

**AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY**  
**NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**  
**NORTHERN NSW BRANCH**



Photograph: Liz Chappell

Interviewee:	WILLIAM TODD
Interviewer:	LIZ CHAPPELL
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**This is an oral interview with Will Todd at "Bona Vista", Armidale. Will will be speaking with Liz Chappell for the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) of the Northern NSW Branch.**

**Thanks very much for agreeing to this interview Will. It's part of an ongoing project we have for Australian Garden History and we've always been fascinated by Bona Vista because the garden is so intact. Could you tell me what you know about its very early days?**

01.25

Well Liz that's my pleasure to talk about it because I was actually born in this house so it's always been a very special part of my life. The first owner was a man called Patrick Wade and he took up the original title in 1880. He was a mail contractor and he built the original house which was basically three rooms down, three rooms up with a verandah and a balcony and different things. But I also suspect out in the back yard there's quite an interesting stable building and because he was a mail contractor and had to look after his horses, he had very good accommodation for his horses which is still there. Patrick Wade apparently was quite an interesting, entrepreneurial type of person and he also at one stage owned what was Tattersalls Hotel in Armidale, I think it was called The Duke of Wellington, or a different name anyway. But sadly, Patrick Wade died early before 1886 and the place was sold.

**Do you know if Patrick Wade had any impact on the garden or did that happen later?**

I don't think he had any input in the garden but the house was much smaller and I think he was probably concentrating more on his living. He would have had some sort of a gardener round the place but not too much I don't think. So that happened. The next owner was John D Bradley who was the district school inspector so a lot has been written about him. He owned the property from 1886 to 1910. He was a keen gardener and he also had a large family, I think he had 6 daughters and some of the daughters married into the Mallam family which was a well-known local family but I have photos taken in 1890 of the garden and the house when John Bradley owned it and it shows what he'd done with the garden.

**Would you like to describe this picture for the record Will?**

Right, well the first photograph is taken looking from the house north and one can see a picket fence enclosing more formal gardens which are bordered by terracotta tiles which are still in place to this day but the trees and things have taken over the area which is in the photograph. But you can clearly see the layout of the garden, looking from the house to what was the road at the front. And then there's another photo with two gentlemen standing at the front gate, picket sort of fence, and I imagine one of them is Mr Bradley, don't know who the other is and it looks to be taken a little bit after the first photograph that I

have because of the growth in there, I don't know whether they're roses or what they are but it's looking back towards the house which you can see how it was when the Bradley's lived here. So that's those two photos.

**I think it's quite remarkable to see a Federation garden, or a late Victorian garden in such an intact condition Will. Can you identify many of the trees from the early photos that are still here?**

Yes, I can identify the photinias and I can't actually see, there was a radiata pine behind the house which was there but I can't identify any of the others. I don't think I can see the Bunya pine tree either in those photos but they would be the only ones I can identify.

**So, it was Mr Bradley though that planted that magnificent Bunya pine?**

I suspect so because I think in the photograph they're standing near the Bunya pine, somewhere, but I can't see the pine in them.

**And what about the Cypress hedge? Did that come later?**

Then we go forward to 1910 when the Tindal family from Ramornie at Grafton bought the property which was situated within a day's drive from Mr Tindal's property. So, I think he had property at Grafton and also over at Gunnedah and those places but Bona Vista was his base. He extended the house considerably. He put on a bedroom wing on the eastern side of the house and a formal drawing room at the front. They were the last rooms built. But it was Mr Tindal who laid out the hedges as they are now. So when he arrived here all the bordered area that Mr Wade had done stayed intact and then Mr Tindal extended the garden, he had an extensive vegetable garden and he planted the hedges before the 1st World War.

**That is incredible. So, they're the original plants in that hedge?**

That's right.

**Do you know what cypress they are?**

I don't. We've always just known it as the cypress pine hedge.

