since 1953 and he was based at Kamerunga Research Station near Cairns and I have strong memories of the ... I guess the first time I met him, which was hot, humid, no air conditioning and he was a very

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Errol_Chandos_Aberdeen

⁷ <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/simmonds-john-howard-jack-16125>

⁸ <https://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE5985b.htm>

⁹ <https://www.cooktownandcapeyork.com/do/museums/natures-powerhouse;>
<https://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/scarth-johnson-obit.html>

slow person with the fan rotating slowly you know, very much the sort of ... that was that period and of course, in those days you wouldn't even telephone Brisbane unless it was a national emergency. And if Bill Pont was going to visit the Tablelands, which was where I was based, he would write me a note to say that he was coming next week, he wouldn't telephone either. You know, the telephone was only used very rarely. And you have your little memo book that you would write memos in.

And the post worked?

30.20 Yes, that was the end of an era, of course.

Yes.

Within that period we got a fax machine and we gradually entered more modern times.

Even today, a fax machine is already passe.

Exactly yes.

So, so how did it How was it for you when he would come to visit?

Well, he was, you know, he was a gentleman of the old school. And if he came to the Tableland and it would be because he would be looking at or visiting a farmer or doing something related to his needs, and I would sometimes travel with him to look at the particular problem. But each of us had our own responsibilities, I was responsible for tobacco and so I was part of the team of people working on tobacco, extension, agronomy, plant breeding. And so you learn and your priorities and what you do is influenced by that team need.

And the main problem of tobacco disease was a downy mildew. And at that time, the fungicide now known as Ridomil was just becoming available and so I did some of the early work (that's metalaxyl is the scientific name) ... did some of the first work controlling, looking at that fungicide to control downy mildew. And, you know, of course, you're working with the research team, the farm labourers, but also having some dealings with farmers, we would perhaps be doing trials on their, on their farms, you would be visiting the farms to look at disease problems. We also operated the diagnostic service so that myself and a technical staff member with me, Bob Davis, would need to try and work out what was the problem in that sample that was brought in whether it was, you know, a cabbage or corn or a mango. And of course having been in Brisbane for three years, where I also had responsibilities for diagnostics, I'd built up a knowledge-memory of the cause of many of these things.

But there was always some excitement, I suppose, when you diagnosed or saw a disease for the first time. For example, for seeing downy mildew on roses for the first time and, you know, there's this sort of feeling (I suppose it's how medical doctors may feel where they have that power to know that is what that is, and this is what you should do). And there's also the trust, you experience the trust, both from the farmer but also your colleagues in Extension, because Extension Officers would only bring you ... or get you to look at the problems they didn't already know the cause of.

So the special things came to you?

Yes. And we would also get sent specimens. So we would get sent specimens: my district extended to Mackay and in those days they would send you sometimes a specimen in a specially made wicker basket that was sent up in the train. And you'd have to send the basket back, of course, because they wanted it but ... but sometimes, of course, they'd come in the post and they would not be able to be worked on because they'd rotted along the way.

Were they safe in the wicker basket?

It depended on the particular specimen, but yes, it was. That was in the days when you could do things like that. I mean, when we were children, sometimes on holidays in North Queensland we would post a coconut to our cousins in the south, you know, you would just need to write on the coconut put stamps on it and it would go through the post to our relatives.

You can't imagine that happening today, it wouldn't go through the machinery.

It would be worth trying.

We just had a brief pause, Greg, but just the whole idea of that world that you were in at that time is so different from today. So, you mentioned a couple of other aspects, the air conditioning and so forth.

Yes. Well, of course. I mean, many people don't even know what Plant Pathology is and I remember saying to someone once, I was a Plant Pathologist, and she said, "I didn't know that plants had blood". But of course, Plant Pathology is the study of plant diseases and diseases are one of the major causes of food loss, forest destruction and damage to the environment and so the study of plant pathology is very important, but perhaps under-recognised. And you know, the era that I lived in at that time was one of change. I mean, Jack Simmonds, who was the first Government Pathologist, used to ride a horse when he visited farmers, he would go by train somewhere up into the country then ride by horse ... go by horse. My immediate boss would ride a bicycle when he was visiting farms. And for me ... we, of course, didn't have air conditioning in our cars, and I didn't get air conditioning in my government vehicle until I made the case to the Director and it was only because of the plant specimens were collecting that justified having air conditioning in your vehicle. Didn't matter about the humans who had to drive several hours, but the plant specimens of course, were more important.

Was the horse a departmental horse waiting at the railway station?

I'm not sure because that was of course in the 1920s. And they would maybe go to the local place where you got horses, hired a horse.

So you must have become very involved in the community you lived in and worked in?

Yes, I did become involved to some extent. You know, I had interests in plants, of course, and so in that time in North Queensland, particularly when we lived in Mareeba, I was in what was then the Society for Growing Australian Plants - it's now the Australian Plant Society, I think, and we did some wonderful excursions. In my earlier days in Kuranda, my wife and I lived in Kuranda and that was a more alternate lifestyle place. For a while there, particularly as our eldest son was only young we had a stall at the Kuranda markets where we would sell food that we would make on Saturday. Meanwhile, I was working in the DPI during the week in Mareeba, 40 kilometre - half hour drive to work.

What prompted you to have the stall as well?

Well, I guess it was, you know, that meant that my wife had some independent income, but also, you know, salaries weren't so high, we were wanting to buy a house.

So, you moved out of the tobacco industry?

So after nine years in North Queensland, in which time I had also completed my Master's degree in Agricultural Science, externally from the University of Queensland, I applied for and was appointed as the Post-Harvest Pathologist that was based in Brisbane. I was responsible for research to control the diseases on fruit after harvest, particularly on mangoes because that was just the beginning of the expansion of mango growing in North Queensland [c. late 1980s] and there was an interest in developing better methods to control the diseases so that the fruit could be exported. It just happened that that was also the end of the mango growers ... sorry, the tobacco growing era and many of the people who had been tobacco growers began

growing mangoes. And so some of those industry leaders in the tobacco industry, I continued to deal with them as they became mango growers and I valued I guess and appreciated those connections over many years with those same farmers.

So why did the tobacco industry fall away?

