

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

TASMANIAN BRANCH



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Interviewee: **ANN CRIPPS**
Interviewer: Jean Elder
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Ann Cripps, Australian Garden History Society, National Oral History Collection, Interviewed 25 August 2023 by Jean Elder.

[JE] [This is] an interview with Ann Cripps recorded for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection. I'll be speaking with Ann about her work in Tasmania as a landscape and garden history consultant and also about the first twenty years of the Australian Garden History Society, as Ann was a foundation member when the Society formed in 1980. The interview is taking place at Battery Point, Tasmania, on Friday the 25th of August 2023. The interviewer is Jean Elder and our recorder is Rhonda Hamilton.

The Australian Garden History Society acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Note: between 50.13 and 58.29 there are occasional coughs on the audio recording which are not identified on this transcript.

So Ann, welcome, can you tell us a little about your early years – where you were born and where you grew up?

[AC] I was born in Hobart. I lived some of my early life in Sydney and then came back to Hobart, went to school (Collegiate School) and I lived with my grandparents up at Fern Tree and I think that's where my love of gardening first began.

How old were you then?

Well, I visited my grandparents many times as a very young child but then when I came back, I would have been about ten and it was only recently that I found out a little bit more about the association of the wonderful garden at Fern Tree which is Lichen Gate, Pillinger Drive. It was very much, I suppose, a Gertrude Jekyll type garden, and wonderful walks and hidden places. A wonderful garden for a child to enjoy, and my favourite occupation was to go out in the garden with my grandmother.

I found out later, when I was doing some work for Markree (which is the house in Hobart that was given to TMAG [Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery] and became a house museum in 2011) and that had formerly belonged to the Baldwin family. The house is an Arts and Crafts house built by Bernard Walker and the garden was designed by Cecil Baldwin. He went to Burnley and he and Eileen Bamford and [Edna Walling] were all there at around the same time and my grandmother's next-door neighbour, who she was always gardening with and visiting gardens, was Eileen Bamford (or Eileen Wood).

When Eileen and Edna Walling left Burnley they decided that they would set up a landscaping business together: this is according to family records. But this didn't eventuate because Eileen married and moved to Hobart and lived at Fern Tree. So I think that was fascinating to find that association because the garden at Fern Tree (my grandmother's garden) was very much, I think, influenced by that period.

Yes, that whole era.

Yes that whole era of gardening.

Did you have your own little garden there, as so often happened with children?

I had my own wheelbarrow, and I had my own watering can and I just followed my grandmother around. And I used to love the rockery, and the Laburnum walk and all of those sorts of things, just loved it.

And this interest, after you finished school, where did that lead you, or where did your schooling take you?

My schooling took me to (after school), to the State Library where there was a group of us. Then, to become a Librarian it wasn't a university course at that stage, it was an in-service course at the State Library and you moved around into different sections of the library: so Lending Library, Children's Library, Reference Library, Periodicals and Book Mobile. I think I learnt from the training that we were given, I learnt about research and I'd always had an interest in history. I'd always had an interest in gardening and I think those things just sort of came together.

Mmm, very much so I can see. It also would have given you a great understanding of, as you say, research and archives and how to go about it.

5:14 When were the first steps towards taking on work, public commissions, in that area of history, garden history research?

Well, I married an architect, my husband Peter, who was very involved in restoration work and for many years was down at Port Arthur, working there. He was involved in a private practice that was commissioned to do work at Port Arthur. They were the first group of architects and engineers who did work on that site and tried to restore and understand the site and we would talk about this work and I said, you know, 'What about the gardens? What about the plants?' And so Peter and I, through sort of just general discussion, we realised that you can't just look at a building, you've got to look at the environment around the building and so that became an interest for both of us – that, yes, the building was important, but the landscape around the building was equally important.

In that period when you did your first major public commission, had you done some (the first one was Bishops court, am I right?) but earlier than that you had done some smaller private commissions?