**And can you describe that hedge because it's not just a formal straight back and sides is it?**

No, well when I was a child I remember it being cut by hand; the men had trestles and planks and hedge cutters and string. And it was basically square as you will see in some of the photographs we have taken around the early 1950s or late 1940s. So it was beautifully square and so on but you can only trim it back, you can't cut back into it, so you just trim it and then over the years it's grown into this unusual shape which, looking from the end it's like a little child's drawing of a house, a simple house with a peaked roof. And I had

the horrors through the drought that the hedge may not survive the drought but thankfully it looks as though it has. So I am very delighted about that.

**So what other contributions do you know the Tindals made to the layout of the garden?**

Well they then, the Tindal family removed all the pickets that Mr Bradley had put around the front garden which was edged and as a child I remember the picket fences, they were in sections, so the pickets were actually re-used, the panels, some of them went right along the front of the garden and then some of them were around the cottages. So they were recycled. So that happened. Then the main thing that the Tindals did was add the drive. So, there's a horseshoe shaped drive coming in and out now and Mr Tindal after planting the hedge and separating, making sort of rooms with the hedges, then he had a driveway that came in from the eastern side, which is still there, and up to house and it divided around a triangular bed and one part of the drive went to the back of the house and one went to the front of the house. And that's all exactly as it was laid out by Mr Tindal.

**Now that would have been in the very early days of motor cars?**

Yes, yes, so that's it.

**Which were no doubt still housed in the stables?**

Yes and actually I do have one of the photos of two of Mr Tindal's cars. Mr Tindal had a chauffeur and he had a chauffeur's cottage which is still here.

**That's wonderful. Now your parents then came after the Tindals?**

My parents came in 1946. Mr CF Tindal sadly passed away. The Tindal family, as a family, lost a lot of their men in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and even the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, sadly. And my parents bought the property from Mr Tindal's daughter in law, whose husband had been killed in the bombing of Darwin in February 1942. And Tindal Air Base is named after Wing Commander Tindal. And his widow had lived here for seven years, prior to moving away.

11.22

**And then your parents came, you were one of the youngest of your family Will?**

I'm the youngest of six and I was born in 1949 here in Bona Vista.

**So really you've spent most of your life here?**

Yes, except I did spend quite a few years out on the western plains. My family have country out between Collarenebri and Mungindi and Burren Junction areas. So I spent about 30 years out there. And then came back

here after my mother died. My mother lived here until she was 97 years of age and then I bought the place from my family in, whenever it was anyway.

**That's wonderful. Can you recall back what it was like living here as a child? Was this a great garden for games?**

Well it was a magical place to grow up because we had, as well as the garden and so on there's a small acreage so we had horses and sheep and cattle and all those sorts of things. But the garden was magical because of the hedges and things. So we'd have lots of fun, running around and doing things that we shouldn't have done like walking on top of the hedge and things like that which was not very much appreciated. [both chuckle]

**Did you tell me a story once about putting tennis rackets on your feet so you could walk on the hedge?**

Yes, and our legs would get very scratched. And the gardener, I could never understand why he didn't like small children and I think that was the reason because we were always sort of climbing trees and doing things and walking on the hedge and doing things we shouldn't. But it was a lot of fun and riding our bicycles around the paths and all that sort of thing. It was basically, as I say, it was a small farm but we were fairly self-sufficient because we had a wonderful productive vegetable garden. And I well remember things like asparagus beds, strawberry beds, gooseberry hedges and all the things that you grow. There were a lot of fruit trees here so my mother did a lot of preserving and that sort of thing with the fruit.

**You mentioned a gardener. Did your parents have a full time gardener?**

Yes, yes, so it was all beautifully maintained when I was growing up and then probably the full time gardener came to an end probably about the late 1960s and then we've just sort of made do with whatever since.

**And was your mother an active gardener herself?**

She wasn't what you would call a very active gardener. She loved flowers and she would always find a flower in the garden because she would have arrangements in the house. In the dead of winter she would find something, somewhere and she loved that. She loved the garden but she didn't, she wasn't overly involved in the day to day work in it.