40.22 The tobacco industry began to fall away because the government wanted to phase out tobacco production. The tobacco grown in Australia was mainly filler tobacco, the only really good flavour tobacco came from the tobacco growing areas in Victoria which were more elevated. The soils, the nutrition management, and also the cool nights contributed to develop what was regarded as the flavour tobacco, which would receive a higher price. Also, there had been a period when by law a tobacco product sold in Australia had to contain at least 50% Australian grown tobacco. Once that restriction was removed, there was less demand for Australian tobacco. The advantage moving forward was that many of the farmers who went into growing mangoes were very aware of the importance of controlling nutrition in order to get good colour and the mangoes grown in the Atherton Tableland (because of the cool nights) have a wonderful blush. Of course, the main variety is the Bowen or the Kensington Pride mango, a variety that appeared and evolved in Australia and around Christmas time the mangoes from the Atherton Tableland come on the market and they always have a wonderful colour.

It's interesting to hear you say that they developed in that time, some of us think that there's always been mangoes forever and a day.

Well, you know, what's been necessary has been better transport systems, the growth of the trucking industry, better roads, and cool storage. The research we did in the 80s and 90s were to do with developing the best systems for marketing fruit in the south. We also had to work out measures to control fruit fly, because there were prohibitions on entry of fruit into Victoria and South Australia because of the risk of fruit fly. We then went on to develop ... *pause* ... I was talking about the development of export protocols, we then went on to develop we had to develop protocols to ensure that mangoes were free of fruit fly when we're exporting to Japan, the first export market that was opened up was the market to Japan.

Why was that the first?

I guess it was because it was a very high value market. And there was strong interest from the Japanese also. The Japanese ... we had Japanese disinfestation technology which was like a steam heat - I don't know enough detail about that - technology to ensure the mangoes were free of fruit fly risk, but the fruit weren't damaged. We also worked on the radiation of mangoes to control that ... the irradiation technologies didn't proceed to the same extent partly because the radiation technologies also interfered with ripening of the mango which stayed green.

Were you involved in the marketing overseas?

I wasn't, no. Of course, there's a controlling fruit fly and managing disease were only part of what was necessary, we also had to manage ripening and there gradually emerged approaches to managing fruit and vegetables. We had quality assurance which was to improve the whole chain from farm to market to try and ensure that the fruit or vegetables were of the best quality when they got to their destination. We've gone on now to have supply chain management, which is also about efficiencies in terms of labour time, and care for the product, to Value Chain Management, which is a similar approach. And these, these system's approaches really have become worldwide. And of course, they're things that supermarkets have been very interested in. One of my colleagues in Queensland, Scot Ledger, was very much involved in developing what we call Freshcare¹⁰ and Freshcare is aiming to get fruit, fruit and vegetables in the best possible state to the consumer, and also to minimise losses. And

¹⁰ <https://www.freshcare.com.au/about/>

my responsibilities at that time in mangoes and other tropical fruit were really focused on the development of appropriate disease management approaches.

It's a huge business.

It is a huge business. But you know, so much and so often people talk about, you know, we need to improve yields, we need to get more production and therefore we need to invest in production research. But for many commodities, 30% of the product is lost after harvest. And of course, that's where the profit is. Because you've wasted all that energy and time, environment, everything that has gone into producing that product, if it actually is then lost, it's a huge waste. And even today, you will read many accounts of you know, research and they always forget about postharvest. And but of course you know, the supermarkets and the producers or the manufacturers are very much aware of those issues.

That was a large part of the rest of your career, wasn't it?

Yes. Because at that time when I began to work on mangoes, in addition to the Australian research looking at the development of our domestic and export marketing, I was involved in collaboration through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

The Australian Centre for Agricultural Research was an initiative of the Fraser government and was really about doing research on problems affecting Australian farmers and developing country farmers so that the research was funded both in Australia and the partner country. And initially that was very much in Southeast Asia and other parts of Asia and of course the Pacific and Papua New Guinea.

And you travelled around those places in your work.

Yes. I was involved in some of those collaborative projects and I subsequently came to Canberra in 1995 to work for the Centre and I was involved in commissioning and managing research in postharvest technologies. That was both the postharvest technologies for fruit and vegetables, but also for grains. So we were responsible for, you know, projects to do with grain drying, grain pest management, but also diseases of fruit, particularly tropical fruit, and some work on vegetables. And also then extending to supporting collaborations to do with better management of cocoa and coffee problems postharvest in Papua New Guinea, later on in Indonesia and we were also doing a variety of work in the Pacific.

Just before ... I'd like to come back to a ACIAR ... just before we leave Queensland, you did your PhD when you were still there.

Yes, I did my PhD in the area I was working on in mangoes so I worked on stem end rot of mangoes¹¹, developing an understanding the causes of the problem and the best ways of managing it. And at that time I completed my degree, graduated and I did work for a brief period for CSIRO Division of Horticulture continuing some of that work in tropical fruit mango work.

Where was that Greg?

That was based at the Cunningham Laboratory at the University of Queensland, in what was then the CSIRO Division of Horticulture. And you know, I guess it was through that period that I subsequently joined ACIAR. (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research)

Greg, just thinking about your, your PhD, and you did both your degrees ... your postgrads part-time, was that for a particular purpose?

50.45 I think perhaps it was, you know, historical, but also quite common in agriculture, and particularly in Queensland, for people to do their degrees part time. The management saw it as

¹¹ <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:40d9af1>

a win win, because they got more effort from their scientists and their scientists got a degree. But, of course, many of them were from an era where sometimes they had been sent away, even to other countries to do their postgraduate training. And so there was an appreciation of that need and importance. Because of course, these days, you wouldn't be employing a research scientist who just had a bachelor's degree, these days they would have to have a probably a PhD just to get a job.

We were of the end of an era where we could do these things part time and there were some of my colleagues and friends from university went to other places, Western Australia, even overseas to do their doctorates. But in my case, I did them part time. And of course, when you approach postgraduate studies, having had practical real world experience, it grounds your approach to what you do in your postgraduate studies, it falls out naturally from what you're doing but it really is something you very much own because it is an area and a proposal you develop yourself rather than it being, you know, something that your supervisor had thought up.

And was it a juggle, but at that time you had a wife and children?