I'd done some, I suppose, some help with friends who had old properties and I tried to engage with them and make them aware that the garden was just as important as the house and then when there was talk of the establishment of the Australian Garden History Society, a letter went out to all of the architects that were involved in restoration work and Peter got the letter, and can I distinctly remember him saying to me 'I'm too busy, you go.' And so that's how I became involved in the Garden History Society and also then involved in some commissions to do work.

So the commissions came around about that time?

Around about that same time, yes.

Tell us a little more about the Bishopscourt project.

Well, Bishopscourt, again Peter was doing a Conservation Management Plan for the house and we felt that it was very important that the grounds should also be included. And so I did the work on the grounds and then that became a Conservation Management Plan of the whole site.

There were some very interesting things there. There was great dip in the lawn and the current Bishop had said 'Oh you know, that is so annoying, we need to fill that in.' And I puzzled over it and then I found out that it was actually (found some very early photographs) and it was an amphitheatre, and each year the children of the various homes and the Sunday schools would come and perform plays for their parents and other people involved in the Anglican church. So, you know, that was just one of those things – 'No you don't fill that in, because that is important.'

Roses that had been planted by one of the bishops' wives when she established a garden around the tennis court. There were a lot of interesting connections, plus the fact that the site – one of the bishops there was Bishop Montgomery, whose son of course was Field Marshall Montgomery – and so planting of trees and the history of the site was very, very important. And from that work we realised that we needed some money and some help and so we put in a submission to the Australian Garden History Society, the Tasmanian branch. And they were very generous in helping us over a couple of years with things like tree work and major expenses that were required.

10.10 What year was that, roughly?

That was in 1980.

Quite early on?

Yes, quite early on.

That's alright. I'd forgotten as well. And then from there (don't worry we can add that date later) the Markree House was probably ...?

Well I think probably the other commission that was interesting from around that period was a commission from the National Parks to look at exotics in the East and West Pillinger and along the Lyell Highway, and they were very much, the feeling at the time was that anything that wasn't an endemic Tasmanian plant was a weed and therefore should be removed. So we had a wonderful, very interesting trip round the West Coast looking at plants that had been established: European plants that had been established in the early miners' gardens and other areas such as along the railway line. We had plans of the site, we had plans of the railway station at West Pillinger and the railway station had gone but there was this row of irises. We measured the row of irises, related that measurement back to the measurement of the railway station - exactly the same.

[Laughs]

There were all those interesting things, but it was very difficult, I suppose, to convince the Parks people that there was historic importance in the European plants that were around there and I felt that, – yes ivy can become invasive – but a lot of them really didn't have the potential to become invasive and were important remnants of the early settlement around there.

Did you have success in that negotiation?

I still am not sure. I'm not sure whether they actually kept things or whether they just decided 'No, that's too hard. We'll just keep it as it is', and keep an eye on it.

I guess I'm interested in whether your research interests sort of changed over time, from those first early years, or it still remained very much looking at landscapes and the importance of plants and gardens and the old historic homes?

I think in the early times of my research I concentrated more on the history of the site and the building, the families that had lived there over the time and then it lead me on to an interest in who supplied the plants; the gardeners; the establishment of nurseries here; the supply of plants; the exchange of plants and I became a lot more interested in that side of garden history.

And clearly in your book *Gardeners, plant collectors, friends: Hobart Town and beyond* a lot of this research comes together - the research over the years - about nurserymen and early gardeners. The book covers such a wide area it's hard to ask a question but I'm wondering - were there key things that stood out for you when you were writing the book, about the early nurserymen and gardeners?

Well I suppose because of my involvement in Narryna, and Narryna in Battery Point being part of Robert Knopwood's land grant where he established his garden Cottage Green, he was one of the first people that I became interested in, looking at his diary which he kept daily and in that he wrote about what was going on in the colony, but for me the important thing was that he wrote about the establishment of his garden. And so, I suppose, he was the catalyst and then I went on to research some of the people that Knopwood had mentioned in his diary and look at the early nurserymen who established gardens and who supplied plants, and also looking at the plant collectors that came here.

15:46 And you talk about, in the book, the importance of the Quaker influence in these early horticultural endeavours?