**Now you have a lovely collection of black and white photographs here Will, that were taken when you were a very small child. Can we have a look through those and can you give a verbal tour?**

Well these photographs were taken I think, there was a nurse here who stayed after I was born and she stayed a friend of the family and she took lots of photographs fortunately. So, one of the photos here to start with is looking from the house down towards the bunya pine tree at the front gate, which is usually closed. And you can see a small privet type hedge and you can see a

lot of fruit trees between the hedge and what is a tennis court, looking down the front drive, that one. And then there is one looking down the drive, that we use to drive in all the time now, they're just bordered by some borders and as a child they used to grow a lot of dahlias and things down that drive, they were [indistinct].

**And the large trees at the front, on Bona Vista Road. Are they eucalypts?**

They're eucalypts and sadly they were magnificent eucalypts and they were removed when they widened the road. And I was very sad that they couldn't have kept them but they would have been in the middle of the road and it couldn't have been done unfortunately because I remember the road at the front, just as a gravel road to start with and then over the years the road's become busier and busier and of course now it's a very busy road.

**So is it alright if I just put them down here in order?**

Yes, and then the next photo we're looking at is taken from one of the upstairs windows across the front drive, well it's still there, it's a triangular garden bed and on each point there was a Japanese maple. There were two magnificent red coloured ones on the one side and there was a green one on the point as you are coming into the drive. Sadly, those trees were very badly damaged in the 1996 hail storm and never survived. But they'd been there all my life up until 1996 so they were very much a part of our memory and that little garden bed is surrounded by tiles which had been glazed, they must have been a slightly better-quality tile than all the original tiles that Mr Bradley had around the front.

**Which are of course still there, which is remarkable.**

Yes, so they're all there and you can see them quite clearly now because we don't have the trees, we just have flowers and things in that garden basically now. There is one rhododendron which amazes me because it's very old and I think it was sheltered by the Japanese maple. But it has survived and it has survived the drought. I did keep watering it but I think the roots must be so far established that it's happy where it is. And in the summer time it's really exposed to the heat which is quite amazing.

**It is indeed.**

So that's that one. Then the next photograph is a photograph taken within what we called the enclosed lawn and it shows the sundial which was a little memorial that Mrs Tindal had made to her son who was killed in the war. So that's still there. One can see fruit trees, they were peach trees. My memory of the peach trees, they were never very good bearers but they were there. But there was also a rose trellis sort of set up which is no longer there. But basically the remains of those roses only came out last year when it was so desperately dry and they died. So I've cleared, apart from the sundial still there, there was a medlar tree on one side of the sundial which I remembered

all my life. Luckily it had a sucker one year and I transplanted the sucker. The sucker has survived the drought but the old one has died. So I'm really pleased to have this medlar still there. So it's basically at the end of the enclosed lawn. And the rest of it I'm just intending to have as grass now because it's quite a nice expanse.

### **Do I remember a persimmon in that garden?**

In the next court where the vegetables were, you would. And I thought the persimmon was dead and it's shooting leaves again now which I'm delighted about. There's also four crab apples which I planted when I came here in that next garden which was what we call the vegetable garden. And I thought they were all dead too but they've come to life so I'm really pleased about that.

### **Thank you Will.**

20.07

Then we have a photograph just looking at the front of the house. One of the, it must have been very fashionable to have houses covered with creepers and things and, as a child, it was a cat's claw, is it?

### **I think it's a Virginia creeper or Boston ivy, one of those two, is it?**

And then there was the one with the yellow flower.