It didn't seem a juggle at the time. And you know, it's something to do in the evenings. And of course, because it is your core work as well it means that, you know, you're validly spending your work time doing that, while doing your other responsibilities. It didn't seem a juggle. Part of that period I was also the Treasurer of the Australasian Plant Pathology Society and my strongest memories of spending evenings trying to juggle the records to do with finances and of course it was all on paper, there wasn't anything computerised: you had everyone's membership on a card, and they would send you a cheque and you'd have to bank it ... it was ...

Very old times.

Yes, that's right.

But there must have been actually ... thinking about doing as you just said, doing a PhD in your core work, there must have been a great, it must have been a fillip for you, a great tonic?

Yes, I guess so. But of course, I was the sort of person who enjoyed studying, who enjoyed, you know, the minutiae of detail, and of course, these are the things you have to find out about when you do research, you have to, of course, also be thoroughly aware of the literature to make sure that what you're doing hasn't been done by somebody else.

You've said throughout that you're a very conscientious student. Did that come automatically to you?

I guess so. I guess it's really that, you know, you tend to focus on the things that you're good at. I happen to be good at studying. And I was going to say also that of course in that very busy period, I was also writing for *Your Garden* magazine. I was the correspondent for the subtropics, which involved writing a monthly column and that really helped, you know, deepen my interest in gardening, I suppose. And I had the chance to write a few stories. I visited David Gordon¹², who had Myall Park in western Queensland. Of course, the well known grevillea Robin Gordon is named after his daughter, it was a natural hybrid. We went out there to do the interview, my wife and younger son came. We got there and he straightaway piled me into a car and set off driving around his huge property showing me all things in flower - I didn't see my wife again until we came back for lunch. He was he was quite elderly almost in his 90s at that time.

He must have been thrilled to have had you visit.

He was passionate about plants. And he explained that of course, he was fortunate because he had ... he was a wool grower and at that time wool was worth a lot of money and so he was

¹² <https://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/gordon-david.html>

able to expend some of his profits on his real passion, which was collecting and growing Australian plants while the wool industry helped him to do that.

How did you how did you come to that project working for *Your Garden*?

They advertised in the *Courier Mail* at the time, they wanted a new correspondent for the sub tropics. I had written one article which was about growing the flowering of the night flowering cactus, it just happened that the house we were renting in Brisbane had a large night flowering cactus that flowered. I took photographs and decided to submit an article. I'd been reading *Your Garden* magazine from when I was a child and, you know, so there was always that interest. Of course, at that time *Your Garden* magazine was the main vehicle for advertising nurseries, for getting mail order plants and seeds - I'd been getting mail order plants from when I was about 15 / 14 and growing interesting and unusual seeds - that was something that I guess was part of my interest in gardening.

Had your parents received the magazine that came across your horizon?

It would have been because I saw it in the local newsagent. The magazines in our household would have been the *Woman's Weekly* of course, and they had the gardening column by I forget his name ... Seale, Allan Seale. You know, so that was where I was first reading about it and of course, in the *Sunday Mail* we had the gardening column by Ray Langdon, who curiously and subsequently was my lecturer in plant pathology at the university. My father was always got *Time* magazine, he got many of the book offers through *Time* magazine, there was a whole series - *Life* magazine, he got *Life* magazine as well. There was a *Life* magazine and the books about Australian mammals, chemistry. Also from when I was just in primary school, or my parents bought *Look and Learn* and *Look and Learn* was I guess, something that helped educate children about many fields of knowledge, history, archaeology, it came from Britain, but and of course there was stuff about gardening in it as well. And we would get the *Look and Learn* every week and I would avidly read it.

So all those magazines coming into your house, Greg, there was a ... there was a learning and scholarship that was fostered by your family.

Yes. And also in my later years in high school, we were part of the Extension service of the State Library in Queensland. And the Extension service allowed and sent each week by train, books that you're interested in. And you would just express what you're interested in, generally, I was interested in architecture, house design, and things to do with animals so I guess pets, gardening, and each week you would get wrapped in brown paper and string, some books. And then every Saturday morning my father would take them back to the railway station and they would go back to Brisbane. And then he would pick up the following week's books: that was a wonderful service from the railway and the State Library.

For all of regional Queensland?

Yes all of regional Queensland I guess.

Was there a thought at one point that you'd consider dentistry?

1HR00 Well, of course, the only reason why I thought about dentistry as a career was I had the idea that I would work three days a week and garden the rest of the time, you know, on reflection and knowing people who did gardening ... who did dentistry, I'm glad I didn't. You know, in grade 10, when we did the frog dissection or toad dissection in science, I almost passed out. I had to walk outside and so I knew that that nothing to do with blood was ever going to be in my career path. I did do human physiology for matriculation, that's because I couldn't do biology, it wasn't available, it was the only thing that was close to science and my interest.

What other subjects did you do - do you remember?

For my senior year I did English, Maths I, Maths II, Chemistry, Physics, and human physiology. Very much a science (approach).

So it was it was the class where if you're going to do science at university, if you were going to do engineering, you would have had to have done technical drawing. But I had not done technical drawing since grade eight, I had no interest in being an engineer in any case.

So there was a presumption in your schooling, that the students would not automatically leave school and get a job locally, that there would be tertiary education to follow.

Yes, I mean that. That was the period under the Gorton government, the Gorton government offered scholarships from grade 10 for the last two years of high school. We did the Commonwealth Scholarship exam in grade 10. I was the recipient of one of those scholarships, as were many of my friends. It wasn't very much money, but it was just an initiative of the Gorton government to encourage more people to continue. And, you know, of course, quite a lot of children still left school at 15 at that time, but there was still a lot who went on to do to their senior, their matriculation.

So going back to you know, just went out with this section, but coming back to Brisbane, and leaving Brisbane for Canberra. How did you feel making that move?

Well, I guess you know, I felt very positive about working for ACIAR. We came down here in spring September before we moved so my wife and younger son were also happy to be moving. The idea of living in a cooler, elevated climate appealed to us. My wife's mother lived in Sydney so it was also something that was good for her. In her own work she had finished studying journalism in Queensland and was just a time in her life where moving to other areas of employment fitted. Our eldest son was already at university in Brisbane, he stayed there. So it just fitted naturally and you know, it was the feel of what was going to be right.