Yes, I find the Quakers absolutely fascinating. The fact that the Quakers couldn't go to the universities in England and so they studied plants and they became very involved in horticulture and plant collecting and a lot of the well-off Quakers then encouraged the other Quakers, such as Fothergill sponsored James Parkinson to come out on Cook's expedition as a botanical artist and Fothergill also established a school – Ackworth

School – up in Yorkshire where a lot of the early nurserymen and colonists, who were not the wealthy, went there as they were sponsored, or their education was paid for, and there they learnt about gardening, there was a very large kitchen garden, there were orchards. They learnt all of those skills which then I think equipped them to come out here and establish gardens and set up as nurserymen.

The Chandler Nursery, William Chandler, he was an important early nurseryman but not part of the Quaker connection?

No, not part of the Quakers.

The first William Chandler came out under the Assignment Scheme and was assigned to John Leake up in the north of the state. And from there he came down, he was married at St Georges Church in Battery Point, and he went to Government House as the Head Gardener there and then his son gained an apprenticeship at what were the Royal Society Gardens and from there he then established Chandler's Nursery.

So, fascinating links with the northern connection, then the gardens at Government House, the Royal Society Gardens, and then a nursery that is still today in family hands.

Yes, still going strong.

You also write in your introduction in the book that 'the gardening and art have always been intertwined'. I'm just interested in your thoughts about gardening and art – and partly, you also describe the four quite important women of that era, the early colonial era, and least two of them – Mary Morton Allport and Louisa Anne Meredith – were artists as well as gardeners.

Yes, well, I mean, there were botanical artists and then there were just artists who loved plants. There were the women and then, also, there was Frederick Mackie – a Quaker – but I was just amazed at what I found about Frederick Mackie. He came out here on a mission journey to check on the conditions of the convicts, the Aborigines, and the settlers, the Quaker settlers. He – with Robert Lindsey – travelled for some years around Australasia and he kept a journal and in that journal he sketched the plants that he saw.

He married at the end of the mission journey and came back here and established a small Quaker school, because there was no Quaker school in the colony and the Quaker Friends meeting house in Murray Street, they let him a couple of rooms for the school, which previously had been a nursery run by James Dickinson who came out here as a convict. So Mackie, when he left and went to South Australia to be with his wife's father, I thought 'What happened to him?' He was somebody who had come from a family of nurserymen in England, who had worked as a school master here but who, in his journal, had written about all the plants that he had seen – he had sketched them – and what happened to him? And I was talking to a friend about this and she said, 'I wonder if my Quaker, old school friend, knows anything about Frederick Mackie?' It

turned out that they were descendants and they sent to me his sketchbook – or his book – that he had kept when he went to South Australia and from that I was able to find that he was into plant breeding as well as growing plants for a nurseryman in South Australia.

So a link between gardening and art which of course – as you mentioned – was very much to the fore with people like Louisa Anne Meredith and Mary Morton Allport.

The Allports are interesting. Joseph Allport was a solicitor, but he was a very keen gardener, and he established a very successful garden at Aldridge Lodge. He exhibited plants at the horticultural shows, exhibitions, and his wife drew and painted: painted miniatures on ivory of some of the plants that Joseph collected from the environment of kunanyi/Mount Wellington.

23.01 And they're exquisite, aren't they?

Yes, absolutely exquisite.

It's interesting isn't it from that early, first colonial days we still have iris shows and the best rhododendron shows, and the gardens are still fascinating. There's still that interest in gardens.

Oh yes. In fact I gave a talk at the Hobart Horticultural Society about a week ago, talking about those early years of the Society and, the thing that the members were amazed at was the variety of plants that were exhibited, including the pineapple. I mean, who would have thought that they would be growing the pineapple in Hobart Town?

Indeed. [Laughs]

And they were, and exhibiting.

Yes.

One more question, before we move on to talk about Garden History Society history, what do you think, what were the learnings from those early gardeners and horticulturalists that have relevance for today's gardening and horticulture? I'm just thinking of their seed propagation, their spreading or, exchanging of seeds and ideas. Are there lessons too for our ...?

I think there was one very amusing report in the paper after one of the early exhibitions and one of the comments that was made was that it was a great shame that the wealthier garden owners – when they were gardening – were just throwing out plants and seeds that could have been given to others for establishing their gardens.