### **Yes, that's the cat's claw.**

And it was on the double, on that high part of the house, very thick, and I used to think it was rather spooky having all this vine anyway I'm glad it's all gone. And some of the original Virginia creeper is still on the front part of the house. There's another photograph here, looking from the tennis court up towards the front of the house and you can see the fruit trees that sort of were on the lawn beside the tennis court. The other thing that's interesting at the back of the house you'll see a huge radiata pine which I well remember. That pine had a hitching rail around it which I've kept, the hitching rail, because the pine, it was a massive tree that went straight up and then a big branch went out over the house and we were concerned that the one over the house was going to fall on the house and one year we had a man with a crane to come and take it off and in doing so he underestimated the weight of the branch and the branch came crashing down and the crane twisted but luckily the branch fell on top of a rain water tank which was full of water so it concertinaed this rain water tank and gently lowered the branch sort of just onto the roof, without damaging the brickwork of the house. So that part of the pine tree was taken down and then in due course later on the remainder of the pine tree had to come down because it was old and you could see signs of strain. But I'm very glad the whole things gone because it was the devil with pine needles and things in the guttering.

**And from the photograph it looks to be nearly twice the height of the house so it would have been a worry in a storm?**

It really was a massive pine tree and actually when I was a baby, I think there was a very big snow storm in 1949 and one of the lower branches came down then towards the back of the house so we were very pleased to see the end, well I was particularly of the pine tree. The other photograph is one taken from the front fence, looking up through the vegetable garden and you can quite clearly see the layout of the vegetables and there were certain trellises and things scattered around, little lawn paths between each vegetable garden, looking up to the very square shaped hedge. And actually if you look carefully you will see there were just gaps in the hedge. Those gaps my parents turned into arches which they are now going through the hedge. So that's that.

**That's wonderful to have that record Will.**

The only other photo I do have is one taken across the front paddock towards the house and you can clearly see the bunya pine tree. There are a lot of radiata pines from the front of the house going down to the back and then in an L-shape down to the side, well a lot of those are gone. You can see there's a hedge along the side of the garden, it's just a general shot and you can see both the bunya pine tree and the very big radiata pine at the back.

**And a lot of sheep in the foreground, as all grazing families used to.**

My father had western properties with merino sheep and he had a little Border Leicester stud, so they were, they're not known to be wonderful with wool but anyway that was the Border Leicesters in front of the photograph. And then the only other photograph I have is a photograph, just a snap taken of the lane, well it's the road, Bona Vista Road, as it was when I was going to school and looking out across clear paddocks which is now of course all built up on and developed. That road, occasionally we would drive down it if we were going somewhere as a short cut to the highway, but we would never attempt to drive up it in the car because it was so rough and gullies and all sorts of things. But it just shows how times have changed.

**Now you inherited here really an intact Victorian garden. What aspirations did you have for it when you came here?**

Well when I arrived and also I'm not a gardener as such, I don't really know much about it but I do appreciate gardens. I love looking at them but I'm by no means a horticulturalist by any standards. But I thought well, the house, everything had been closed up a bit, for 3 about years before I came here and so things had got quite overgrown and the very first thing I had to do when I came was have the drive cleared so that the pantehnicon could come with my furniture because it was like driving up a tunnel, everything was sort of meeting over the top of the drive, it was lovely, I loved it but I had to be practical and things had just gone wild. So anyway I cleared all that and then over the time cut back a lot of growth and so on. My main concern was



keeping the garden pretty well as I remembered it with plantings from my childhood and just keeping it neat and tidy if I could basically. So over the years I've taken up all the little rock borders and put them down again, things like that, and basically just try and maintain it as it is.

**You mention planting some crab apples in the vegetable garden. Are there many other trees that have been added on your watch?**

Not a lot, some Japanese maples which sadly have died. I've tried different times growing other, one thing that I really would have liked to have had was a magnolia, which I've put in four and I haven't had any luck with them. And I've put in different things over the time. I have put in some claret ash and some plane trees within the surrounds of the property, not within the garden so much.