And your wife as Lesley Watt wrote in *Your Garden* as well.

She helped contribute to just one or two articles. We contributed to a book on vegetable growing, she helped do some of the research. When we lived in North Queensland, she'd worked as a [freelance] journalist, part time.

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

AUDIO FILE 2

Greg, we've just had a lovely break and you've shown me your part of your collection of wonderful early Australian garden books ... gardening books. And your entry to that into collecting was through Edna Walling.

Yes, well the time when we lived in North Queensland the first time I really heard about Edna Walling was when a collection of her writing was published in a reprint, and of course, subsequently, there were some of the books by put together by a Trisha Dixon and so that was really how I first became aware of early gardening books. This was in the 80s. And then, of course, Victor Crittenden published a bibliography of Australian gardening books, which provided a reference point for that.¹³ But of course, garden books, they're like hen's teeth, they're very hard to find. And they often end their life in the garden shed, and then you have things like the floods in Queensland in the 1890s. Many factors have contributed to their rarity.

¹³ Victor Crittenden, *A history of Australian gardening books and a bibliography : 1806-1950*, Canberra College of Advanced Education Library 1986

They are much rarer than books that people collect in other areas, such as, you know, travel books, earlier Australian explorers. Many of the books in my collection I've only ever seen once in thirty years, and they very rarely become available, but they're often, often even thrown out because they're not particularly very big, not in particularly good condition. So that was, I guess, an appendage to my interest in gardening generally, but also just an interest and fascination in what people wrote in those times.

Why? What about Walling was it that particularly caught your eye?

Well, I guess it's her style, it's a very conversational, warm, encouraging style of writing, short little pieces that are entertaining but provide information as well. And of course her wonderful photography, and I've always been interested in photography as well. And her early books were published in sort of sepia tones which I guess add to their beauty and obviously they were published with great care.

Edna Walling is particularly known for her walling and her paving. Were any of those elements part of her writing part of what you wanted to reproduce?

I think so. Yes. We lived in the government house in Mareeba. It was a brand new government house, and I made a random stone paving in the entrance area under the house where there was bare earth. When we moved to Brisbane in the mid 80s, the year of Expo 1988, I conducted I created a circular path in the front garden made with random pieces of sandstone. I'm pleased to say the path is still there. And you know, so that was an inspiration but I think her cottage style, her style of having lots of green, green as a colour too but also her style of having successional flowering, all of those things appealed to me.

And what do you then proceed to collect?

Well, I guess with Australian gardening books, you really ... and using something like Crittenden as a reference, you're collecting what comes your way because they are quite rare. When I moved to Brisbane in 86, I used to go to the University of Queensland Alumni Book Fair which was held around Anzac Day every second year and at that time I was lucky to obtain some early editions of Edna Walling's books. I would go to the Lifeline book sales in Brisbane and then Canberra - occasionally you would see early gardening books, but also some of the many book dealers in Australia. And of course, once we had the internet, it was more easy, easily possible to be aware of what they were selling. So I didn't, you know, I set out I guess to try and get as many of the books in Crittenden's Bibliography as I could. He only went up to 1950 and that was been my focus, and that also then led on to me subsequently preparing a series of talks for the Garden History Society.

What prompted those writings, those talks?

I guess it was a conversation I had with the then Chair of our local branch. I joined the Garden History Society in 2010, even though I'd known about it and been interested in for many years, but I joined because I wanted to go to the conference which was to be held in 2011, in Maryborough, my home town. And it was in one of those early Garden History Conferences I happen to sit next to Louise Moran, who was the Chair at the time, and we talked about garden books and went from there. And, of course, you had the wonderful publications of Richard Aiken, which also illustrate and talk and describe many of the publications and writings, and that's also been an inspiration. And of course, we have the *Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* which he led the production of and that's also been an important reference.

I noticed that two of the people who you particularly referenced in the collection of books that the Branch digitised - *The Handbook of Australian Horticulture* by James and the *Flora Australasica*, by Sweet, they're both ... both those men are referenced in the *Companion*, and they're particular favourites, I think, of yours.

Oh they are favourites, I guess, because the one by James is perhaps the biggest and the largest of the publications from that period 19th century but it also has some intriguing and wonderful illustrations which adds to its charm. And of course, the *Flora Australasica*, by Sweet was a 19th century British publication but Sweet was one of the very early cultivators of Australian plants but it also has beautiful illustrations by Smith and it's perhaps the illustrations that you know, add to its beauty. But the writing in that one is quite clear and simple and was even at that time, some useful information about how to actually grow Australian plants.¹⁴

You're looking at the book on the table, which one is this?

Oh the one on the table is by James and the copy I have is one that was formerly owned by Victor Crittenden.

How did you come by that?

I bought that from the bookseller in Berkelouw, who are at Berrima and I think that they may have bought it at auction, I don't know.

Because Victor had his own collection too, he donated many of those but collected again.

Yes, Victor donated ... when he died he bequeathed his collection of gardening books to the University of Canberra and because he was formerly the Librarian at the University of Canberra which is where he was able to begin his work on the bibliography as a Librarian - that was part of his job to work on bibliographies and you know, he had the resources, the time and the opportunity to both collect and document the publications related to gardening.

This is a big broad question about the Society, but many of the ... the Society is made up of many themes and threads and people who've done that formal work bringing publications to the public, and people who help on plant stalls on weekends. So there's a great diversity, is that your experience of the Society?

10.19 Yeah, it is. And of course, the Society aims to meet that broad interest through their program each year, you know, they will have a series of talks during winter, they will have garden visits both urban gardens or walks through suburbs, they also have projects that address certain issues. In my time, they've supported the digitization of the records of the Yarralumla Nursery, we had then a larger project on digitization of some of the earliest Australian garden publications in the National Library. That was one of our projects in celebrating the 40th year of the society.

You were very involved in that?

Yes, I was because I guess of my knowledge of Australian gardening books and having some familiarity with what is held in the Library we were able to produce an initial list of books that would be good to digitise. We omitted some of the books that have been digitised in other places that are available online. We were fortunate also to have the connections in the Library and we did also have the opportunity to look at some of them.