The other interesting thing is that they were – from very early times – they were even, in Knopwood's garden, they were growing exotics and endemics in their garden. They were very much into kitchen garden, of course, because that was a source of food when there was an unreliable source from the Government Gardens and the unreliability of the shipping. So I mean, again, I think that there were ... things today that

are still relevant, to keep up with your propagating and sharing of plants and seeds; the importance of the kitchen garden; the importance of growing exotics and endemics. Yes, I think that a lot of what they were doing is still very relevant today.

Mmm. And you mention in your book too some of the early conservation ideas – I think that was from Louisa Anne Meredith?

Louisa Anne Meredith – I think she could probably be one of the first conservationists.

There was a fashion – when you had a ball or a party – to go up to the mountain and cut fronds from the ferns and other plants and, you know, decorate the ballroom. She wrote very decisively about the policy of going in and clearing land – that that should not be done and that you should be keeping some of the trees and some of the natural landscape.

So I think she made people aware that they were doing the wrong thing if they just came in and cleared the land, and also if they went into areas such as kunanyi/Mount Wellington and just randomly cut trees and plants from there.

We certainly could do with her voice again today, couldn't we?

Yes, yes.

27:49 Now we come to talk about the early history of the Australian Garden History Society and Ann, you've had a long involvement with AGHS as a foundation member of the national organisation founded in 1980. You were also one of four people on the Tasmanian committee of AGHS established in 1981 (and I think it was established largely to organise a 1982, the national conference in Hobart). You then spent four years – as a committee member at that stage – and then in 1990 you began serving a total of nine years as Secretary of the Tasmanian committee, including six years as the Tasmanian rep on the national management committee. You've made an enormous contribution to AGHS both at a state and national level, but back to the early days, I think just to start getting some of the history in perspective, can you tell us how – we touched on it earlier in the interview - how the AGHS came to be established in 1980?

Well I think the first impetus was when the Australian Heritage Commission funded a survey of historic gardens in all of the states and from that there was the exhibition which was curated by Howard Tanner and Peter Watts, called *Converting the wilderness: the art of gardening in colonial Australia*, and that was a travelling exhibition which began in 1979 and went through to 1980. Then there was a proposal to establish an Australian garden history society. There was a very well-established garden history society in England and the idea was that the Australian one would be very much based on the English one.

And so a letter was sent out to various people and organisations, inviting them to a meeting in Melbourne to discuss this proposal, and I went to that meeting and from there the Australian Garden History Society was

established. And we decided to establish a branch here, as you mentioned, and then we were involved in the running of one of the early conferences.

30:40 I'll come to the conferences a bit later, but I'm interested in just exploring a bit first about the kind of activities of the AGHS Tas.

In 1981, the first Tasmanian excursion was held at Fern Tree – in December of that year 'there was a picnic lunch provided and after an eight-minute leisurely walk through the Fern Tree Glade past some interesting gardens' – that was the description in the newsletter. And so began the Tasmanian garden visits and excursions. Ann, I'm just interested, can you tell us more about these early visits and lectures? There seemed to be regular visits and – very early on – became a practice of having lectures, of key people.

Yes, because this was such a new organisation, we felt very much that we had to tell everybody what our aims were and this was, of course, to promote an interest in historic gardens and the plants that were growing in these gardens, and we were not an association that had just been established so that people could go and visit lovely gardens. So therefore the lecture side of it became very important, and if we went to a garden the owner was invited to talk about the garden and the establishment of the garden, and quite often one of our members would have done some research into that garden. The educational role of the association was very important to us. Very early on, we had Gay Klok talking about Kitty Henry and then we had ...

Can I just interrupt you? Can you tell us a little about (for those listening) Kitty Henry?

Kitty Henry was a florist but she had been very much part of the, I suppose, the 1930s-1940s sort of garden scene in Hobart and Gay Klok who owned an old property down Sandy Bay – she had worked with Gay Klok, and so that was one of the reasons for going down there and looking at Gay's garden and also for Gay to give us a lecture on Kitty Henry. At the same time – because we were in the area of the Lipscombe family nurseries – I gave a talk on family nurseries, such as the Chandler's and the Lipscombe's.