**And how did the drought that we've just come out of impact the garden here?**

Well it was a devastating drought as everyone knows, it was just horrible because it went on for so long and I had absolute nightmares about things dying. My main concern was the big hedge and the bunya pine tree and I really didn't know what to do about the hedge because before we had water restrictions I was wondering whether I should try and put soaker hoses under it or what but when you actually look into it, it's such a complicated business. Then of course we had water restrictions and people would say well perhaps you could buy water but once you start interfering I feel you could muck things up because you've got to keep going until it rains. So anyway I looked around town and I was observing things in the parks and other people's hedges and kept my fingers crossed and fortunately it's looking satisfactory but the thing that I kept on thinking was that the hedge had never been pampered, and even the bunya pine tree, I'd noticed at times they had sprinklers and things going down at Central Park and its always been well watered and maintained and probably lower and all this sort of thing so I thought well my plantings here are probably pretty hardy and I hoped that would have **stuck** to them and it did.

**And look by now after the rain it looks absolutely magnificent Will, full of flowers and your trees are very healthy and the hedge is a picture.**

Well thank you very much and what I'm doing is just waiting to see, I'm not rushing into cutting things down that look as though they are dead because they might shoot and then as time goes by we'll sort of trim them up and cut anything back that needs doing. And I know the sorts of small plantings that I'm going to have, hardy things like lavenders and salvia and penstemons, which are old fashioned plants and they'll suit the garden and attract the bees.

**Well you're lucky to have a wonderful history of photographs of the garden. Did you also perhaps have planting lists from any time in the past? Rose orders and the like?**

No, nothing like that, no. So I didn't have any of those. The only other thing that I've planted here since I've come up are some more roses, not a huge number but just some more. But some of the original roses too that I've remembered all my life, fortunately I also gave them a little bit of water. They were special ones, some red ones out the front. The other thing that I was really keen on preserving is a lemon tree which is in the back garden, back yard area, which has been fantastic and it's older than I am and last year it had the most massive crop of lemons I have ever seen. So it's fascinating watching the plants and how they've survived this really very, very difficult time.

**And what is your favourite part of the garden Will?**

My favourite part of the garden is, it's on the southern lawn area between where the water tank was and glass house. And it had some large shady trees and within that area under the trees since I've been here I've planted a lot more daffodils and bulbs and things and I'm hoping that they're going to keep surviving because I have visions of this wonderful vista of blue and yellow and all that sort of thing. My neighbours down the road very kindly gave me a lot of iris, I love iris, so I've got a lot of iris down the driveways and in certain spots around. And there again I thought they'd all died during the drought but they've come back and they're looking very happy.

**And that little greenhouse is an absolute picture. Could you describe it for the tape?**

Well it's been, it's a very basic little, well when it was built it was rather special because it had steam heating in it. It was very similar to the one at Saumarez because I think Mr Tindal and Mr White were friends and they used to compare notes. Anyway as far as I've been concerned it's always just been, we called it the glasshouse and my mother used to have quite a collection of geraniums and people would give her cuttings and things and that was one thing she always liked and she'd always remember the plants from her friends and say of well that's so and so and this is from so and so. So we've tried to keep all that going but next to the greenhouse at one stage there was a very large silky oak tree which sheltered it but sadly it blew over. Fortunately it didn't blow over the glasshouse, it went the other way but it's taken the shade away a bit and it's now very hot in the summer and I still have some of the geraniums and things but it's not as it was.

**But it's a delightful little sort of gothic building.**

Yes, and its roof, it had been replaced in my time as a matter of course. The timber frame for the glass roof, that had all been redone and then of course in the 1996 hailstorm the whole thing was smashed again. So it was replaced then, all the glass and so on. So it's like a cat, it's had several lives.

**It's up to its 9<sup>th</sup> life. Now is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you think we really should have on record about the garden?**

I can't think of anything in particular. The garden, it's been a happy garden and I think that's one of my big memories of this place. It's been a place to relax as a family and there's a tennis court. We'd often have tennis and we'd have afternoon teas and, earlier in our lives there seemed to be more time and people could sit out in a nice part of the garden and they'd take the tea out there or things like that. So we've got a million happy family memories of the garden so it's just been a special place and by no means perfect but I think it has a certain feel about it when you drive up the drive now.

**Well that's wonderful Will. Thank you very much indeed.**

*Interview ends: 34 minutes 31 seconds*