Prior to that project, I'd given the first of my talks for the Society, it was a joint event with the Friends of the National Library and I talked about Australian garden writing 1788 to 1887, the first century of writing.¹⁵ And at that event the National Library had very kindly assembled some of their books for the attendees to look at and there was also a few of my own books were put on display. *Look, But Don't Touch* we looked at them and it provided a little bit of taste to a

¹⁴ *Hand-book of Australian Horticulture*, H A James, illustrated by Guglielmo Autoriello;
Flora Australasica, or, A selection of handsome, or curious plants, natives of New Holland, and the South Sea islands, by Robert Sweet, drawings by E. D. Smith.

¹⁵ 2014: *By Quill and Spade : Pioneer Garden Writing for Australians 1788-1888*

broader audience of some of the treasures both within the National Library but also in Australian publishing.

So do you think just pondering as you speak, Greg, has the Society driven that interest in gardening literature at the library?

It's been an interest that the Society has encouraged. More recently through both the efforts of our Society and the Friends of the National Library there has been some small publications by Marian Mahony¹⁶ digitised. One of the members of the Friends of the National Library actually sponsored their digitalization but certainly it's an area where we have been active, and of course, you know, we're very fortunate there has been in the late 19th century, early 20th century, people who set about to assemble many early Australian publications, and much of that collection is now housed in the National Library. It equals or perhaps, compliments that held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney.

And again, touching on the photography, part of that one of the projects that you were involved with was the photography competition. The first I think?

It was held in 2020/2021 and it started out is an idea of what could we do during COVID. We had COVID, we couldn't have talks, we couldn't have garden visits, how could we involve? And of course, we did start doing some talks, but how else could we engage members? I sort of naively thought also how could we make a whole lot of money through people paying to enter a competition but in the event, not so many people entered. Also we extended over two years, perhaps because of COVID. But it was still a fun thing to do. Those people who were involved enjoyed participating and we were lucky also to have some very eminent people who willingly agreed to be judges in the competition. That was Trisha Dixon, Lucy Culliton, the artist, and two photographers, Victoria Cooper¹⁷ and Doug Spowart¹⁸. And between them, they judged the various categories and although the entry number was small, we still had some splendid photos produced and awarded prizes.

Tell me one in particular about the lawn mower.¹⁹

Yes, The Lawn Mower²⁰, it was by Maggie McCredie and she lives in Jindabyne and it was just one of those magic shots that she took of her grandson mowing the lawn. And at the point where the photograph was taken he was mid-air pushing the mower and it captures just the joy of the moment. But also, in the text that was written with it a little bit of the challenges of mowing and gardening. Maggie's no longer young and she was both appreciative of the support her grandson gives from time to time but also she's a very keen, gardener and Instagrammer. Recording the times and treasures of her garden.

I think the photography event I was thinking about this year, was the film a different kind of photography. It's your first film night, the Society's first film night.

The first day. Yes, that's right, we had I think we've now had two or three film days, we do them each year. The first film day we did, and we do them in the Gundaroo Hall which is not so far to drive, it's a nice old fashioned hall and in the first event, we did a fundraiser. Many members had donated their gardening books, and we had a gardening book sale and we had a film and we had afternoon tea. You know, because as we get older people often begin downsizing. So there was quite a number of books accumulated. We've been less keen to do book sales since because of the challenges of storing all the books in advance. But this year, we had a similar

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marion_Mahony_Griffin

¹⁷ <https://wotwedid.com/>

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doug_Spowart

¹⁹ The Lawn Ranger comes to Granny's rescue! Maggie McCredie

²⁰ <https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/publications/aghs-2020-photo-competition/>

event, we had the lunch catered by a local Gundaroo group fundraising for themselves. And we had a film and a lunch in the hall, we have a talk – the theme was heritage roses, the film related to that as well. And, you know, it's not, not exactly so warm in Canberra or in winter so coming to a day event, sunny day it happened to be was something that people enjoyed. We even have members come down from the Southern Highlands for these days.

That's one of the challenges for any group, to keep people engaged, to provide events and continue to raise money and continue to exist. So is that ... is that examining of the entrails something that Society is doing?

Well, we're fortunate we have a fairly active and a largish group of members here. But of course, you know, we in addition to keeping members entertained, we like to and want to support some projects. And so the money we've raised from our events help support some of those projects. I've mentioned the digitization of the records of the Yarralumla Library. And, you know, each year or two years we will try to support some activity related to garden history. In the past, in earlier times, there was a series of booklets produced about historic gardens in the area and we also will prepare and support submissions relating to public matters relating to gardens and garden conservation within the ACT.

Part of its advocacy?

20.00 Yes.

One of the other big events of scholarship for the Society is the conference. And you were part of the programme committee for the conference that the Branch held in 2016. I know you weren't here that first day, but there must have been a lot of work in planning for that.

There was a lot of work. But of course, it's often the working together that makes being in any Society enjoyable. And we have and we're fortunate to have some very capable members locally, members who've experienced and organised even conferences earlier in Canberra for Garden History Society and who are very knowledgeable about garden visits as well. My main roles in that particular activity was to be one of the members of the scientific programme. But also, I was a bus captain on one of the, on the bus tours that we did. We had our tour into the country out into the Braidwood area which has some wonderful historic gardens and we had some visits to gardens that are closer as well.

And the program itself had a very scientific bent.

Yes, that's right. I think it was called something like *The Science of the Garden*.²¹ And being Canberra, there were people who had the strong science background that delivered a nicely tailored and integrated series of talks related to science in the garden.

I attended that confidence in one particular stood out for me was the kangaroo grass, makes for wetter landscapes by John Passioura²² (am I pronouncing him correctly), which was very scientifically based but a wonderful program, it must have grieved you somewhat to not make it back for that first day.

Yes, I had some other travel commitment and so I didn't arrive back until the morning of the next day and I was able to attend the rest of the program, but not that particular talk.

There was a great spirit to the conference. So ... but a big effort required on a voluntary basis. I'm not sure how long those voluntary capacity can keep going. But one of the other people who you also spoke of and were very generous in helping me when I interviewed him was Cedric Bryant?

