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Photographer: Dr Kate Cregan, 28 March 2024

INTERVIEWEE	PROFESSOR TIM ENTWISLE
INTERVIEWER	DR KATE CREGAN
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TRANSCRIBER	DR KATE CREGAN
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ALL USES OF THIS INTERVIEW SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THE INTERVIEWEE AND THE SOCIETY: PROFESSOR TIM ENTWISLE, AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY, INTERVIEWED 28 MARCH 2024 BY DR KATE CREGAN

Ok, ah, we're here today to interview Professor Timothy [John] Entwisle. Ah, my name is Dr Kate Cregan and it is Thursday the 28th of March [2024]. We're in Tim's home in Glen Iris and the purpose of the interview is to be included in a much larger oral history project that's being run by the Australian Garden History Society. So just to start out Tim, um, I'd like to you to tell me a bit about where you were born, when you were born and your sort of family background if you can please.

I was born in Nhill, so that's in the Mallee of Victoria, and that's on the 17th of June 1960 but only spent a couple of years there. My mother Betty Macdonnell and father John Entwisle were both teachers so they moved around and we moved from Nhill to Wangaratta to Euroa. Uh and so that, we'd spend a few years at each of those places. But I have two brothers, who are Rodney and Colin, and they of course moved with us, between those places, and until 1966, when John Entwisle, so my father, died of asthma and my mother looked after the three of us for quite a while, particularly in Euroa we'd got to by then, and then [my mother] remarried when I was ten years old. So she married Ron Renn and also joining us was some extra children so we had an extra, or I had an extra sister, Juliet. I had three older brothers, Jonathan, Chris and Tony. So then we eventually moved back into Melbourne at that time, we moved to Alphington, and lived there for quite a while and then eventually moved back out into the country again, to live at Castlemaine where I did my final years of high school.

Ok, um it must have been a bit odd going from being the eldest child to being a middle child all of a sudden

2:30

It was uh, I suppose it was difficult in some ways initially, but I was fairly independent and I'd been looking after, I think, the two younger children with my mother, or liked to think I did. And when we got to the new arrangement the three older brothers were just old enough to be sort of living almost separate lives and Juliet who was a bit younger, blended in more with the younger cohort in that, in that new family. So yeah, it was a bit change but for whatever reason I think I've been fairly adaptable and I don't, I don't really get to fussed by those things.

Right. And was gardening a part of your life then?

Absolutely not. Um, it's interesting thinking back, and I have a few times thought about where the interest in gardening came and in those early homes – they were rental properties, not very flash – there tended, there's no gardens that I remember really. I do remember some early gardens but they were very basic. Um, very dry, I don't know, most of the places seemed to be, you know, dry plants and had not been particularly well looked after. The, the biggest influences I think in terms of gardening came when my mother remarried and so Ron Renn was interested in ah growing seeds and growing eucalypts and gums and local plants. He was a bit of field naturalist I guess. His interest, he liked to grow things, so there was that connection. And then, also my grandfather used to take us for walks in the bushland around Castlemaine. He lived there as well. And I recall those connections with the

local bushland, not so much gardens, but I suppose being out in nature. They were there, latent, and then I moved on through life and got interested in other things. But I don't. There was certainly not a strong gardening influence in my early years.

Ok. So you say went bushwalking. Would you say that you had an interest in nature then rather than gardening?

4:42

Yes, as a, an adolescent, in my twenties there was definitely an interest in what we might call nature, so non-, not ornamental gardens. And I definitely enjoyed bushwalking up to a point. Um, I had an ill-fated bushwalk into south-west Tasmania which meant I really got put off long bushwalks. It was very unpleasant, [I] didn't enjoy it too much in the end. But I still liked doing day walks and two day walks and going out into nature. So I think that connection for me is more about plants more generally rather than it is about you know amenity or ornamental gardens, which did come later.

Ok. Um… yes I have read about your um, adventure in Tasmania and I have to admit I do wonder what drew you to going for that particular bushwalk

5:37

I think it was um, in a way, not thinking about it too much. I mean I went there with friends who were keen, keener bushwalkers than I was and we were university students who didn't think much about all these kinds of things. So we didn't prepare very much, it looked exciting. It, you know, people loved this walk which was in the Western Arthurs. It was known to be quite beautiful. So I thought it would be a lovely thing to do. What I hadn't thought about, I think, is how difficult it might be and it's, it's an interesting thing sort of looking back on it. I did enjoy parts of it a lot and some bits spectacular, you know, it really was a special place. But because we got stuck in a cave for , you know, four to five days or five days and we had to sort of, well, we ate all our food so we had to walk out. The, the stress of that, was you know, I realised that wasn't a great deal of fun so I avoided doing longer walks again but I think it's more I did things as a student where I would do them without thinking too much. I don't think I necessarily planned it at all.

That was, so you were in Tasmania and that would have been in the early [19]80s. Were you at all interested in the sort of protests, and conservation, and Franklin River, and those sorts of things going on at the time …

7:00

Yes

Because it was sort of around a similar period wasn't it.

Yes I was, I, I was interested, I had friends involved and living in Tasmania, involved in the NO DAMS movement. I was strongly involved in more the uranium or anti-, sort of anti-uranium movements and particularly in North Melbourne when I used to work there, so I was very much connected with those. I didn't actively go and protest, that was not, and probably all through my life, I've not done. I mean I've been on protest marches but I wouldn't call

myself an intense activist wanting to be put in jail for it. I would tend to do the intellectual stuff and write about it. I would, you know, I would write letters to people, I joined groups and I helped them. So with the south-west Tasmanian, um, changes going on, the damming of the rivers, I was very much against that and I would, you know, contribute to meetings, I would sort of talk about it and write about, but never actually found myself in the river, so to speak.

As some people did. Yes, yep, yep. Ok, so moving on to ah, because you've already started to bring it up, your university experience and when you did become more focussed on plants, how did that come about?

8:30

I, I was very interested in science and I, from an early time I think I felt like a scientist. I don't know that I defined it that way, but I'm a very kind of logical person, sceptical and I do find that's the way I approach life. So, science suited me. I also found at high school that if you could do science, or you could do maths, you tended to be pushed into it and I slightly regretted that a little bit because I had interest in history and a few other things but you were always channelled into, particularly in maths and physics if you could do them, and I could do them. They were fine. So when I went to university I did, I picked, the pure maths and advanced physics in first year and I thought this is, this is the challenge, this will be fun to do. By the end of that year, it wasn't much fun, I didn't really enjoy it and I'd done one little botanical subject in that year and that botanical subject was really just done to fill in the number of points. So we had to sort of make up a year and I needed an extra subject and I thought … look, you know, and I remembered growing seeds at home, I remembered that kind of latent interest perhaps. I thought botany, botany could be an interesting subject. So I didn't do zoology, I did botany. And then after that first year I changed entirely to botany, got rid of maths and physics, didn't feel I needed to do that and then continued through my degree doing entirely botany. So I had never done biology at school, except obviously as part of science I guess in early years, and I never did zoology at university. I used to argue, and this was probably part of my approach to life at the time, I didn't want to dissect animals, I didn't, um, you know I, there were things I did at university to avoid any … in physics I wouldn't do the, the pracs to do with uranium, so I had sort of principles and things that I was willing to lose marks from. I never did zoology.