**So it started – this interest in family nurseries – started very early?
[Laughs]**

It started very early, yes, yes.

And also, about ten years later, our interest in dry climate gardens and the problems of gardening in dry areas such as the East Coast was something that we felt we should also look at and so we had a weekend on the East Coast with lectures on historic gardens – how do you cope with gardening in a dry climate? So again, the mix of garden visiting and lectures.

And reading the early newsletters – in August 1983 – Mr Frank Walker writes of the importance of collation of information about old landscape

ruins, isolated exotic trees across Tasmanian roads and he called upon AGHS Tas members to contribute to this project. Perhaps this is one of the first advocacy projects that the Society took on?

Yes, the Walker family, again a family of nurserymen, so the first, his father Frank Walker established a nursery in Launceston in the 1870s and his son Frank was the Chief Horticulturalist with the Tasmanian Department of Agriculture and he was actually awarded a Veitch Memorial Gold Medal from the Royal Horticultural Society in England, for his work on urban horticulture. He was very much a man before his time.

So, he was very concerned about the desecration of some of the old trees and, again, the history, such as the memorial avenue of trees from Hobart to Launceston. He wrote some articles for our journal – or it was a newsletter – and I think, probably, that was the impetus for the Register of Trees.

36.00 Ah!

A very interesting man and he was certainly a valuable source of inspiration for the Garden History Society and the roles that we wanted to get involved in such as advocacy.

So possibly then that was the beginning of the National Trust's Significant Tree Register?

Yes, yes.

Right. I'd wondered what happened to his collation so there, that's where it was.

And then in September 1985 – in one of the newsletters – there is another mention of an advocacy project with a campaign by Mark Hurburgh?

Hurburgh.

To save a Sequoia in New Town and this was successful. He actually petitioned Hobart City Council?

Yes. Mark Hurburgh was on our first committee. He was Education Officer at the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens, and he wrote a history of the botanical gardens. A wonderful man and he, in a very quiet way, just gave us so much help and direction in those early years.

Yes, his campaign was successful, and it was another advocacy project that the association was involved in. Another one – in the north of the state – was Culzean, the property at Westbury which had been bought by Dr and Mrs Laker in 1965. He was a vet and a very passionate gardener and landscaper, and he was absolutely horrified when the Department of Main Roads decided that they needed to widen the road and that would go through part of his property. So, he asked the Australian Garden History Society Tasmanian branch whether we would help with that and we did and, again, that project was successful: the road wasn't widened and his property wasn't impacted.

And then another early status as conservation. In 1983 (oh this was the national body) published guidelines for the preparation of conservation plans and I'm wondering if you can tell us a bit about this publication and how it was used, and did it go on to that important Port Arthur weekend in April 1984?

Yes, there were a number of publications which were produced around about that same time. 1983 – the Australian Garden History Society published their guidelines, a very valuable booklet, looking at various aspects that you needed, such as research, looking at geology and soils, historical research, climatic data. All of those sorts of things that probably we now take for granted but at that stage we needed guidelines. At the same time the Heritage Commission published a document on how to record the National Estate values of gardens and the National Trust published a bulletin on planting, c1950[1850]-1900, which listed all the plants and trees and other interesting information that was needed if you were looking at your garden or a conservation management plan of the garden. So all of those things were new tools, but they all added to what we needed to try and encourage people to look at the historic importance of gardens and landscapes.

40:29 And the conference that you organised at Port Arthur. That was a joint one wasn't it?

That was a weekend that was organised with the Port Arthur Historic Management Authority, and we had about fifty delegates at that meeting, from all over Australia, so it wasn't just a Tasmanian branch activity. And we had some very interesting lecturers looking at researching historic gardens; establishing the criteria for the restoration of a colonial garden; the use of landscape in conservation; and we looked at the plants that were growing at Port Arthur and the history behind those plants and how they came into Van Diemen's Land.