Yes, that's right. Well, Cedric, of course, has had a long he's passed away now but he's had a very long involvement with gardens and gardening in the ACT region. He came to Australia as

²¹ *The Scientist in the Garden*, 37th Annual National Conference, 14-16 October 2016

²² *Kangaroo Grass Makes for Wetter Landscapes*, John Passioura, CSIRO Agriculture and Food

a young man. And of course, we already have recorded his history, oral history. But I got to know Cedric when he was writing for one of our free newspapers, but previously he wrote for *The Canberra Times* and he was also a very long time and strong member of our Horticulture Society of Canberra. The Horticulture Society of Canberra was established in 1929 so, you know, in the blink of an eye it will be celebrating its centenary. And I did speak to one of the Garden History Society members just this week when she was talking at another meeting and she noted that 1927 will be the centenary of opening of Old Parliament House in Canberra and suggesting that perhaps that will be a good year for the Garden History Society to have a conference here again.

How was that received?

It was just a conversation between her and me.

Now, it's out there in the ether. Your own writing, you had those, you've made those four programs where you've spoken about writing across the centuries, and you're very much into social media, which I'd like to talk about later, but is there any thought about turning those presentations into a publication?

Yes, I've thought about that. You know, it's a book in waiting perhaps. But I very much enjoyed when I was preparing those talks and also producing the PowerPoint images. Each image tried to be a one page compilation of the author and their publications. And often, I would also try and have one quote from that particular author. It was great fun to do. In the first talk I also talked about the ways in which garden writing and communication occurred, starting with newspapers.

And had that lovely title *By Quill and Spade* - the word quill is barely used anymore. Did you think it would continue to four (presentations) when you were doing the first one?

I guess I hadn't thought that far ahead but once we got into the second one, it became a logical idea to take it through to beyond the present, what would the future be?

And of course, in the meantime, COVID struck and you refer to your friends overseas, watching and welcoming them on your more recent one, which had that lovely title reflecting the times in which we were ... the 'calamities' of the times a year of calamities²³, but and refuge, is a garden a refuge for you?

I think so yes. Because that was really talking about 2020 when we had COVID but we started that year with the bush fires to the east, which caused Canberra to be inundated by the smoke from the bushfires. And the smoke levels were so bad that we couldn't even go outside. We had to run the air conditioning in our house, virtually from December through till February, all the windows closed, we had wet towels under the doors to keep the smoke out. And so when COVID came along, you know, although we had many restrictions at least we could go outside, at least Bunnings was open here in Canberra, we were lucky and we could get to plants by mail order. They were considered to be essential.

You've attended other conferences since the Maryborough conference, do you go every year?

I've been to many of the conferences. There's a couple I have missed I missed the one to New Zealand, I think I had some other commitment at the time and I missed the conference this year because it was very close to the 50th anniversary reunion of my university year and I was going to that instead.

And do you go on the post conference or pre conference tours?

I don't go on those, No. I do go on the additional day where we would go and visit gardens.

²³ 2021, *Our Garden Refuge in a year of Calamities*

And I see on your Instagram account that you went to the Australian Garden Landscape ... Australian Landscape Conference.

Yes, the Australian Landscape Conferences which are held in Melbourne every second year and the most recent couple of those have been organised by Fleur Flannery under her company name, I think it's Outlandish, but they've always been a wonderful grouping of speakers. There's also usually a one day garden tour and because they're held at the Convention Centre in Melbourne there's capacity to hold more people than is sometimes possible with our conferences, and international garden gardening and landscaping experts spent some time talking to us.

It must be a giddy immersion to be in that environment for that time.

It is ... but it's usually well-paced. And you know I'm a great believer in only going if you feel like it, that you also need to if you feel like you know going and doing something else for half a day - do that.

You also had you're just making it a tangential leap to your International Plant Pathology Society Conference in August, in France, you made a very swift visit there. Could you tell me about that trip?

30.00 Well, I've been involved in the Executive of the International Society for 17 years – first Secretary-General and then President and Past President and the Congresses are held every five years. And most recently, the Congress was held in Lyon, France. It was organised, I guess, with considerable worry by the locals because they were doing their preliminary planning during the COVID times, we weren't sure how many people would come. In the end, we had, I think 2,400 people attended; it was five days of presentations relating to plant pathology, with many concurrent sessions. It coincided unfortunately with the heatwave in Lyon. One day, it was 40 degrees, the highest temperature recorded in Lyon - we had a conference dinner in a large tent where we had a performance a little bit like Cirque du Soleil and the temperature at our table was 37 degrees.

We're accustomed to those fluctuations in Australia but they're not so prepared in Europe,

And they don't have air conditioning often. So the it can be doubly challenging ... hot weather and no air conditioning ... we've become very soft.

Were part of the program organising for the that?

As a member of the Executive, I had lots of roles including providing advice about the scientific program and I, with some colleagues in Italy, organised the session on social media. We conducted a survey through our membership, because the International Society involves sixty national and regional societies, representing about 26,000 plant pathologists worldwide. We had about 800 people respond to our survey, we reported on the use of social media by plant pathologists and we had some talks relating to other aspects of social media as well.

I watched your presentation and some of the comments in your survey were "I don't have time for this" but other people were engaged, and it's clearly part of the future, it seems.

Yes, I think it was useful to understand that, at present time perhaps half the our community of pathologists use social media, about half don't. And so in trying to outreach to a community you need to be reaching out to both groups. You need to have strategies appropriate to each of those groups.

And there's a role for educating people in the way of using social media, as well.

Yes, I think that's correct. But also, there can be a lot of fear about social media and my own feelings about social media is that I'm in control of what social media I look at, and so the many elements of social media that are not so nice, I'm not privy to them because I choose not to engage or follow those people or those issues within social media.

And just as a tangent to the conference, your own social, you have your own Instagram account. And what's the name of that?

34.00 My social media Instagram account is called @gardenrevue [r e v u e] as opposed to 'review' because I took it along with the idea of a revue as in, you know, a compilation of things.

And from my own small engagement with it, you concentrate on plants in your garden, plants you see at conferences, and there's nothing about your family, except those who have gone before - your parents and your grandparents, and that lovely photo of yourself, the little boy with a koala, is that ...