Ok. Ah, so … you shifted your major to botany … and that would have been over four years for an honours degree

Ah well, yes it was, but it was over three years really and then there was another shift. And towards the, or in the third year of the degree, I became obsessed with algae, microscopic organisms like seaweeds. And I'd always, when I got interested in botany it was the quality of the lectures, the interest, you know, it was presented really, really well. When we got to third year we had fantastic lecturers in algae, they were interesting people, they were cool, they were kind of, um, informative and I switched to doing algae and then that, I did a little project in third year and that led to doing an honours year, so by the time I got to the end of my four year degree with honours I was what we call a phycologist. So I was interested in algae, I'd, I'd transitioned through

botany and had now got to what I thought were these amazing organisms called algae

So you had already specialised

I had. In a way you had to specialise, and in a way you do anyway. So it could have been, you know, I could have been working on banksias or I could have been working on something, ah, fungi or whatever. So for me, I got interested algae, and that was again coming back to being a scientist, there was things to discover. I went out collecting and found some algae in streams, I brought them back, looked under a microscope, and they were, they were new, they hadn't been seen before and it was that excitement of finding things that seemed to be unknown in the scientific world. And that, that I found quite exciting. And that's [when] I became what, you know, what we call a taxonomist. So I identify, I name, and I classify plants and algae and again that probably fits my personality quite well as well.

Yes. Um, I, I noticed that in your memoir um, talking about being a taxonomist that you um, you actually are a bit of a … not a rebel exactly, but that you have taken issue with a sort of a level of colonialism that's inherent in taxonomy that goes back to what, 15th, 16th century, probably initially.

13:12

Yes, probably more so in recent years. I think I was probably blind, to be honest, I think I was blind to that when I was first doing taxonomy, or not, you know, in a sense, blind is perhaps the wrong word. But it wasn't, I didn't quite see that dilemma or, or contradiction. In more recent years I, I can, and also you'll notice I'm very careful to say that things are discovered for science or it's a scientific discovery, but of course, you know, these plants have been there, the algae were always there. Sometimes known to First Nations people, sometimes not, but they were always there. Just because a taxonomist, or someone like me comes along and puts a name on them, you know, it's suddenly coming into existence? So, I've always, I mean that probably is my own interest. The other one that goes along side it is probably a slight philosophical interest in science and I've often read about the philosophy of science, and got into these big debates as you do, probably when you're a student, about what's a species and you know, how, what does that mean? And that that takes you to some of these places because you, you realise to a degree that these are arbitrary constructs that we're setting up. But then you also look for ways to make them less arbitrary in a sense, to make them have some scientific integrity and during my career that science of classification has greatly changed. When I began it was more like, as people sometimes describe it, like stamp collecting, you're popping names on, putting them in boxes, and there's no way really of knowing whether that means anything. By the time I finished there was a lot more work being done on the evolution of organisms, plants, algae and everything and trying to relate shared characters and look for shared ancestors, and you know DNA sequencing came in. And all that combined, as much to do with theory as it was just in the new techniques, but it did mean that we have a much stronger basis for the way things are classified. Which means, without getting into a whole separate discussion, the way we know classify plants, is hopefully more realistic and

more predictive and tells us more about things. And that's why often we have name changes too. People get irritated because we split things up and change them but now at least there's a rationale for that.

Ok. Um, so, ah, when you finished your degree, you, ah, took up a job at the, well, first at um the 'box factory' [both laugh] or the printing factory, cutting up boxes, but when you got your first research job that was at the RBG [Royal Botanic Gardens]. Is that correct?

16:00

It is. I had an interesting sort of connection with the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne, or Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria as it ended up being called, and I did work there after my honours degree. And when I finished, I wasn't quite sure I wanted to do more research and I wasn't, and in fact working at the 'box factory' as you say, which was, my wife Lynda's parents ran that factory, and that was biding my time in a way, until I got a post-doctoral project that I'd put in, or I was hoping to get at the time. But I, I, even after honours I was really unsure whether I wanted this, going back to honours, whether I wanted to continue in research or wanted to kind of go out, I don't know, and do something, perhaps get some money and, and enjoy my life and those sort of things. So I did decide to take a year off, and that year I spent, or nine months of it, at the Botanic Gardens as a horticultural assistant, which is kind of odd because I was a phycologist as we've talked about. I did a bit of botany, um, but I did work in the Gardens for this nine months because, I wanted to, and I enjoyed it and, and I had you know, thinking back, probably to the little trigger for that, I'd worked over one summer holidays pressing, um, plant specimens and labelling and mounting them, as they say, and that was a holiday job to get money, because I needed each year to get money for university. And one year I went to the Gardens and I think that's where the little sort of spark of liking the Gardens or working in the Gardens came from, spent this nine months there, then went off and did a PhD on algae. So I decided I would go back and I remember talking to people and they, and thinking I may as, I'm going to do something, it's going to be algae, it could be as I said before, it could be banksias, it could be working on something entirely different, you know, it might have been the history of the Roman Empire, which I would have loved to have worked on, but I decided to do that. And then that, that, you know, sort became I suppose, once you become an expert in something you do continue, you find out what's needed and that led to an eventual post-doc when I was in the box factory, the printing factory. And that post-doc was more the ecology of algae, which was interesting, so as a, someone who loved classifying things, I had this more practical project about why algae grow where they are in the Yarra River catchment, how I might use that help us tell, talk about water quality, how we might monitor … deep down it was an excuse for me to still go and collect and classify algae, I think that was what was still driving me, but I, but I, you know, it had a practical vein.

Ok, um. Is it correct that you did your PhD in a relatively short time-frame?

18:56

I think these, these days it would be considered relatively, or those days, relatively short, but it was, it was three and a bit years. It was always going to be that. I think I was sort of the view you can always do something in a set time. I mean I'm not, I don't, I have a little bit of … I think if you set a kind of, and I do this through life generally, if you set a kind of timeframe and you do as much work as you can, I very quickly realised the PhD could go on forever or and it was really up to me to find, to find what it was. And I think the other things is, I *do* get sick of things, and while I enjoyed doing the PhD. And I should point out I went from Melbourne University where I did my degree to La Trobe Uni, and that was because there was a good supervisor there and I, and I quite liked going to another university, the change. I found by the end of it, I'd had enough of it and eventually, I think my, my career, when it gets in the Botanic Gardens, a lot of that is driven by not wanting to do the same thing all the time. And I'm not, I freely admit in my memoir that I'm not a particularly good scientist in a way, because I just can't focus for that length or period, [be]cause science is mostly 99% boring, tedious collection of data and I just can't do that.

That's interesting. Do you think. This is sort of a side question, do you think you would have prospered in an academic career then? Or do you think you took the right path in going towards working in … it's not really industry, but it's, it's outside an academic world.

20:38

Mm. Yeah, I've often thought about that, because I, every now and then I've thought I might go back into academia and I think it was always a possibility, and I probably, initially, thought that's where I'd be. I think the, what I would do if I was in academia, I would, I would, the lecturing and the other parts of the work, and, and a lot of academics of course will do research, lecturing and they may some other side hustle that's related to their work and if I did algae, I might get involved in environmental projects where I was, you know, I was the algal expert if you like. So I think I could have made that work. I do think, you know, looking back, it was a good change for me and working in industry, as you say, or working in a botanic garden and eventually becoming a CEO, or eventually have a role where you can talk about and lead and make decisions, but also not be sort of tied to the minutiae of detail, suited me far better. Look, I think a university career would have worked as well, I just would have had to think about the way I structured that.

Ok, so we've started to move into your working life and I guess one of my um … observations about that is that, as you say, you were a CEO, um, what doesn't come out in your memoir is, what's it like to be a CEO, day-to-day? Like, what are the kinds of things a CEO of a botanic garden has to do, what are the decisions you have to make?

22:33

Yeah, it's ah, I think the reason for that not coming out is that it's very different, I've found, I've talked to other CEOs, it can be a very different role wherever you are. And for me as a CEO I've always, always, liked the fact that you can run at a whole lot of parallel levels, if you like. So I can go out

and, you know, do an opening of an event and give a public speech, I can write about a particular botanical topic, I can go and give a talk to a plant society, I can then come back and sort of be involved in the budgeting of the gardens and I can start to plan for how we're going to do things. So the day-to-day of being a CEO is actually really hard to describe and I remember giving a talk a couple of years ago, and I was you know talking about a typical day as a CEO. And I, I, I just couldn't. I couldn't think of what it was like and in a way it sounded like I did nothing. On one hand, you stood there and you think well, the organisation would work entirely well without you, and I think you know, to be honest as a good CEO it should be something very like that, you should be there like the conductor of an orchestra. They can all still play their instruments and they could you know in a way play the tune, but you're there holding the whole thing together. So you know, when you, when you are doing it well, you're not getting down into the detail and able to skim across various bits and pieces, but for me, a typical day perhaps a bit different to some others was because I was an expert in my field, and I'm just mean in a technical sense I'm an expert, I'm a botanist, I wanted to do some botany at the same time. So I might start the morning by writing something, it might be a piece, an article or something, or a, and then when I get to work you know, I might deal with some of the, have meetings, but in between those, and even in a ten minute break or a half hour break, I might go back to some other piece of work that is slightly more intellectually challenging and that's creative and. So as a CEO there is the duller stuff, then there's the creative stuff. Some CEOs, it would be all about the business, for me it was mixing that running the business and being a figurehead for a cultural organisation. And I, I like that blend, you know that you have this, I've sometimes described it as a soapbox where you can use as a director, but you also have to do the technical details, so. And it changes and the unpredictability that means you can't describe a day as well, I like.

So the kinds of, you say meetings, um, that's something that I would project onto that job, that it would be full of meetings, what kinds of meetings would you have to attend.

25:00

Well you would have meetings with your staff, so you would have meetings with your executive team, you would have meetings with your senior leaders, you would have meetings about particular projects, so you might meet with a couple of your staff when you are about to put on a big event and you'll meet with them, talk through the logistics. So often there would be a series of meetings first, then it comes, comes up to you. Then there's external meetings, so that would be meeting with what people love to call stakeholders these days, but meeting with people who, ah, you want work with, or people who you need to influence. Or, and this might be with the City of Melbourne, or it might be with a government minister. So there are those kinds of meetings, there are meetings with the parent departments. So, for example, at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria there's the Environment Department which changes names every now and then, but that's, that's where you sit administratively so there are meetings to do with that, catching up with the Deputy Secretary of the Department or catching up with somebody who might

be, um, looking into your budget submission for that year. So the meetings vary, um, I, as anyone who works with me would probably know, I don't like meetings particularly and I would try to avoid having meetings when I could, probably to an extreme sometimes. Um, because I prefer to just kind of make decisions and have a short meeting. I do get by frustrated meetings that just go on about nothing. So I tried to not do those, but inevitably you have to meet [both laugh]. I think I thought maybe I could get rid of them all but I never could.

No. Um, so, all the places that you've been in these high management positions, so that would be the RBG, then Sydney Botanic Gardens, then Kew and then back to the RBG, is that be correct?

26:52

Yes. So, it's, beginning at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, then moving up to Sydney and the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, where I started as the Head of Science. So when I was first in Melbourne I was a botanist, I got a job there after I had been doing all this algal work, I got a job as a flora writer, and that meant you know writing up accounts of flowering plants – back to the Banksias – and other things and ferns and all kinds of things. And I loved that, because I felt like I was being paid to be a student and study new things. I thought that was, you know, an amazing job. And it also got me then interested in plants more broadly. So when I first worked it was at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria it was as a botanist, I then started to move up through sort of Head of Research or Research Manager there, and then the job came up in Sydney as what was called Director of Science and that seemed a big opportunity, both career-wise, but also a chance for me to move. Um, ah, I quite like, you know, trying different things, it was an opportunity to do something else. And I should mention that I got married along the way to Lynda, Lynda Martin, um and we had two children. I don't know if I should bring them up at this point or not, but that influenced those decisions and how far we moved. So we weren't going to go overseas, but moving to Sydney seemed quite reasonable. Jerome, who was born in 1988, and Emily in 1989, were at an age where they were, sort of, moved, um, into primary school. So we went to Sydney, I went as Head of Science, and then an opportunity came up to be Director there. I'd been Acting in the job for quite a while when the Director had been away, I always liked the, you know, doing that role and I, and then eventually, the Director that was there left, Frank Howarth, and I Acted for and then applied for and got that role as Director of Sydney. And Sydney is, you know, a very big, it's probably the biggest Botanic Garden in Australia and it has a strong science group as well, which I quite liked and three Botanic Gardens under it. So I worked there and then this job, a job came up at Kew Gardens in London. That was a big shift and in that case we had to leave our two children, Jerome and Emily, in, well they, well not had to, they were quite keen to stay in Sydney, they'd already found their home there. They were at university, um, they were happy, sort of outside [home], I think they were both living away from home by then. So we thought, this would be fun. Lynda was a French teacher, so she was interested in being closer to Europe, I think that had some appeal, there was the chance to sort of do a bit of travel, you know an adventure, a bit scary but

an adventure. So we, we took this job up, and I was Director of Living Collect…, no sorry, I was Director of Conservation, Living Collections and Estates. Which is a very odd kind of title and it effectively meant that about half of Kew Gardens was cobbled together to run different parts of Kew. And Kew is a huge place its 800 staff and a huge budget, so I had about 400 of the staff and I had these bits of horticulture and of landscape. I had the Millennium Seed Bank, which as a big venture, the conservation programs, so I looked after the old buildings and it was like being a mini-Director. So that's why, even though it wasn't Director of Kew, it was an opportunity to do something similar. We worked there for, well we lived there for two years in Kew Gardens and enjoyed that experience immensely, um you know, travelling in Europe, travelling in the UK. And I enjoyed the job there a lot, and then the Directorship came up, uh, of Kew Gardens, which I applied for and *didn't* get and that then set me thinking about what I'd do next. Because I had perhaps always, not that I hoped or thought maybe going to become Director of Kew would be a lovely, lovely thing to do, and for all kinds of reasons it didn't happen, which is kind of fine. But then, then the role came up back in Melbourne to be Director of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, a garden I loved, a garden I'd been brought up in, I'd started my career in. And the Director there had been there for twenty years, so I thought well you know the next person might be there for another twenty years and that might put me past my viable life as a Director. So I did apply and was successful and we came back to Melbourne after I'd done just under two years in Kew, so we weren't there that long. The plan was always to come back at some point, it wasn't going to be a forever job, but the two years was much shorter than we expected. We didn't get to every country, we didn't get to every [chuckles] every place we wanted to travel to, but we did come back and then spend ten years.

So each of those institutions would have been at least partially publicly funded, yes?

31:55

Yes

Yeah. Did they all also rely on, um, bequests or philanthropic monies as well?

They do, in fact there's slightly different mixes, but each of those gardens would have ah, money provided by the government coming in certain terms of the budget and then the rest you would provide through your own earned revenue. And that could be things like cafes or things like events, philanthropy, um sponsorships. Kew Gardens was only about 50% funded by the government and they had an entry fee. So you pay to go to Kew Gardens as you do in a lot of overseas gardens, and that's part of their revenue. Whereas in Melbourne, and in Australia, all the botanic gardens are free. And the subsidy is much higher, so the subsidy in Sydney, if you could call it a subsidy, was maybe 70%, 60, 70%. In Melbourne, it's more like 80% the government put in and the rest you would provide from these other things. In Sydney there were more options, there was the, the Domain which was around the outside of the Garden you could use for running big events and

the Sydney Festival used to run in there. They had a car park in fact that they ran and had car parking, so that there were more revenue sources, and then in Melbourne, you know, a lesser mix but still having that combination.

So are those public funds directed in particular ways, ah, so would some of it have to go on infrastructure, or have to go on research, or?

33:30

Not technically, I think in the end you often run the budgets with that in mind, so you do sort of think these are the core activities you must do, and the more we can raise from external money the more interesting things we can do. The more, you know, the more educational things we can do. In reality, I don't, I don't like to view it that way too much. I do see, and I've always seen the cultural elements of the gardens, the scientific elements, and the conservation elements as equally important. And I don't like to think you know we can run just the gardens and close the gates for example, and people will come in. Or we just, you know, look after the collections. I don't think that's what a botanic garden is. So, in the end, you tend not to put a dollar against you known, a dollar isn't directed towards a particular, so government money is not directed towards a particular area. When it comes to the crunch you often do have to talk about it that way sometimes to government to explain, and certainly say that you've been, you know, certain amount of money into certain areas and if you have to make cuts usually there's a discussion with government about where those cuts have to be made. And that is, then, because it's a public organisation, because it's a cultural organisation and since you report to a minister through a board, those decisions have to be made in consultation, so you're not totally independent as the CEO.

Yeah, I should probably clarify that in Australia we're talking about ah, State government funding aren't we? Do you get any, do the Botanical Gardens get Federal government funding or is left completely to the States?

[TE] They're primarily funded by the States, except for the Botanic Garden in Canberra, which is funded through the Commonwealth government, all the others are funded through the States, or in fact in Brisbane funded through the City Council. So there are different models. And there are, and regionally you'll find some gardens funded by council, some funded by Departments of governments, so there are different kinds of funding sources. But yes, in Australia it's mostly State government funding, and for Sydney and, and Melbourne, definitely State government funding, with research grants often coming from the Commonwealth. So with some of the botanical work, it would come through Commonwealth grants, like a university, and you're competing for them with universities.

So that's the equivalent of the NHMRC [National Health and Medical Research Council] sort of grants?

Yeah, and ARC [Australian Research Council] and various grants, yeah, and often, yeah, they'll be done in combination so with a university, they'll tend to

put in grants with the Botanic Garden, and museums and universities together and employ staff at each place

So would a lot of the research at each of the Botanic gardens that you've been at be done in collaboration with universities? How much would be in collaboration and how much, or even industry, how much would be purely um funded through the garden?

36:20

Yeah, that's changed over time. I think when I began a lot of the funds, for example, um, Melbourne was internally funded and the research was done almost independently. And in, and I should say that taxonomy is a field where people have often worked alone, which is unusual these days. You work by yourself, studying a group, and do the work. And these days papers of course have many, many authors usually and there are many collaborators, which is you know generally a good thing. And that's changed over time, but I would say it could be about 50/50 but usually any, any decent kind of research, or a scientist at the Gardens would be expected to be bringing in grants from outside, and be expected to be supervising students, and be expected to be teaching at universities to some degree. So there, they, there are very few who would not be doing that and they might.

So would they have partial positions in the universities? Because I know that's how it can work with doctors in public hospitals.

Yeah, some, there are some combined positions, we tend not to, haven't done much of that in, in Melbourne. Some. Adelaide I know does that to a greater extent. There are pros and cons in that. Universities can be very strong partners and they can dominate. And there's always a tendency in Botanic gardens to be a little bit wary of those sometimes. But the reality is, and one of the you know, one of the more interesting positions at Melbourne Gardens at the moment is a post-doctoral fellowship that's funded through philanthropy, half the funds were raised by the university, half by the Botanic Gardens and then invested and the money coming off that, the interest, supports the post-doc and that person is based either at the gardens, as a joint position as we were talking about. So it's done. Often though it's more like a position based or funded if you like, where they're a public servant or a public sector position through the Gardens and they just get involved in research at the, you know …

So internal research?

38:20

Yeah, yeah. It's interesting, there are so many combinations, we had a research group working on urban ecology for quite a number of years when I started at the gardens it was already going. But that was a combined. The Baker Foundation funded a lot of it, but it was really, it was based at the University of Melbourne. The offices were there the staff were there, the, a lot of them were employed by the university and there were some staff employed

by the gardens so that was quite integrated and that ended up finishing up just because the funding stopped.

And what about in the UK, when you were at Kew?

Yeah, Kew there were joint positions. A lot of people there would hold a professorship at a university, either sort of technically or as an honorary role. So my own professorship is an honorary position at the University of Melbourne and that's done a lot. So a lot of the researchers at Kew in London would have connections with um universities and um it could be at Reading, or it could be Oxford or Cambridge or London, anyhow the different universities, but they tended to have connections with certain universities, historically. And they would, um, and if you supervise a student, I mean the best way to get fresh people and fresh ideas of course is to be involved in some kind of teaching or supervision of students and that would require some connection to the university as well.

Ok, um, … so coming back to you as being, um, a CEO or a Manager in various different levels at different gardens, you, um, you've said in your memoir that you like to keep control of the message. You like to um, … yes, put out a particular message about the garden,

Mmm

whichever garden you were working at. And it seems to me from having read the memoir, that for you there is also a bigger idea that you have about what gardens should be and how they should function, and how they should function in relation to the rest of society. Um. Could you tell me a bit about how you developed that position?

40:35

Mmm. Well just, if I could just take one step back, you're quite right about that sort of controlling the message, if you like, and sometimes to I think the detriment sometimes, so I realise looking back I always very much liked to have a consistent message coming out of the Gardens and I got a bit frustrated if we didn't do it well. So media is something I liked doing, I like being able to communicate and I like to have a strong message, and so when I saw it weaker or not as strong I would kind of maybe step in, so it, so I did do that. When, and then, as you, the more you talk and the more you give talks, and the one thing I've done all through my career is give talks to groups and that can be, I mentioned before, you know plant societies or field naturalists clubs, or PROBUS groups, whatever, I, I tend to say yes to those. I, I think it's important to me to say yes as often as I can, and I like doing that. And you do find that when you give those talks you start to, you have to think about what you're going to talk about obviously, and I might talk about um, you know, the Botanic Gardens itself, I might talk about climate change, I might give a talk about the history of something, to me, you always have to have an element of a slightly higher theme if you like. I don't like giving a talk where I'm just going to run through the Botanic Gardens had ten gardens and this is what they do, this is the event we do, I like to have a narrative and I found that narrative

started to develop, and that, and that was around what botanic gardens are, what they can do, and why we need a botanic garden. And I found that quite an interesting provocation too, because I like that as well, I like sometimes when you can test people's assumptions, and even at big international meetings I like to sort of test, you know I might go to a botanic garden meeting we all think they're great, I like to test well are we great? Why do we do what we do? Why do the government give us money? Why should they keep supporting us? And in, in the memoir, you probably recall I did that frame that in terms of reading a novel that happened to, um, sort of, make a critique of botanic gardens. This is by Robert Dessaix, it, I liked that particularly and I did use that, I used that a lot in talks and I've done, in other things, I like a kind of a, use that word again, provocation, but a way to test myself. And when I did that, I started to think about what a botanic garden was, and I was a scientist by training, I became very interested in the public side, the events side, I love a botanic garden that's engaging and brings people in and that became very important to me. I don't, I don't see the point of botanic garden that doesn't have, isn't excited to have people coming in. I also realised we were doing a lots of important conservation work, but I got a little bit frustrated by people tending to say you need to be one or the other. And this would happen in kind of corporate planning meetings, you know, coming back to not liking meetings. Ones I hate are corporate planning meetings probably. And only, only because I love the big thinking, but what I don't like is you tend to have to say well what, what do you really do? We're, we're here to save plants. And I would go, well, yeah we are, but we're also more than that. I'm comfortable holding multiple things at the one time, and I really do believe that a botanic garden that's good does a whole bunch of things together. And I talk about those – nature, culture and science – and more recently I've been, um, I've just written something a few weeks ago about healing gardens and, and done a few talks on that, about the fact that there's, ah, there's so many different ways we are involved in the health of people and the health of the planet and that's quite a nice take for us to think about. You know, comparing ourselves to hospitals, comparing ourselves, you know, probably during COVID and I was starting to think of a lot about this, what do we do in terms of emergency responses, what do we do in terms of, um, helping the community to stay healthy? And so, you know, coming back to your question around, what do botanic gardens do, I just felt that I'd developed these ideas and I'd give talks on them, I would, they change over time but that it, for me it gave a, a broader theme to what I was saying and to me that's important to have a bigger narrative when you're talking, not just sort of relaying the facts.

Um, ok, … So, yes, you, you've called yourself a provocateur, or, you saying you like provocation and I can read through the book, the memoir, that you like to be a bit of a provocateur. Um, … in relation to your work with the AGHS, how did you come to be involved with them?

45:32

Well, that's a good connection actually, the provocateur and the AGHS, because, and I would, I should add very quickly that I think I'm a, I like to be provocative but in a, a kind of gentle way to sort of. Hopefully, people, I'm provoking them but not irritating them, and if I get that right [chuckles], that's

where I like to be. But, the interesting connection is the first thing I recall or the first connection I had with the Australian Garden History Society was back in the early 1990s and the editor of the journal, named Richard Aitken, was looking around for some reason, I'm not sure why, but he was looking for people to review books. And I was always interested in writing, this is a theme throughout my life, I'm probably a slightly frustrated writer, and, frustrated in the sense that I would like to do more of it, and I was keen to write these book reviews and I can't remember if he asked me or if I offered to do it, so I started to write book reviews and, I, he quite liked them I think because I was, I was you know, cheeky and always quite honest. So I was never someone who would write a book review and say, this is lovely, and I would always put, try and make the writing interesting, because otherwise I wouldn't write it. And I was looking back on one when I was preparing for this interview, and I was saying to Lynda, it reads like I'm a pretentious git [both laugh] in a bad way, but in a positive way I was enjoying writing. You could see that I was enjoying the, the, getting into words, I was enjoying gently poking and provoking and not just saying 'this is a great book because it's about the history of gardens and it's a very worthy book". And I often tend to say something is worthy 'but' [laughs]. So anyway, Richard Aitken seemed to like that and so he would come to me with books and get me to review things that I didn't necessarily know much about. And again, this is probably a theme in my life, I like to talk about things that I know nothing about and then within half an hour can become a sudden expert and then talk on radio, and I love that. I love the, kind of excitement of that, because there's a real buzz in being able to talk to your experts in your gardens and then being able to convert and translate that, and then talk to me a day later and I'll have forgotten what I was talking about probably. But, in those um, book reviews I, I, it was I enjoyed it and it was a chance. And that was the connection I had with the Society way back then, the only connection I think. I don't recall going to meetings initially. And, I did that through the 1990s, this is when I was working at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and I was into writing, I was doing a bit of writing for The Age newspaper then too, so I was starting to try and write in as many different places as I could. So this was before I had an opportunity, so to be fair I was probably taking advantage of, of them in a way, as a chance to write. And that's how it started.

Mmm

48:33

Um. But then I did end up sort of making various connections with people. And there are people in the Society that I've crossed paths with and met through the Botanic Gardens, and people in Sydney, Colleen Morris and Howard Tanner, um, Peter Watts, who is in Sydney, these are kinds of people in the Society that people know. And that, um, that was a, those, I got more and more interested I think in that history of gardens and also working in a botanic garden you, you realise you're looking after these amazing heritage landscapes. And so there's obviously a connection between Garden History and what I was doing in my, my day job. So I did start to go to, um, meetings. I started to give talks, or was invited to give a few talks, and I spoke on, for example, Joseph Banks – you know we were talking before about mixed legacies of people, and about um, him as a, a sort of starting the, the

foundation of scientific botany in Australia, but also you known of setting up colonial Australia and the big changes wrought there. So I found that an interesting contradiction, or to go through the history of the Gardens, um, the need to replace trees. One thing I've spoken a bit about, and it all fed from a, a major event I talk about in the memoir, which is removing trees in the Domain, some fig trees, now that was a, you know I, you can read about that in the memoir, I do a whole chapter on it, so there's too much already, but it was formative both in giving me the courage to go out and speak on these issues and also meant that I would then contribute later on into debates about looking after, you know, sometimes it's the right thing to remove a tree, and sometimes, um, you need to think about the future and the tree does need to come out. And that's, these are hard topics, particularly within in Australian Garden History Society, where we tend to think that every tree is sacred or every garden is sacred. It gets me into ideas about heritage gardens and how to care for those when the trees die, when climate has changed and we're going to have to put different trees to survive when the design of the garden no longer exists, what do they think the garden looked like. I find those topics really interesting and I'm, my own view on a lot of that is, uh, is very nuanced and, and you know it's case by case. I don't have a kind of 'you must preserve a garden exactly how it was in a particular year'. And that's important in botanic gardens because they're not created in one year, they're created over a hundred and seventy-six years, in the case of Melbourne Gardens, and they change through that time.

Is that at odds with Kew's um approach to having a very large historic garden? I'm, I'm just wondering.

51:30

It is and it isn't. I think if you look through Kew in detail you'll find there's new children's gardens, there's a new Mediterranean garden, so in a way they keep the bones of it and the keep the heritage and they have the lovely history that people love about it but they are adding new gardens for exactly the same reasons. They, they, their mission or their vision is to change people's lives, to conserve plants, and the only way they can do that is if people are interested and come there. So, you do conserve the heritage, but in a way that it's, it's a changing heritage and it's quite subtle in some ways. But Melbourne, Melbourne Gardens is a great example, well Cranbourne is different because its – this is the other garden I used to look after at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria – that's a newish garden within bushland but the Melbourne Gardens are you know a heritage garden with a very set framework of paths and gardens, designed by William Guilfoyle, and I think it's, it's quite beautiful, but perhaps the most beautiful botanic garden landscape in the world, and that, that can be both good and bad. You know you're constrained by that, so you don't want to ruin that, but equally you have to keep reinventing and changing, I think, because you're a botanic garden you're not there just to hold on to that historic landscape. And I think it's been done well at Melbourne, you know before, during and it will after my time, in adding elements of landscape that fit in but that take it somewhere else. And a great example is the new arid garden, the cacti and succulents, or the volcano

as it's called there, these are elements that connect, they're still linked to the old garden but they take it somewhere else.

Yes, I ask about Kew because um having visited many National Trust buildings and a little bit about their codes and listings I wondered whether that extended into an attitude towards maintaining a particular idea of a historical garden.

It does, it extends in a legislative sense as well because these are, it's World Heritage listed, at Kew. Melbourne is listed on a State basis I think and that does constrain what you can do. So technically you can't move the path, you can't make the path wider, this is at Melbourne, and Kew's the same, you know, kind of got certain constraints and that's reasonable. It just means that you work within those constraints and certainly with Kew, while I was there I was chairing their World Heritage Committee and you work with the neighbours around the area, because it's a sort of broader heritage area around Kew as well that it's part of, and that does mean you need to look after the elements, the historical elements, you know, where the first garden was at Kew, um, near the palace, Kew Palace, look after some of those views and vistas, but like any, like a building, you do your conservation analysis, you work out what the important things are and they can be infrastructure or they can be less tangible things, or less tangible in a sense, or the views, the feel of the garden, the landscape style.

Oh, like, sort of you know, particular vistas …

Vistas are very important …

They've been designed 200, 300 years ago …

They have, although I often comment that I think if you brought back William Guilfoyle he'd, he'd chop down a lot of trees in the Gardens, [be]cause we'd stuffed up his views. You know. When he planted, he would have thought, oh I'll come back in fifty years and change this again. For sure.

Yes, well that brings me around to um another set of questions, because the [Melbourne Botanic] Gardens, as you know, are built in an area that used to be um a meeting place for the local Indigenous people before 'we' arrived. Um, how does the Garden, in both the [Melbourne] Botanic Gardens and also the Sydney Gardens, how do each of those deal with that kind of history?

Mmm, yeah, that shared history, or that combined history.

Yeah

55:38

It is, it's something that's always in our thoughts and always a consideration. And you do it in different ways. There are, if you look at Melbourne, there are elements of that Garden that have been restored back to the original vegetation around the [Yarra] River, so we're bringing back the Indigenous plants and through that, using those to interpret the local First Nations culture,

the Wurundjeri, ah, Woiwurrung, also having a lot of educational tours that connect people's plants using local knowledge. So there are educational ways of doing it. And the same out at Cranbourne as well. In Sydney there is a connections garden there between the colonial first gardens around Sydney, which didn't work, versus the natural vegetation which was full things, of, you know, people could have lived off and they didn't. And that's interpreted very strongly within the Garden. So you do that kind of thing. And it's interesting, some new signage went in, wayfinding, at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens before I left there and that's got a really deep connection to the country but not in a sort of a 'berries and sticks' way, as it was put to me. It's more there are colours for the different zones of the Gardens so that the signage has colours for the highlands, for the meeting areas, for the River, and so embedded in the wayfinding is the cultural elements of that land before it was a Botanic Garden, without doing something like, putting the berries and sticks and having a symbol of an Aboriginal culture, it's trying, and we worked with local communities to do this, that was a preferred way of doing it. So it's still a botanic garden, but it has that deep connection. Now there are things, there are many more things that need to be done at Melbourne. One of the interesting, it's not quite the question you asked, but one thing that interests me a lot um before I left, and I was talking a bit about it was, sometimes people would say why don't you return the Botanic Garden to natural vegetation, why don't you return it to the plants that used to grow there? This is an old-fashioned idea of having exotic plants in the middle of a Garden – shouldn't the Botanic Garden be turned back into the, the, what grows around the River and perhaps the landscape that was there before the city? And I think that's, it's a good question to ask, but my response would be that I would knock down the Art Gallery, I would knock down the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground], and I would put that vegetation there and I would keep the Botanic Garden because it's far more important than those places. So it's, it's a misunderstanding of what a Botanic Garden is …

Provocateur …

Yeah. But it is, it's a misunderstanding of what a Botanic Garden is, it's not just plants. It's kind of saying, well because plants grow in a botanic garden, it's the same as restoring vegetation. It's, it's not, it's a cultural institution that does a whole bunch of other things, like the Gallery, like the MCG, like the State Library.

And, obviously, then there are attempts to bring in Indigenous culture as well, as you've been describing. Is that part of the thinking behind Cranbourne as well, is it a greater part of the thinking behind Cranbourne as well?

It's stronger at Cranbourne, because, partly because it's a newer garden, there's the change to build it in, in a more integrated way and talk about seasons, Indigenous seasons, in some of the displays at Cranbourne and ah, the plant material that's on the signage there has a stronger connection. And because there is bushland as well. You know, 300 hectares of heathland and that, that is managed as a conservation zone, but also because of its connection to Country as well. So we, again, I think there's more that can be

done out there, but it's, it's designed, I suppose the theme of an Australian Garden lends itself to, you would hope, to an Australia that goes back 60,000 years or more, not an Australia that goes back a couple of hundred years.

Yep, and within that is there an exploration or research or acknowledgement of Indigenous cultivation practices? So we're talking about gardening, so rather than just you know, it's an Indigenous Australia plant, the way that Indigenous people, Aboriginal people in Australia might have actually cultivated?

1:00:00

I think that will emerge. I think that will emerge and because that's a concept that's probably got more um profile in recent years particularly through Bruce Pascoe's book [*Dark Emu*] and other, other publications. That, that idea of it, of agriculture of some form and the cultivation but it, so, so the short answer is we don't do a lot of that at the moment out at Cranbourne but definitely that would, that is something that's been talked about, how do we best do that. Because to change a Botanic Garden takes bit of planning, time and landscaping but it would eventually. But it does bring up a, you know, a related issue, which is about cultural landscapes and probably returning a bit, connecting a bit to the Australian Garden History Society, there's been a discussion over recent years about the Australia Garden History Society being a society that should have a broader interest in cultural landscapes, it's not just about big old gardens of rich people, to put it bluntly. And it's about broader landscapes, it's about restoration perhaps and that would connect up through to the garden-*ing*, or the interventions by First Nations people, but it's also you know of course as we know the whole of Australia is a cultural landscape because of fire and because of people living here for so long. My, coming. Interestingly I began, by sort of this discussion within the Society, by encouraging us to think more broadly, in, I've, I've [now] reversed a little bit in recent months and on that issue, I'm a bit worried that we're going to have scope-creep and our society is will become the Society for everything. Because if you're a society for cultural landscapes I do think you then have responsibility for um, because they're all cultural landscapes, the North of Australia, or South-West Tasmania, or every piece of vegetation in the whole of Australia and that's not quite I think what people mean when they're talking about Garden History. So, I, I there's a definitional problem, that's a bit technical in a sense, but if the Society is interested in those plants where we ah manipulate or we actually cultivate or we change, if that's the incentive, you can take that all the way through to the whole country, but then that becomes National Parks, and that becomes a society that's interested in all kinds of other things that I think is not that productive. Because you would end up having, um, if you're overlapping with groups that do that, so I can't see the point in that. But I can see an interesting point around where does Garden History take you, and I mean, I think it takes you into suburban gardens, I think it takes you into the gardens of the less rich, I think it take you into balconies, and takes you into perhaps urban environments, and to some extent um gardening when restoration is gardening, and some restoration is very strongly gardening. You know, the replanting of plants around where we live here, those, that's about gardening, it's about, I think I can see that connecting to Garden History. What I can't quite see is that a piece of forest

that is being, or has been burnt for tens of thousands of years, but that, what would we add as a Society to that?

I suppose what I'm thinking, or asking, more is there research being done into what kinds of practices that might be recognised as gardening by non-Indigenous people, that Indigenous people were doing, or have done in the past, or might even be doing in their gardens now, whether that's been looked at?

It. Not as far as I know. But that would be of relevance and would be interesting. And I think that is, what I've noticed, or we've all noticed now, is that conferences start with usually with consideration of the deeper history of the country and that will be by a local Indigenous person talking about that, often about the geology of the country, the age of the rocks, about the history and they will work their way up through to the gardens of the rich and famous. Sort of, that's a caricature. But that, that interest and the looking at gardening, to use that term, or gardens in an Indigenous sense is an, is an interesting and fertile area. But the risk is of course that you need that to be done by people in a community, or on behalf of a community, it's very hard to do that as a, as a westerner.

I suppose there are people, um, who could be asked, or who you know are interested, um, or drawn to do collaborations or whatever …

Yeah, I think that's the way. Yeah.

… various Indigenous institutes around various universities. Ok. So you [sighs] … you've talked about ageing gardens and the need to have intervention in them, um, you've talked about, you know, bigger picture issues … and your own expertise both in management and research … you've talked quite a bit about, um, having interactions with various levels of government as well in running the gardens, have you ever considered going into politics yourself?

1:06:00

Um, I haven't. I've been suggested, it's been suggested. No, um not suggested to me I do it, suggested that people think I must be wanting to, which is perhaps a different way of putting it. I, um, politics interests me, and I enjoy working with government, and I particularly used to enjoy in Sydney, we were a lot closer to the State government and we worked a more with Ministers and Departments and their officers. I don't think I would do it because it is a difficult game and you need to be a really strong people-person and one thing I, while I like talking to people, I like talking with them to a certain extent, I'm not necessarily good at the kind of social chit chat, but, don't enjoy let's say. I can do it, but I don't enjoy it. And I think as a politician, you might, despite how some of them seem to be, that is something they need. So look, I, politics is interesting and I haven't really ever seriously considered it though. It's, um, I like working at the edge of politics, and I like the political aspect of working at a Botanic Garden or a cultural institution but I don't think I would get into politics.

Ok. Even if it meant that you could effect your bigger vision about gardens?

Yeah, ah, yeah, that's interesting, that is a reason people go into politics, to do things, to change the world. Um, I don't think that I would do it for that reason, it's partly the stage of career I'm at now too, and it's not where I want to be. And I think others are just as effective on it and I don't think you would make major changes to some of the things I'm interested in by being a politician. And that's just from watching people going into politics and watching what they can do and it just doesn't seem the ideal way. Which, which is interesting in terms of the, the Society then, the Australian Garden History Society, the, what influence it has and how much it lobbies, you know, the politics of that society, which I haven't done a lot of and that's probably another interesting point, as a CEO you are politically neutral and adaptable to the government of the time. You like some governments more than others and you have to have your own biases but you do need to be, um, there for the organisation working with whatever government there is, so you're not really trying to change things in that sense so you lobby in a different kind of way. So I'm probably used to that lobbying behind the scenes than I am lobbying overtly. And you know going right back to you know protesting, I wasn't so much in the Franklin River or on a boat on the Franklin River, I was doing it perhaps behind the scenes.

Ok, the pen is mightier than the shovel?

Well, yeah, yes. [Laugh] Sometimes it is.

If you had your time again, you know, career-wise, would you do anything differently? Would it still relate back to gardens in some sense or to plant life in some sense?

I find that an interesting question because I'm not, I don't like the kind of what ifs in history, I find that really irritating. Not, not. It's a good question, but I'm just saying that when people go through history and people say well what if you know Napoleon hadn't done this, or what if he'd got on a ship and come to Australia instead of going somewhere else. And of course, you know, that would have changed everything in so many hundred thousand ways. So you know. But, to your point. I think it could be entirely different, I mean interestingly, I think if I ran my life entirely it would not have to be in plants and botany. I do think that there were chance events and decision, you know, was I going to, I loved maths for a long time and I was really interested in pure maths. I don't like applied maths but I found that [pure maths] fascinating, so I could see myself doing that. At the end of, um, I think my PhD I was getting a bit tired of research and I was really interested in journalism, and I might have applied for something and I didn't get in. But I would like, I think I'd enjoy journalism to an extent, and law is something I've been intrigued by. So, we all that the things we might have done. I feel if I went, looking back I feel I've made a good decision because I can use botany and I can use plants and gardens to do all the other things I like, and that is writing and explaining and teaching and changing and leading and all those kinds of things. I think I could

transpose that, I'm of the view, I think I could pop that down and do something entirely different. Whether I'd be as successful who knows.

Well if you're interested in the law, there's actually nothing to stop you from doing a law degree now

No, no.

It doesn't have to be rewriting the past

No. That's, that's right, exactly, but again I have I mean, my son Jerome is a barrister, a lawyer and I enjoy having conversations with him. I mean he enjoys talking through cases with me. And I think. And just. And then I think at least I don't have to take anything to court now and lose. I can have the intellectual conversation. I think that's interesting, the journalism one is interesting. Looking at what a journalist's life is like, and, the writing pressures and the deadlines, I don't actually think I'd like that that much. I kind of, I like setting my own deadlines and I keep them, as we've talked about, and I'm really precise on that but I like setting them myself, and that's what you can do as a CEO you see. But as journalist they would be set by someone else, so I do think it's an ideal arrangement where I can write for magazines and op-eds and do radio and things but my day job as a Botanic Gardens Director that in a way, as you said, would I do it differently?, I think that's turned out to be a great mix.

Yes. It's clear through your memoir that you've always managed to be a science communicator at the same time, I mean the two parts of your career seem to have meshed, that you've used your position in order to get out a message in a way journalist would hope to get out a message anyway

And that's been an essential part of the job for me, I don't think I would do it without that and it is, is, a great, opportunity to do that, or a chance to do that and you, it's I suppose it's, think … yeah I suppose people can do it in different ways and I don't think every Director of a Botanic Garden or every Director of a cultural institution has to be the same, and you can do it without that, but for me that makes it all work.

Ok, I think I've asked all the questions that I wanted to ask. Is there is anything else that I haven't touched on that you would like to leave on record

1:13:22

Let me think, I think we've covered, we've covered the background pretty well, thank you, and the Society. I should have mentioned that I'm the Patron of the Australian Garden History Society which is something I've been since 2018 and I don't quite know how that came about but it's possibly through some of those people I mentioned earlier on and I think Richard Heathcote might have been President at that time and they were looking around for a new Patron. And I am, I'm the Patron of a few different organisations including, I've been the Patron of the Cactus and Succulent Societies in New South Wales and Victoria. A thing called the Fungi Map a citizen science programme, Mossman

Botanic Garden in Queensland and a thing called Plant Trust. So I, I mention those partly because I think it's good to have them on – oh, one other one is the Friends of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens. I mention it because it's another role of being CEO of a Botanic Gardens and being able to be Patron of these sorts of places where you don't have a, a, a really sort of, you don't have a lot of, don't spend a lot of time but you might go to general meetings, you might give a talk, you might present things or you might give advice and I quite like those roles. So being with the Australian Garden History Society as a Patron has been a lovely role and I've, that means I write an introduction to the um meetings, the conferences quite often in their little booklet, I'll give a talk and I've spoken about some of the talks I give. And it also means, and I should mention, I mentioned Lynda, my wife, Lynda has become a member of the Victorian chapter, about a year after I became Patron we were in New Zealand and she became the, um, became involved in being part of the regional committee that looks after Victoria, as their newsletter editor and that's been great too. That's actually worked for both of us too, both having an interest in gardens and Lynda has a botanical background as well as French teaching and so, that's also quite a nice way for that to fit into our lives, you know, having that common interest. We've always had a common botanical interest. And I think if I looked at the Society, I think the only other thing to mention is getting involved in some of the tours that they lead around ah Victoria, being able to keep giving talks, if I can, and that opportunity to you know, going right back to where I started, to be able to provoke, it might have been through book reviews initially, but now I can do it through giving talks. So I've evolved from doing it subtly, in doing it through book reviews, to now being able to do it though talks. [whispered - It's good].

Ok, so that's it, so then I think I should finish by thanking you for taking part, giving your time to doing this and I'll turn the recording off and explain to some of the subsequent practicalities and administration that will follow on.

1:16:40