And then we had somebody who looked at, or lectured, about the archaeology, looking at finding drains, old pathways, brick edging. All of those really interesting things that were so valuable for Port Arthur in the work that they were doing in restoring their gardens, but also on other people. I mean, tiles, garden edging tiles, how the design of those changed and if you knew the design of that tile you could then sort of date certain parts of your garden. So, very interesting, practical things that we learnt. It was a very good conference.

And it leads me to think, the kind of membership of the Garden History Society at that time, it tended (my feeling from reading it) on the whole a younger membership than we have now and was it a time when people were moving and taking interest in these old properties and restoring them: hence the interest in conserving and looking at the history?

Yes, I think that this education/information role was very important. There were a lot of younger garden owners, people that had bought older properties and they wanted to know where to go to get help, and so they joined the association and became very active members of the association.

Sorry I'll interrupt, it's just quite interesting because I look that by 1983 Tasmania had 100 members and this had grown by 1987 to 270 and by April 1988 to 300 members, which is more than we have now, presently. So indicative of exactly what you're talking about yes.

Yes, the education role. One of the concerns later on with the Garden History Society, there was an organisation called the Open Garden Scheme and that was a means where people could go and pay a small amount and visit a garden on a specific day. When that Open Garden Scheme folded, there was great concern about – in the national management committee – that people that liked to go and visit gardens would join the association and that we must not lose our emphasis on education as well as garden visiting.

So I think that the education aspect is very important, or was very important in those early years, and that was probably why we had such, I suppose, a younger membership because they wanted to find out more about what to do if they had an early property or if they were interested in history, or interested in plants, they wanted to learn.

I noticed – in some of the early newsletters (and certainly we don't do that now) – that they would specify or have family events where children were invited, or on occasions there'd be specified 'children and dogs not welcome' – on occasional things.

Yes.

It made me think, yes, they were much younger.

Yes, yes.

45:28 The change in the membership also has been probably less professional people – landscape architects, garden designers – and more the amateur gardeners (of recent years), would you ...? I'm surmising a little here that perhaps ...?

Look, I'm afraid I don't know. I just think that there's scope within the organisation for all of those criteria. I mean, that was one of the aims when the organisation was established: that we should have a mix of professional people plus amateur gardeners, plus those who just love gardens, but we should not just concentrate on garden visiting, we should have an educational role and combine the two.

Yes, and I think my time on the recent committee that the same concerns, that the focus needs to be back more on education, and if you ask any people who join it's mainly because they want to visit interesting gardens but we really need to have a stronger role in advocacy and conservation.

Mmm.

But I want to now come back to the annual conferences (the national conferences) that were held in Tasmania, the first one being in Hobart in 1982 and I think you had played quite a role in that conference?

Yes. We had a very small committee, we worked incredibly hard, we did everything ourselves, but it was a great success. We had some interesting speakers (in Mark Hurburgh). He talked about the botanical gardens and he took us to the botanical gardens, we looked at gardens around Ross, we looked at Summerhome, which is a very interesting early garden here in Hobart and we went up to Woolmers and Panshanger and so we visited some very interesting gardens. We were determined that Tasmanian hospitality would be at the fore, and we just produced a very small brochure, and it was very successful and Tasmanian conferences always have been successful.

Always have been.

Because I think we just have that – we've got this wonderful state with these wonderful gardens, and we work hard, and we produce good conferences.

And the 1986 one was in Launceston. Were you ...?

I wasn't involved in the 1986 conference as much as the two Hobart ones. The next one was the...

The 1993 one in Hobart?

Yes, that was a wonderful conference. It was bigger, of course, I think we had between 150 and 200 delegates for that conference, and we had a person called Ethne Clarke who was an American garden writer who had been living in England for about twenty years and had written a number of books on cottage gardens and herb gardens. She had done some work with Rosemary Verey on a couple of her publications and she wrote to the Australian Garden History Society and said 'I'm thinking of coming to Australia' and at that stage the Tasmanian conference was sort of in the planning stage and we said 'Can we bring her here for our conference and we will focus it on cottage gardens', so we called it *From village to vase: the art of the cottage garden*.

Another keynote speaker was Peter Cuffley from Victoria, who had written books on cottage gardens in Australia and so the two of them were keynote speakers along with other speakers.

[pause in recording]

50:13 So Ann, we were talking about the 1993 conference in Hobart and the associated exhibition?

Yes, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery organised an exhibition at the same time which was called *The Art of the Cottage Garden* and that was a wonderful exhibition, bringing a lot of the collection from the gallery of early colonial gardens and the art of people like Louisa Anne Meredith and Mary Morton Allport and so that was an added bonus but a really good collaboration between the Australian Garden History Society and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

So we looked at things like English villages and gardens and then the early colony with the fences and borders; houses and their gardens; and

then gardening in the wilderness. So it was a good exhibition. It ran, of course, after the conference and encouraged other people to visit this exhibition and get an idea of what the association was about.

At this time in the 1990s there are a couple of important tours including Tasmania and there was one of the English Garden History Society which you were involved with. Can you tell us a bit about that tour?

Yes, as I mentioned earlier, there was quite a lot of communication between the English Garden History Society and the Australian Garden History Society and (I'm not quite sure who suggested that it would be a good idea if some of the members of the English organisation came out to Australia), so I visited the Garden History Society when I was in England and we talked through the idea of a tour of Australian gardens. The national management committee gave the proposal its support and together with Jackie Courmadias, who was the Executive Officer of the Australian Garden History Society at the time, we organised a 24-day tour of historic and contemporary gardens of Australia, in October 1998.

So we started in Sydney and we went to Parramatta; Elizabeth Farm; then down to Camden; Glenmore; Southern Highlands; to Canberra (to the National Botanic Gardens) and from there down to Lanyon; and down to Victoria, through Victoria and across to Tasmania.

We had a very interesting group of people and by the end of the tour, of course, we were very good friends. But they were just amazed at the variety of gardens and the expanse of countryside that they had to follow.

One of the amusing things was, we were driving down the Midlands and one of them said 'Is that opium?' and they had never seen opium poppies growing and they were just amazed that we, in Tasmania, were growing opium.

But it was a great success.

Was that seen as a fundraiser for the national management ...?

Yes.

And we haven't spoken much about your time on the national management committee. What were the key issues that you were focussing on at that time?

There were funding issues as, of course, there are with every organisation. There were some changes with the way the journal was being produced so that was one of the concerns of the organisation. And some of the branches were struggling, others were booming, it was just a matter of how we rationalised and how we grew as an organisation.

My time on the national management committee was when Margaret Darling was Chairman, and she was the most wonderful, generous and encouraging chairman so I really enjoyed working with her and others on the national committee at that time.

They were based at the Observatory area in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne, was that correct?

That's right, yes.

And had a part-time ...?

Jackie Courmadias was the Executive Director and, again, a wonderful person who organised the association. So, I mean, when you think about it the association had started and the office was in Bowral and then we... but that was a sort of an arrangement. We then established – I suppose as any organisation has to – we established as a professional organisation with an Executive Officer and an office.

And so it goes on today, 42 years later.

Yes, it does.

We're going up to the year 2000, which is when your active involvement in the committee finished. Are there any other observations you'd like to make about the Tas Branch or garden history overall, the Society?

My feeling is that perhaps we need to return a little more to the seminars and workshops and things. I mean, we had a number of those. We would try and have them on various topics, in various locations and, I mean, the Winter Lecture Series that the Tasmanian branch runs is a very worthwhile series of lectures and we do get a large number of people at those. Which I think shows that that is something that is needed within the organisation and perhaps that's something that we should look at – weekend seminars, not just a weekend when we go garden visiting but combining the educational, the lecturing role at the same time. So that would be, I think, my comment.

Mmm. Because conservation of both landscapes and gardens and garden history is more important than ever.

Yes, definitely, yes.

I think on this note we might conclude, unless there are any other points you'd like to make Ann?

Well, again, we'd really like to say thank you for your contribution [not only] to the Garden History Society but to the Oral History Collection. So thank you.

Thank you Jean.

Recording ends.

Interview ends 58 minutes and 29 seconds.