I guess I see for myself I see my Instagram and social media as my own record, you know, it's a visual diary. I'm perhaps the only person who will look back over, you know, five, eight years of posts. I find it useful to think now 'what is that plant called' and to look back and find out what it is or what the history of that plant was, you know, so that it reaches outwards to people who are interested in gardening particularly. And so I guess the posts relating to my family really relate to issues that are memorable to me, and perhaps maybe memorable, memorable to them, those members of my family? And of course, because I'm interested in photography, that's the other aspect of Instagram that I like.

Is all your photography on the phone.

These days, yes, I do have two digital cameras. But the quality of the phone camera is so good now that it's seldom needed. Although at the moment I'm lucky to have a Gynea lily flowering in the garden and I do wish that my camera phone was a little bit better at magnifying to get a little bit more of a close up of that flower.

I laughed out loud watching your, your presentation²⁴, and I'll refer to it in the transcript, and put a link there but you had people engage differently with it must give you some grief that the people laughed and were engaged with your curtains that you had very lushly opening and closing your presentation that created much amusement and your shirt, which someone wanted to suggest that you auctioned off. Tell me about those for the tape?

Well, you know, it happens that the powerpoint in the modern powerpoint versions, one of the slide changing options is curtains opening as would have been in the past with a theatre performance. And I found it's a very good option to choose when you're starting a talk because it does attract people's attention and makes them realise we are now starting the event. And it does usually lead to some laughter.

The shirt you're referring to because within some parts of the Garden History community there's interest in the shirts that I wear but this particular shirt happened to feature the logos of many of the social media companies and so I'd chosen to wear that shirt because of the theme of my session on social media. And somebody asked where I got the shirt from and I joked perhaps I could auction it.

And the reason why I said that is because I've also been involved with the (International Plant Pathology) Society in establishing the Resilience Bursary to help plant pathologist in need, particularly in response – as a result of the invasion of Ukraine. And at the Congress in Lyon we also had a session on war in conflict and plant pathology.²⁵ And one of the speakers in that session commented that it was the first time that she had seen and heard this topic spoken about. She spoke about the challenges of saving the seed collection during the invasion of Syria, she was responsible for the seed collection in Syria and she had to creep back into her sister's home to rescue some of that collection. We had a speaker from Ukraine who talked

²⁴ Greg's seminar on social media at the International Plant Pathology Congress in Lyon in August 2023

²⁵ *Impact of war and conflicts in plant pathology research and food safety of countries*

about the destruction of germ plasm collection and research facilities for horticulture in Ukraine. That talk is also available online.

And the scholarship supports those people ongoing.

We had fortunately the strong support of the Polish Phytopathological Society, they had existing collaborations with Ukraine because they're neighbours before the war and when the war started some of the female scientists fled to Poland to escape the conflicts also some men who had various reasons for leaving such as disabled children.

Some of the regional and national societies have helped support that fund. Usually the funding will only be for two or three months because that's all that our funds will allow for but often also those individuals who get support will go on to get support from some other body. In some cases they've also returned to Ukraine. In some cases some of them had to return because they would be losing their jobs if they didn't go back but it provides them some respite and it also means that each of them who is doing some important work relating to managing diseases is able to continue contributing to the efforts to reduce food and forest damage from disease.

And so often, philanthropy begets philanthropy, and you had your 70th birthday last year and what was your proposal for that?

40.46 So for my 70th birthday I just chose rather than having a grand party with lots of friends, I proposed to do a fundraiser for the Bursary and quite a number of people contributed some donations which helped boost the funds for that scholarship.

We have gone on also since the earthquakes devastating Türkiye and Syria to begin exploring support for people who are plant pathologist who are affected by the earthquake. So far, we are providing some short term scholarships for two postgraduate students from Türkiye.

In the coverage of those wars and catastrophes does plant pathology get mentioned in the *London Times* or the *New York Times*.

I don't think it gets mentioned specifically but of course war is, you know, something that affects the research progress but it also can cause things such as damage to stored grain and, of course, you then have problems with fungal decay of the grain and also contamination of the grain by the mycotoxins, which are toxins produced by some fungi. But of course historically both plant pathologist and entomologists have been involved in past conflicts. For example, during the Second World War plant pathologist, entomologists from Australia served in Papua New Guinea and they were mainly involved in the malaria management campaign. And the first Director of Plant Pathology, Jack Simmonds, was the head of that group and my former boss was also involved in the malaria control campaign in Papua New Guinea.

Greg, at the conference (before we just come to a couple of other aspects about pathology), someone made the comment that you are not only the Past President, but you're the Past Past President, how many pasts, how much alliteration can you have for that? And they made you a Fellow of the organisation. How was that for you?

I guess it's become becoming a Fellow of the Society is an honour and a privilege, because it's recognising your contributions to the science of that discipline, but also the functioning of the Society. But I believe it's also a responsibility because as a Fellow you should try to continue to serve that profession in ways that you can. I remember I went to a conference once and someone, one of the keynote speakers, said he used to be a plant pathologist and I thought a medical doctor would never say they used to be a doctor, you know, they're a doctor for life. And I think in many professions we retain that interest and responsibility for our entire lives. I'm not going to stop looking at powdery mildew and knowing what it is or whatever.

And is there an opportunity within the Society for you to mentor, perhaps formally or informally?

I think both through the society but also through my involvement in the Australian Centre of International Agricultural Research I've been involved in various aspects of training, particularly in running workshops on mango diseases.

But I also did work with what was formerly AusAID, the Australian Agency for International Development, working with colleagues in ASEAN in mango disease surveying and through that work I had the opportunity also to travel to Myanmar, for example, a couple of times where we would be ... and of course in ... you know while in many countries professions are dominated by men, it happens that in some Asian countries many of the professionals are women. So most of the plant pathologists in Myanmar are women, many at the plant pathologists in the Philippines are women.

It's always a privilege to work with people, to connect with them, you know, to work together to increase your understanding of the science. But I think that there's a friendship there that sort of continues, and underpins all of that training that we provide. Whether that's mentoring I don't know but it's about inspiring to continue.

You had three lovely phrases that you said came from your work, *food for thought*, *food for heart*.

So within ACIAR, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, one of the phrases from those earliest times was *food from thought*, recognising that the food that we eat partly is there because of the thought, the research that has underpinned its production to meet those targets of global poverty reducing.

And the philosophy of ACIAR had been *doing well, by doing good*, you know, an initiative of the Fraser government, it recognised that if we were going to be involved in international agriculture, we wanted to do well, we wanted to do good, but we also wanted to be supporting Australian farmers as well as the partners in other countries. Because the people in other countries are also our customers for many of the products we produce.

And *food from the heart*, I guess, comes out of that, because, you know, there is a ... there is a friendship, there is a commitment that comes from, you know, what would be the connections of the heart that occur, you know, in that ... in that sort of that spirit of recognising our commitments.

Your speaking as someone representing ...

I think when you're involved in international development, working in partner countries, when it is government to government, you have to always remember that you are representing your country and the government, and that your behaviour should reflect that, that you're not there on holiday and you're an ambassador, I guess, unofficially for your country. And, you know, so it's important that your behaviour reflects that and you're not there as a tourist. And so often when you work in developing countries, people want to entertain you and of course, that's important, but it's very easy to be too entertained and one of my philosophies has always been, if I see everything the first time, there's no reason to go back. And so that there is ... there's opportunities to see things that you would not see otherwise. But you're there to do a job and you've always got to keep the focus on that.

I think you mentioned along the way somewhere that you gave up being a vegetarian because of your travels internationally. Was that part too hard?

I think, you know, I guess it's an awareness thing that becoming vegetarian was, I guess, a commitment to understanding both the importance of 'you are what you eat' and diet, but also in having a lower footprint on the earth. But travelling within countries, it can create an extra challenge and it just became easier to eat what was offered within reason.

And ACIAR was established in 95. Is it still around?

Sorry, 1983.

Oh 83.

I started working for them in 1995.

Is it still around?

50.02 Yes. So Australian government, so ACIAR was established within the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and Trade under an Act of Parliament with a 10 year sunset clause.²⁶ At the end of that first 10 years in 1993, they did a review and continued ... decided yes, it would continue. It sits outside the Department of Foreign Affairs, but it's a statutory authority - I'm not sure that's the current term, but they report ... the CEO reports directly to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. We have a particular Charter and you know, it's continued ... it's ongoing in its status. It's ... there's an advisory body and there's also a body that involves representatives from different countries that will advise ACIAR on its activities and the current CEO is Wendy Umberger, the first woman to head the organisation.

Has it had fluctuations according to the politics of Canberra.

ACIAR has always enjoyed strong support from both sides of government. We have also the Crawford Fund for International Agricultural Research. The Crawford Fund, I guess sits alongside ACIAR to both foster and encourage support by both government and the rural community. Because it's also important that the rural community, the farmer organisations, marketing organisations, understand and value and contribute to what we do ... what they do.

So what made you decide to leave the organisation?

I was appointed to ACIAR under a contract, the contract ended and also at that time ACIAR was wanting to change direction slightly. I was working in the postharvest area and they decided to appoint someone who had more direct experience in horticulture. And that created an opportunity for me to move on to become a consultant and continue working in both horticulture and development.

And you did that for how many years?

I did that from 2006 up until 2019, about 12-13 years.

And was that a natural retirement for you?

I mean, I was past my ... what would be the traditional time of our parents retiring and it was it just have gradually tapered off, it was fine.

And your ... your engagement with the Society picked up.

I was involved with the International Society from about 2006 when I became a consultant. Working as a consultant gave me time to ... some free time to be able to be involved more in professional bodies as well. Because it's all honorary work, it's not paid.

So would you have much more time now that you're a Past Past or you have much much more time for a Past Past President?

I think that there's always things to do. I mean I started this journey because of interest in gardening and family and, you know, that's going to continue.

We just had a small break and we came to your article about the Danish garden, tell me how you came to that?

²⁶ *Subsequent clarification:* ACIAR was established in 1982 and is independent of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

So the garden is called *Sanderumgaard*, I'm not sure whether the pronunciation is correctly but it was a garden that was established in the 18th century and in recent years they have tried to restore it along the lines of the original designs. And I came to visit it because the publishers of *Hortus* had announced plans for a garden tour to Denmark. And I wasn't able to go on the tour, but instead wrote to some of the gardens that they were planning to visit, to ask if I could visit and the owner of *Sanderumgaard* kindly replied.

It happened that she had come to Australia under a scheme for young farmers earlier in her life and had worked out at Dubbo and so she very kindly picked up me and my wife and took me back to see their garden and we walked around it and afterwards I was, of course, interested to try to write about it to thank her, because she took the whole day and took us to two other gardens. One was a very grand garden next door and introduced me to her brother, who was the owner and I subsequently found out that he was a count. And, of course, coming from Australia we're less aware of formalities in these matters.

But the garden has gone on to bigger and better things and that's a really good example, I think, of the efforts involved in restoring a garden and maintaining the history of that connection. Obviously also connected to her family but it was, it was just a rare chance. We went there in very early spring and wasn't quite at its peak but it was still a privilege to have that personal guided tour.

Did you catch up with the group, the *Hortus* group, as you travelled around or it was quite separate?

Quite separate on different time, we even chose the same hotel they were planning to stay at in, in Copenhagen. I found in the past, in that visit, we went on to England and we had a similar experience visiting the gardens of Gertrude Jekyll. I wrote to the owners and her gardener met us and spent maybe an hour and a half just showing my wife and I around the garden. And then she said, "Oh, would you like to go next door" - and we went next door, which was the garden that was cared for by a lady that had formerly been ... her house ... had formerly been Gertrude Jekyll's potting shed. And she spent, you know, an hour or so showing us around that garden as well. Jekyll's garden has subsequently and since then been acquired by the National Trust.

But, you know, we in Australia don't have gardens as old. Of course, we have our history of many thousands of years of inhabitants by our First Nations people but for those with a European heritage I guess it's always still wonderful to have chances to visit some of those gardens in Europe.

Well, Greg, I think that's ... that's a terrific point on which to conclude today's interview, and you've been very generous already with your time. So thank you very much for your contribution to the Society's Oral History Collection.





Workers at Fairlie & Sons, Maryborough, c.1927
(John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland)