

# Australian Garden HISTORY

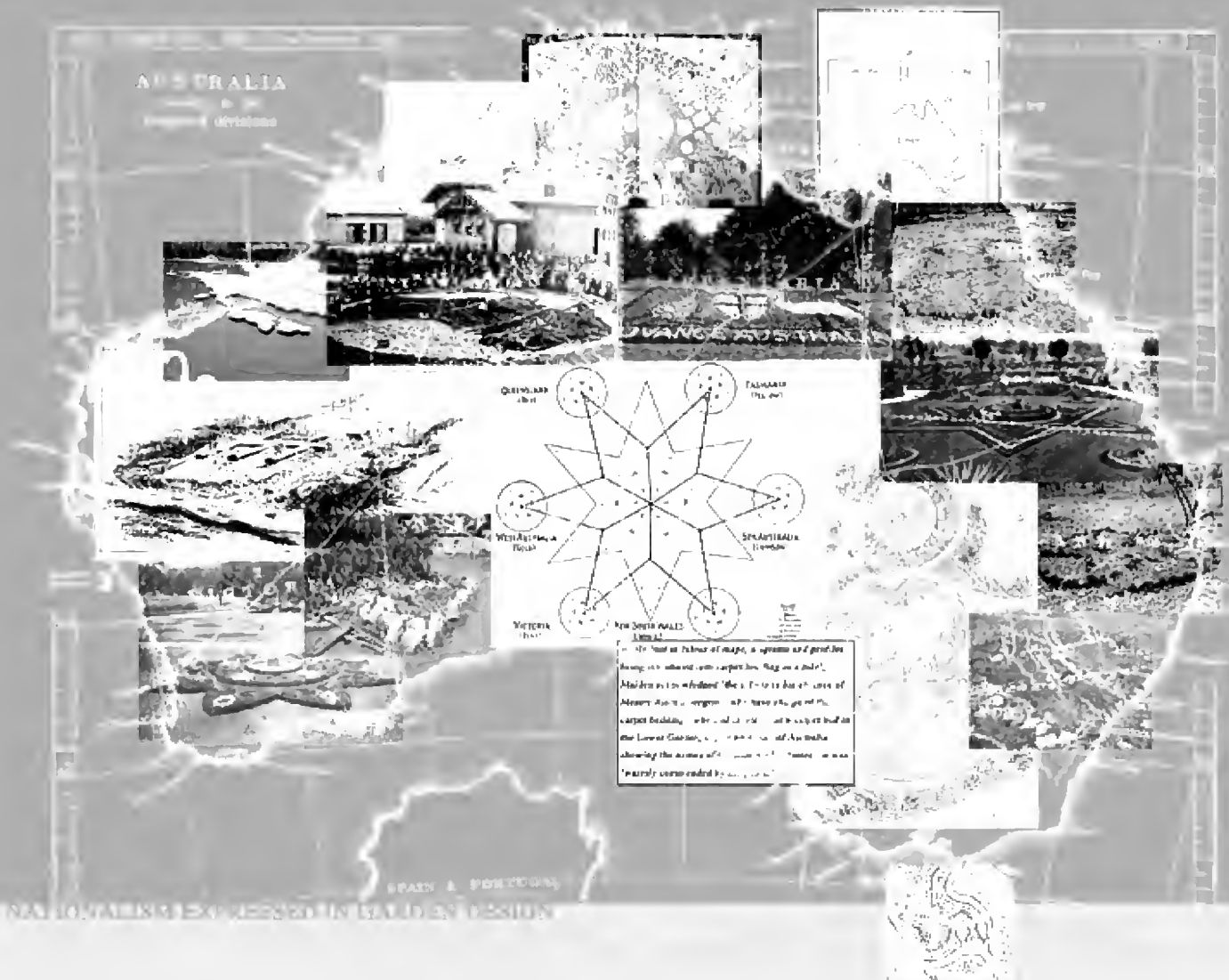
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*New light on Bolobek*

*Gardening nationalism*

*Curvaceous Scottish centrefold*

*John Stevens tribute*



# Australian Garden

HISTORY

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*The poplar walk at Bolobek has been a long-standing feature of the garden, linking the house with pond—see story opposite.*

# *Bolobek: new light on a much-loved garden*

*Neil Robertson*

Bolobek occupies a special place in the hearts of Australian gardeners as the setting of Joan Law-Smith's much-loved Macedon garden. Now, newly discovered archival photographs from the Syme family reveal an earlier garden at Bolobek, one redolent of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Bolobek is possibly the most written-about garden in Australia. Through her books, the late Joan Law-Smith created a unique record of her time at Bolobek and the development of the garden under her custodianship. In addition to her writings, Bolobek has featured in numerous books and magazines, both locally and internationally. Although Joan Law-Smith was always generous in acknowledging the debt she owed to the Syme family for creating the framework around which she was able to weave her own planting schemes, I suspect relatively few people today have any awareness that Bolobek was recognised as an important garden from its very beginnings.

As is often the case when properties change hands, records come to light and this is the case here. After purchasing the property in 2006, my brother and sister-in-law Hugh and Brigid Robertson made contact with Randal Macdonald, a grandson of Oswald Syme, who produced an album of

photographs (some of which are reproduced here) that chart the development of a much-loved family property. These were almost certainly taken by Oswald Syme, a keen and gifted photographer, and developed in his state of the art darkroom at Bolobek.

Bolobek—correctly pronounced with a long ‘o’ as in the bole of a tree; the name incidentally means gently undulating land—does not predate the Syme era as an entity in its own right. The Symes created the estate by the purchase of various pieces of land between 1910 and 1914. Oswald, the youngest son of David Syme, founder of the Melbourne *Age*, was born in 1878. He was educated at Hamilton College in the Western District then worked at the *Age* office for seven years from 1896 to 1903. Thereafter until 1910 he lived at the family home, Killara, near Woori Yallock in the Yarra Valley. Presumably it was the prospect of a farming career and the availability



*The newly completed Bolobek house as the Syme family found it on 13 January 1911. For the past year they had been able to watch its progress from the neighbouring property, Lilliesleaf, which they had leased in February 1910.*



*Oswald Syme purchased the renowned local property Wooling in 1914. Straddling the Baringo Creek, this was the ideal site for the reservoir that has been the lifeblood of Bolobek's garden. Like other wealthy landowners of the period, Syme installed his own hydroelectric scheme.*

*Within a few years, the garden began to take shape. This picture was taken prior to the addition of the straight balcony around 1920. The sunken croquet lawn is retained in the current garden.*





*View across the property from the north shows the scale of the Syme plantings. Pines, cypresses, and willows describe laneways and drains as well as enclosing paddocks. Substantial shelterbelts wrap and protect the homestead and garden.*

of land that led him to Macedon. Another factor would probably have been his marriage in 1908 to Mildred Rowe.

According to the Syme's granddaughter, Jean Gilbert, who holds many family papers including a number of Oswald and Mildred Syme's diaries, the couple moved from Killara and leased a house at Macedon in February 1910 while Bolobek was being built. They moved into the newly completed house on the 13th of January 1911.

Just as Oswald was a devoted farmer, being a member of the Royal Agricultural Society and the owner of a well known and successful Romney

Marsh stud, Mildred was a dedicated gardener. Although it is still unclear just who designed the garden—and for that matter the architect of the house—it is not surprising given the elements of house and garden to discover that Mildred supported the Arts and Crafts Society, collected pottery and paintings, and belonged to a circle that included Nellie Melba and Violet Teague. Jean Gilbert recalls that her grandmother loved her garden and took a very personal interest in it.

So it is reasonable to conclude that Mildred had a strong input into the garden's planting and development. As the photos attest, the



*A broad view towards the house and garden from the north west (pre-1920). The wooden pergola is on the site of Joan Law-Smith's crab apple walk. Immediately in front of this are the lime trees (*Tilia* sp.) which today form the boundary between the garden and the park. A serpentine path winds past the orchard to intersect with the poplar walk (see pages 6–7). Remnant trees from the Syme's orchard remain and recently new trees have been added, propagated from budwood taken from the survivors.*



In his diary for May 1913, Syme noted the commencement of the erection of the 'Draught Stable'. Complete with stone floors the horses were housed on one side of the arch with the sulky stored on the other.

development was rapid with bisecting poplar and lime walks making their presence felt early in the piece. These two aspects of the garden are still possibly its most memorable features.

*Even when she was quite old and frail, she insisted on pruning the roses herself so they were done properly. I think there were as many as four full-time gardeners at one stage but my memories as a little girl just after the war were of two: Taylor, who seemed very old and bent, and Walters who I think was his son-in-law and was extremely deaf as a result of some wartime incident.*

The Symes had two daughters: Nancy born in 1909, and Margaret in 1914. For Nancy's three elder children Jean, Ranald, and Moira Macdonald, Bolobek was very much a favourite holiday house and a welcome retreat from the summer heat of the Riverina.

*It was just a magic secret garden to us as children as there were so many different compartments and places to hide. The see-saw lawn, the stream wandering through rocks down behind the tennis court, the summer house where we were able to make horrible smells with our chemistry set!*

In the 1950s, the garden grew and matured. The Symes were generous hosts and happily shared their garden which was regularly used for charity events.

Following the deaths of Mildred in 1966 and Oswald in 1967, the property was sold to Joan and Robert Law-Smith and a new era in Bolobek's life began. The demolition of the house and outbuildings radically altered the garden's dynamic but interestingly—and very much as a tribute to the strength of its design—the new house was sited in more or less the same position. Within this maturing framework, Joan Law-Smith proceeded to incorporate new aspects. The crab apple walk



The house viewed looking back along the Lombardy poplar (*Populus nigra 'italica'*) walk from the pond at the bottom of the garden. To the left of these are numerous sapling grey poplars (*P. alba*) that today create a magical effect in all seasons in the park.

replaced the earlier wooden pergolas, while the substantial brick pergola created another axis looking across the garden. The tennis courts, integral to the social life of the Syme era, were replaced by a rose garden. The planting schemes were also gently altered and tweaked to achieve Joan's favoured pastel colour schemes—but here and there a glowing rhododendron is still a reminder of Edwardian exuberance! Today it is easy to see why Joan was drawn to Bolobek. Its superb mature trees make it an essentially green garden, and the sense of enclosure makes it a magical place.

Following the Law-Smith's decision to sell the property in 1990, it passed through a number of hands and for a time it appeared likely that the garden would suffer the fate of so many other famous Australian gardens and become only a memory. But in its third change of ownership it was fortunate in being bought by Jill and Greville Edgerton, who did a magnificent rescue job slaying thousands of blackberries and peeling away layers of stickyweed to expose beds and shrubberies to light and air again. Their decision to sell in 2006 enabled Hugh and Brigid Robertson to take on the role of custodians of this great garden.

Now nearly 100 years old, the challenges of managing Bolobek are quite different from those faced by the Symes or the Law-Smiths. Mildred and Oswald Syme's was to create a garden and Joan Law-Smith's was to transform it at that perfect moment of its maturity. But the Robertsons face the challenge of an aging garden where the ample provision of water and consistently good gardening practices for almost its entire life, coupled with the inevitable overplanting of a couple of generations, mean that the garden needs to be managed very carefully in order for it to continue to flourish. Large trees in themselves create challenges. For example the famous crab apple walk thrived in dappled sunlight when it was established nearly forty years ago; today mature trees cast deep shade and the crab apples struggle. Outside the garden, age and years of drought have taken their toll on the large shelterbelts which wrap the garden, temper the fierce north winds and protect the more delicate deciduous trees. The replacement of these is a huge undertaking.

Within the garden itself, it's a delicate balancing act between replacing dead and dying plants while at the same time continuing to ensure as much as possible that the garden's ambience is retained. And quite understandably the Robertsons wish



*A much later photo shows the house with balcony added in 1920. The square sundial remains in situ—at this time it was on the edge of the driveway, today it sits on the second terrace immediately in front of the house.*

to add to the legacy they have inherited and plan a large scale tree planting program of Australian and exotic trees across the property. This in time should create a new parkland adjacent to the garden as well as provide wildlife corridors in an area which is increasingly closely settled.

**Neil Robertson** is the CEO of Australia's Open Garden Scheme. He gardens at New Gisborne in Victoria's central highlands and will be recalled by many readers as the proprietor of the Margareta Webber Bookshop.

# Nation and garden design

Christina Dyson

At key periods in the history of nations, gardens have become potent symbols of authority and national sentiment as well as powerful agents for change.

## Prelude: Charles H.J. Smith

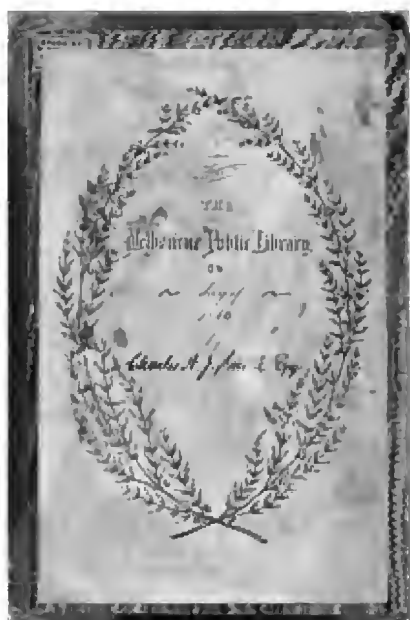
What is it about gardens and nationalism that inspires such fervour? Debates over use of indigenous plants versus sentimental favourites, national styles, and even the shape of garden beds have all added to the rich lore of Australian garden history. My own quest began as a project in pursuit of Scottish-born emigrant landscape gardener Charles H. J. Smith. It was a search of all available biographical information as well as a project for which he was best known. The result—a sprinkling of new information beyond the entry in the *Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* but sadly not a single local project with tangible connections to Smith. And this, after weeks of determined and extensive research of both primary and secondary sources.

In 1855, aged 45, Smith migrated to Australia, leaving behind what is understood to have been an influential clientele and associations with gardens of large estates, villas, and institutions. Smith settled at Kyneton, in Victoria's goldfields—in 1866 he was listed in the *Kyneton Directory* as 'surveyor' and in the 1884 rate books as 'landscape gardener'. Apart from these fleeting references, attempts to locate contemporary

documents by or about Smith bore no fruit, even though his book *Parks and Pleasure Grounds* was publicly accessible in Melbourne, a botanic garden had been established in Kyneton in 1861, and early views of Kyneton illustrate a new town in dire want of some landscape gardening.

Could *Parks and Pleasure Grounds* not count as Smith's project? Apparently not—a place was absolutely required. However, the book was it, so a close analysis of Smith's tome began, as both object and subject. Ever optimistic yet uncertain of results, this approach at least opened up further research avenues, a relief after encountering numerous culs-de-sac in previous efforts.

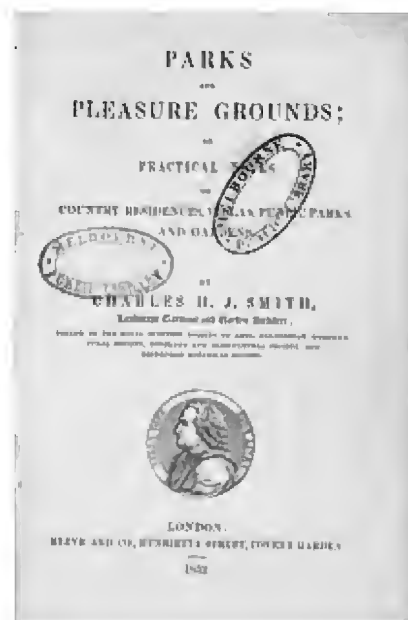
In the United States—unlike Australia—*Parks and Pleasure Grounds* was relatively widely available. It was reprinted three times, with notes and additions by the writer on rural subjects Lewis F. Allen (1800–1890) to adapt the text for its North American audience. Inscriptions enabled some editions to be traced to reference collections, such as the Boston Public Library, the Arnold Arboretum, and the Astor Library (forerunner of the New York Public Library), and others to universities known to have pioneered



In 1860 Smith presented a copy of his book *Parks and Pleasure Grounds; or Practical Notes on Country Residences, Villas, Public Parks and Gardens* (London, 1852) to the Melbourne Public Library (now State Library of Victoria).

The presentation bookplate was possibly a design by Edward La Trobe Bateman who had also designed floral head and tailpieces for the Library's 1861 catalogue.

The title page rather impressively described Smith as 'Landscape Gardener and Garden Architect'. In the book, he espoused ideas regarding the design of many garden types including botanic gardens.





the teaching of landscape architecture. Several were traced to libraries of prominent landscape architects and writers. These included American essayist Donald Grant Mitchell (1822–1908); Danish-born American landscape architect Jens Jensen (1860–1951); John H. Staley, a prominent twentieth-century landscape architect in the San Francisco Bay area; and Warren H. Manning (1860–1938), an employee in the Olmsted office and later an influential private practitioner and founding member of ASLA. The most exciting discovery was that both an original 1852 edition and an 1853 North American edition had once been in the library of Frederick Law Olmsted, best known as one of the designers of New York's Central Park (1858). These two copies are now in the library of the University of California, Berkeley, a gift from Frederick Law Olmsted Jr in the 1950s.

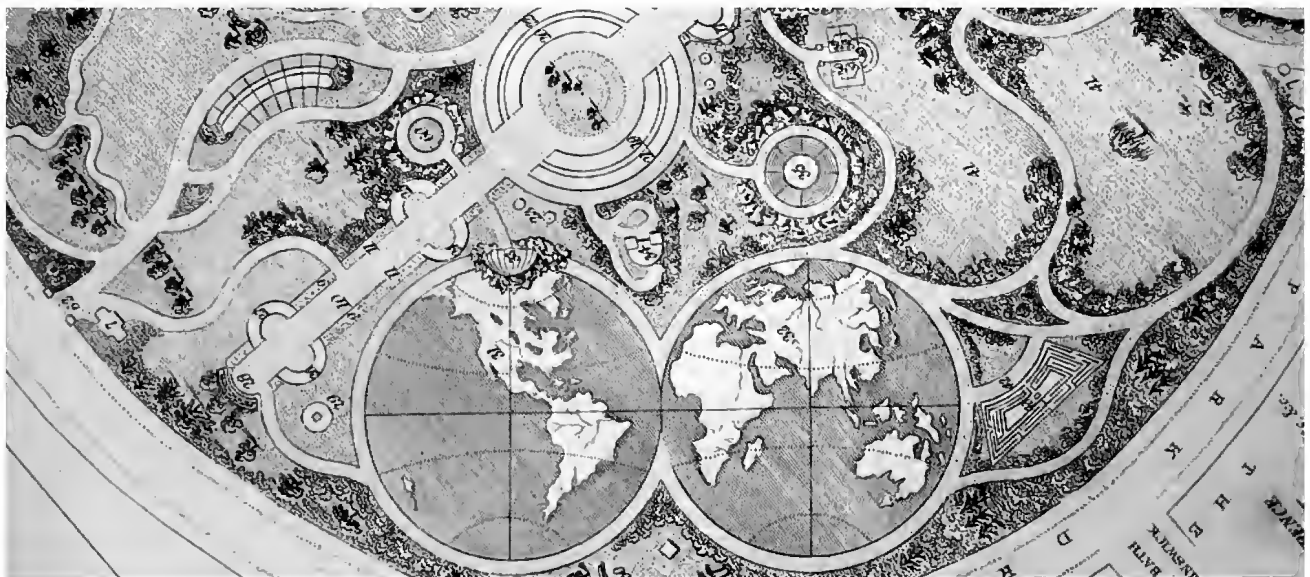
### The 'territorial arrangement' of botanic gardens

Throughout *Parks and Pleasure Grounds*, Smith repeatedly credited his influences and 'merits of his illustrious predecessors', including Uvedale Price, Sir Walter Scott, Humphry Repton, and J. C. Loudon. As well, Smith confidently noted that his book filled a knowledge gap in relation to the pinetum and arboretum. On botanic gardens, Smith recommended the 'territorial arrangement' of plants 'to exhibit the vegetation of a particular kingdom', grouping plant communities of particular places, as opposed to a systematic scientific arrangement based on botanical affinities. 'It seems possible by the selection of characteristic species', Smith continued, 'to give a fair representation of the vegetable economy of the territory selected, and even to convey an expression of its external physiognomy'. By suggesting one recreate the

general appearance or characteristics of particular territories or plant communities, Smith envisaged capturing the character, or sense of place, of particular regions, nations, or continents, over less engaging botanical didacticism.

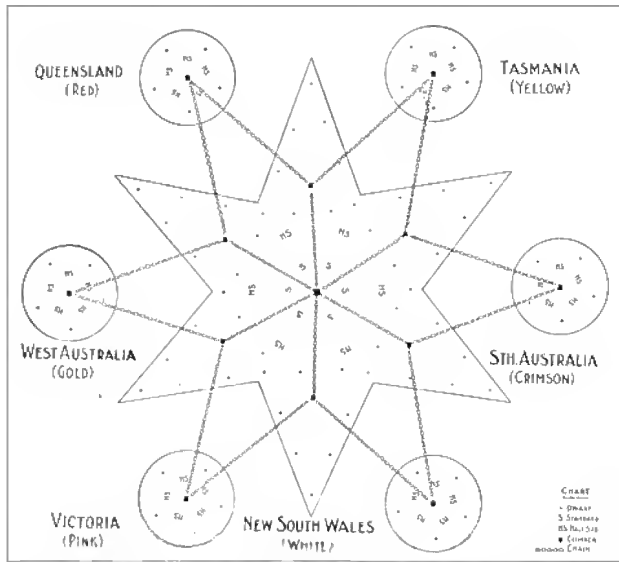
In his book *Gardenesque* (2004), Richard Aitken suggested that in advocating botanic gardens to represent each country, 'and even convey an expression of its external physiognomy', Smith presaged by half a century the enthusiasm of federated Australia for celebratory garden beds in the shape of the continent. By expanding Smith's ideas to encompass the use of vegetation to represent the two-dimensional shape of a continent, this tantalising quote provided the hook to connect the scattered fragments on Smith with the celebratory garden beds that invoked symbols of nation.

The idea was not new. In August 1832, the *Sydney Herald* had described a grand proposal by an American promoter for a three-dimensional geographical garden of the world which included a staggering level of detail, even to the laying down of meridians 'agreeably to principle of Mercator's projection'. During the 1830s, the Gloucestershire Zoological and Horticultural Gardens in Cheltenham, England, included a 'Geographical and Botanical Garden for the arrangement & culture of plants, in the respective countries to which they are indigenous' in beds shaped in the map of the world. Around the turn of the twentieth century, some five decades after Smith's writings, there emerged a number of celebratory garden beds and designs in the shape of Australia or drawing on other symbols of nation. During the same period, symbols of the new nation also appeared in the decorative arts, with Australian flora and fauna applied to design, a story told by Nina Crone in *Planting the Nation* (2001).



The geographic themed beds of the Gloucestershire Zoological and Horticultural Gardens in Cheltenham, England, planned in the 1830s.

Illustration courtesy Richard Aitken



The Federation Star used as the plan of a rose garden in Melbourne's Alexandra Gardens, published in the *Journal of Horticulture of Australasia* (August 1906).

State Library of Victoria

sentiment. The first period was Federation (1901) to World War 1, the second post-World War 2, and the third, the centenary of Federation.

### Federation to the First World War

In 1901, Joseph Maiden, Director of the Sydney Botanic Garden, returned from a break to find that his staff 'had created a new carpet bed in the lower garden, depicting a map of Australia showing the names of the federated colonies'. Maiden acknowledged that 'while not in favour of maps, diagrams and profiles being introduced into carpet bedding as a rule, the efforts of Messrs Allen and Lovegrove who have charge of the carpet bedding ... [have been] warmly commended by the public'. Other examples were later created in the Adelaide Botanic Garden, a fine floral map of Tasmania was laid out at Ridgeway, south of Hobart (1932), and in 1936, curator Ernest E. Lord's revised layout for the Horsham Botanic Gardens, Victoria, included a pool in the shape of a map of Australia.

The finest and only extant examples visited, are the garden beds at the former Stony Creek School No. 886 site, a small and isolated community in Victoria's central goldfields (near Talbot). These took the form of a map of Australia with state and territory borders and, curiously, Port Phillip Bay carefully delineated in stone (the other states do not feature this level of detail), a star-shaped garden bed plus sundial/compass. This had echoes of the example identified by Suzanne Hunt in *Planting the Nation* where pupils are depicted using a giant outdoor map as an educational aid, reinforcing stories of European explorers and pioneers.

The activity of gardening, of place-making, and taming nature in a remote and fairly unforgiving landscape, represented a shared sense of purpose and community building. By using symbols of

### Nation and Australian gardens

The term 'nation' is used frequently in reference to collective identity. Anne Helmreich, in her stimulating book *The English Garden and National Identity: the competing styles of gardens design 1870–1914* (2002), defines nation around the concept of 'shared values', and nationalism as emerging from a 'collective, unified drive for independence and dependant on identification of a shared, distinctive culture and territory'.

*In Australian gardens, expressions of nation ... emerged in public gardens and schools as nation-shaped garden beds, ponds, and in carpet bedding profiles*

In Australian gardens, expressions of nation took form in garden plans reproduced in contemporary gardening publications. They emerged in public gardens and schools as nation-shaped garden beds, ponds, and in carpet bedding profiles. Other symbols of nation included star-shaped garden beds (Commonwealth, Federation or Anzac stars, depending on the number of points to the star), and the Australian Coat of Arms (granted by King George in 1912). By using symbols of nation in Australian gardens, garden-making and garden design reinforced the idea of a shared territory, and shared values and culture, with the activity of gardening extending membership to civil society.

Of the Australian examples found, these fall loosely into three periods which can be understood as key moments of nationalist



Photograph: George (Cheng Xue) Zhuo

The nationalistic garden beds at Stony Creek School were developed between 1905 and 1912 during the incumbency of head teacher Miss James, and more than likely created with assistance of students and parents.



Detail of the pool created at Horsham Botanic Gardens by curator Ernest Lord in 1936, and now one of few surviving nationalistic garden features of its era.

nation such as the map of the newly federated Australia and the Commonwealth, Anzac, or Federation Star, the Stony Creek community could also establish connections between their isolated settlement and civilised political and social spaces, give meaning to their institution and their presence, and, through the activity of garden-making, create a semblance of permanence in transient settlements.

## Post-World War Two

Australian landscape design in the post-war years included changes to the ways in which a garden could be conceived as symbol of changing ideas and attitudes. Complex themes underpinned a garden's conception, including nationalism, ecological consciousness, experimentation, idealism, and modernism, all mixed with economic pragmatism.

Two examples of landscape design illustrating the theme of nationalism are John Oldham's 1950s design for Armadale High School, in Western Australia, and the schemes in Betty Maloney and Jean Walker's books *Designing Australian Bush Gardens* (1966) and *More About Australian Bush Gardens* (1967), published in Sydney. In both examples nationalism, undoubtedly among other themes, is expressed through plant selection and arrangement. In Oldham's design, each quadrangle is dedicated to the particular flora of each state. The arresting black and white renderings of 'bush gardens' by Maloney and Walker, supplemented by plant lists, and recommendations for placement and maintenance, promise gardens that will, at least visually, replicate an organic native plant community and a sense of the Australian bush. Growing ecological awareness was another theme in Maloney and Walker's texts, which were intended for 'the reader who wants to ensure the survival of his own area of bushland and the enthusiast who wishes to establish a bush garden from nothing'.

## Centenary of Federation

Conceivably reflecting on the past one hundred years since federation, a complementary pair of twenty-first century public landscapes utilising symbols of nation emerge.

Drawing on institutions of mapping to define concepts of 'place' and 'home' is the Garden of Australian Dreams at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, created in 2003 by Richard Weller and his practice Room 4.I.3. A largely hard-edged and highly stylised and symbolic garden, it encourages reflection on the construction of national identity and ideas of shared territory yet distinctive cultures by combining non-Aboriginal methods of defining and understanding territory—surveyors' marks and road maps—with the boundaries of Indigenous nations and language groups.

Combining themes of nationalism, environmentalism, current understandings of ecology and indigenous plants, and climate change is the new Australian Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne, Victoria. As well as evoking the red sands of the interior and using plants suited to arid conditions, the garden's design uses elements and a perspective that brings to my mind the graphic vocabulary of the Aboriginal Western Desert painters, and their transcriptions onto canvas of their culture's sand paintings.

These later examples combine Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal symbols of nation, embracing the complexity of the concept of nation and nationalism and its many dimensions, unlike earlier 'two dimensional' expressions of nation through celebratory garden beds such as the map of Australia at the former Stony Creek School No. 886. Undoubtedly there are, or were, many other comparable examples in public and private gardens around Australia. I look forward to documenting other instances of national sentiment expressed horticulturally and in landscape design, and particularly those embodying ephemeral characteristics, one of the intriguing challenges of garden history.

**Christina Dyson** is Melbourne-based practitioner with Context Pty Ltd in the field of cultural landscapes and built heritage. She has undertaken projects for a wide variety of Australian sites. Research for this article was undertaken by Christina in association with Margot Jones, Supornthip Sorsukpaiboon, and George (Cheng Xue) Zhuo, fellow students of Landscape Heritage (Masters) at The University of Melbourne.

# *Noble Rot: exploring some byways of Tasmanian garden history*

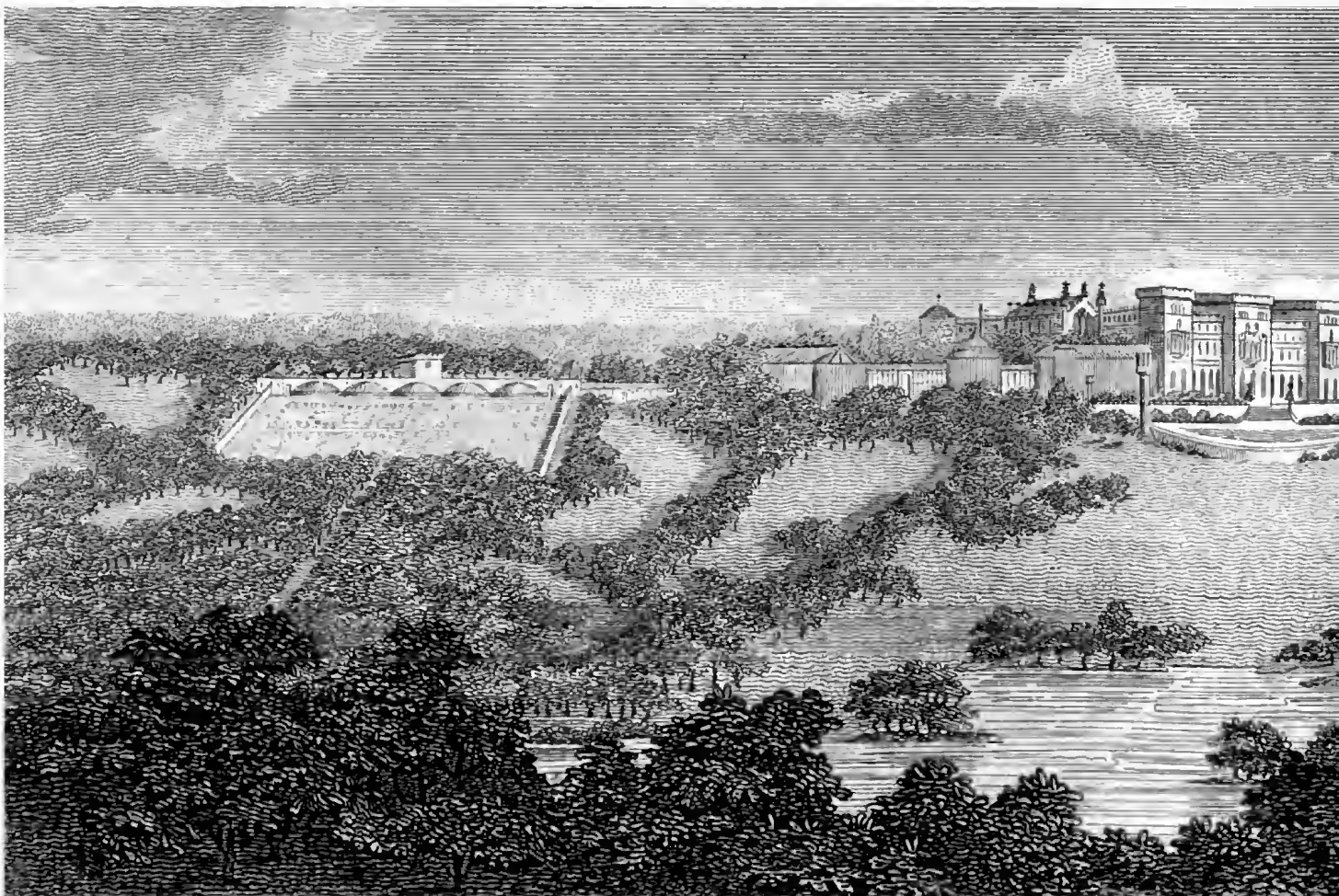
*Richard Aitken*

Garden history has a strange way of popping up when you least expect it, although those who loiter in libraries should know to expect the unexpected—especially when it involves the dark beauties of Scottish gardens.

I bumped into the 17th Earl of Lauderdale when I was in Hobart recently. He was tall, well spoken, urbane—yet his manner had that urgency of a researcher on the run. (Am I the only one who has chance meetings with members of the Scottish nobility? And in an Australian context, does this sort of serendipity only manifest itself in Tasmania?) We were both in the State Library and Earl was seeking to connect with Tasmanian ancestors. (At least, I think he said he was the Earl. Perhaps he was just related. It doesn't really matter.) 'Earl' felt certain that as a Maitland he was co-lateral with the Wilmots, and that Sir John

Eardley-Wilmot was almost certainly related to his grandfather. Eardley-Wilmot, you will recall, was the Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land from 1843 to 1847 and is now commemorated by the wall bearing his name in the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens. But more of Sir John later.

'Earl' was rather taken aback at my casual admission that I had not only visited Thirlestane Castle—the Lauderdale seat in the Scottish Borders township of Lauder—but that I knew something of its garden designer. The castle was apparently created in the 1670s from a sixteenth-century square tower house, but it was the



*Drawn for the Edinburgh Encyclopædia*

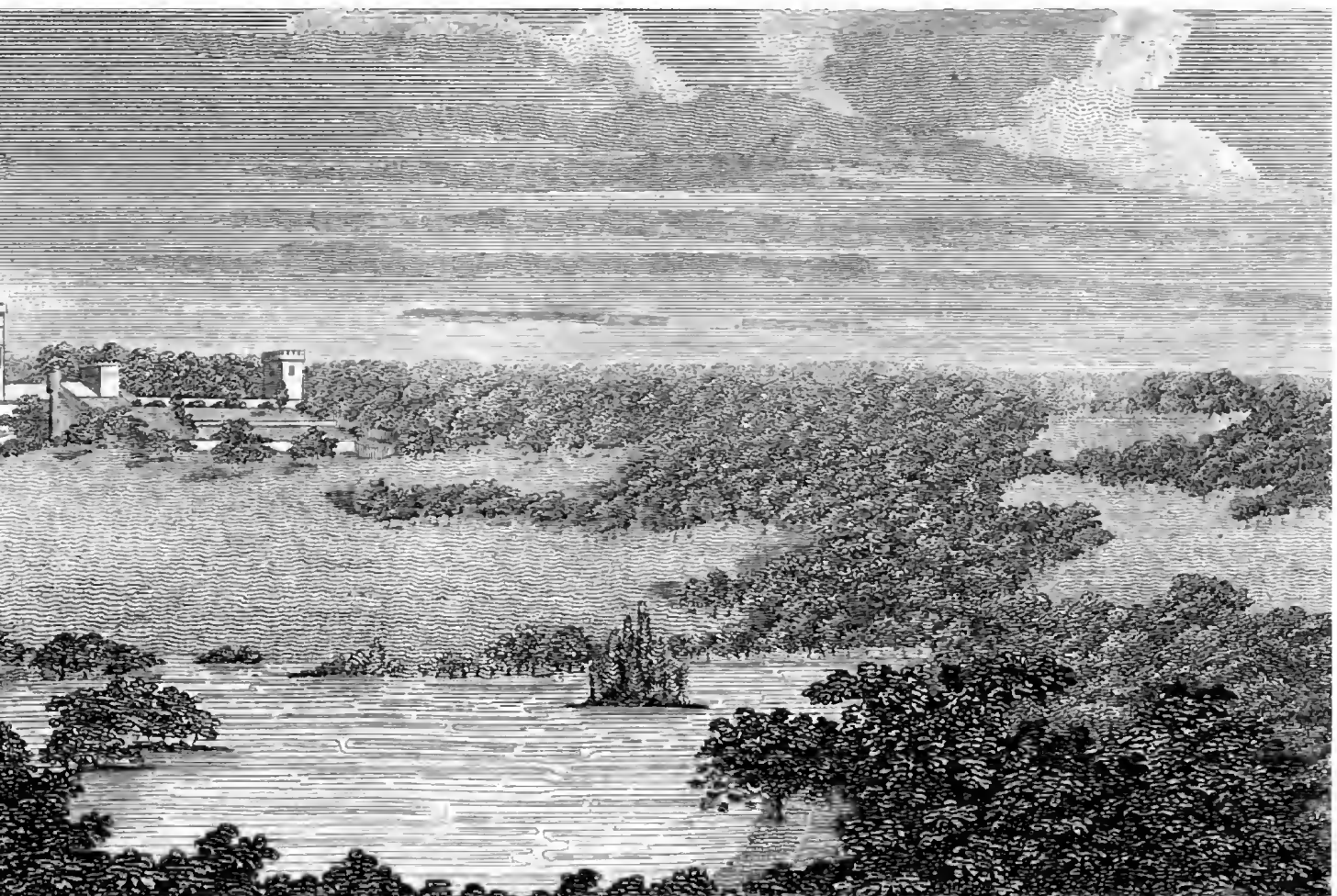
makeover by the 9th Earl that was of most interest to me. Lauderdale had engaged the noted Scottish architect William Burn to undertake extensive alterations and additions, transforming the ancient structure during 1840–43 into a latter-day showpiece. In modernising the castle, Lauderdale also undertook extensive work in the garden—the *Edinburgh Scotsman* reported in 1840 that ‘as many as forty masons are at present employed on the garden wall, which, when finished, we are told, will be the finest in Scotland’. Lest you think I read early issues of the *Scotsman* between plucking wings off insects, I should disclose that this information was reprinted by J.C. Loudon in his *Gardener’s Magazine*, splashing the news to gardeners across the globe.

In fact, in the following year Loudon visited Thirlestane Castle during one of his periodical tours. ‘After passing a number of gentlemen’s seats possessing many natural beauties,’ he wrote, ‘but exhibiting very little good architecture or landscape-gardening ... we come to Lauder, close to which is Thirlestane Castle.’ The apparent absence of landscape gardening was ‘easily ascertained’, Loudon opined, by ‘the want of scattered trees in the parks and lawns’. By contrast, the attenuated grounds of Thirlestane were a fine example of modern thought in landscape

gardening. The new walled kitchen garden was located a good distance from the castle along the escarpment overlooking the Leader Water and the natural beauties of the situation had been enhanced by selective planting, complementing rather than working against the irregular site. It was all very similar to the engraving used to illustrate ‘Modern Gardening’ (see illustration) in that great compendium of Scottish Enlightenment thought, Brewster’s *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*.

*Sir David Brewster is best remembered for his invention of the kaleidoscope. This greatly underplays the significance of his two-decade toil editing the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*

Today Sir David Brewster is best remembered for his invention of the kaleidoscope. This greatly underplays the significance of his two-decade toil editing the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, a work conceived in the late eighteenth-century when Scottish intellect and scholarship laid the



Eng.<sup>d</sup> by J. Moffat Edin<sup>d</sup>.

foundation for Edinburgh's reputation as a northern Athens.

It was Loudon himself who contributed the landscape gardening entry, and his friend and correspondent Dr Patrick Neill, that on horticulture. Neill, a printer and ardent botanic gardener, was the mainstay of the Caledonian Horticultural Society and his small garden at Canonmills Cottage and its hothouses were rich in newly introduced species—Neill was also generous in sharing his knowledge through the *Gardener's Magazine* and similar organs. Although the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* complete in eighteen volumes was not published until 1830, individual volumes were sequentially published as they were completed. Thus Loudon's entry was published in volume 12 as early as 1818, in advance of his own *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (1822) and for which it appeared to act as a first draft of his mid-teens thought on garden design. (This was, of course, a decade and a half before his codification of what he termed the 'Gardenesque' as a mode of design and maintenance.)

*In some of the houses  
of the Scotch farmers,  
far in the interior of the country,  
Mr Lawrence observed excellent  
select libraries*

But perhaps I should get back to Australia. The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*—and therefore Loudon's design advice through this medium—was readily available in the colonies. In 1833 for instance, he reported in the *Gardener's Magazine* having received 'a variety of gratifying information respecting the colony, from Mr Lawrence, a surgeon, who spent five months in New South Wales last year, chiefly in travelling in the interior among the settlers.' (The identity of Lawrence remains a mystery.) 'In some of the houses of the Scotch farmers, far in the interior of the country,' the intelligence continued, 'Mr Lawrence observed excellent select libraries, and among them, very commonly, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, or *Brewster's Encyclopaedia*.' (Loudon also noted proudly 'We were gratified to find that our works were also very generally read in the colony.') My own copy of Brewster was keenly thumbed in Van Diemen's Land from at least 1840 as part of the library of Alexander Davidson and this title was amongst the standard works acquired in the mid-nineteenth century by colonial subscription and public libraries.

All this still leaves 'Earl' waiting patiently. With only minutes to closing time he was in a hurry, but I was also keen to pick his brains to see if he had anything else to offer in addition to his immaculate pedigree. I suggested that he visit the botanic gardens to see the Eardley-Wilmot Wall (1845) and its earlier neighbouring erection, the fluted Arthur Wall (1828–29), redolent of northern hemisphere fruiteries and vineries. It was also in 1843 that Eardley-Wilmot instigated the transformation Hobart's Government Garden into a botanic garden (managed under the aegis of the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land), a fact greeted with polite appreciation by my new best friend.

*Loudon noted proudly  
'We were gratified to find that our  
works were also very generally read  
in the colony.'*

But I'm forgetting the real point of our exchange. The designer of the walled garden at Thirlestane was my somewhat older friend Charles H.J. Smith, who emigrated to Victoria in 1855. It was Loudon who alerted me to this attribution, when he wrote of his 1841 visit: 'A new kitchen-garden, and an extensive range of hothouses, have been formed under the direction of Mr C.H. Smith, and they do him very great credit.' Smith had grown up at Hopetoun House just west of Edinburgh, where his father James was gardener to several Earls of Hopetoun before his death at an advanced age in 1850. With James Smith one of the most celebrated Scottish gardeners of his age, and Patrick Neill a family acquaintance, the young Charles Smith was well placed to commence his career as a landscape gardener and garden architect. It was none other than Loudon who in 1834 announced the commencement of Smith's professional career and it was a plan of Neill's garden drawn by Smith (published by Loudon in 1836) which brought the young designer to the notice of a wider public. Regrettably Smith's career in Australia is as yet imperfectly documented, but I live in hope.

'Earl' took all this on board with mounting incredulity and soon excused himself, muttering in frustration that he would probably have to write to Debrett's to cement the vice-regal link. I wished him well—but of course nothing would surprise me in Tasmania. *Quocumque aspicias hic paradoxus erit.*

# *Tribute: John Stevens*

## *Landscape Consultant (1920–2007)*

*Andrew Saniga*

John Stevens was unrelenting in his pursuit of design through the medium of living things. In May 2000 I first visited him at his home in Olinda in Victoria's Dandenong Ranges. I had heard from others that most of his time was devoted to his garden. When I descended the steeply sloping block and made toward his home the effect was not only of brilliance; I entered an environment of symbiosis and exuberance, and at once was reaffirmed of what it could mean to design with land, and to make living places.

Stevens considered himself fortunate to develop a career around his passion for plants, and brought such ambitions to professional landscaping in Australia. He did this in an unconscious way, for although he was a founding member of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), he was never really heavily involved with professionalisation nor was he really interested in such matters. Instead, he led the profession by example and is now widely recognised as establishing one of the earliest private design offices in Australia.

Stevens trained in horticulture (Burnley School of Primary Agriculture and Horticulture, 1938) and after serving in the Australian Army (1940–45) he completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (University of Melbourne, 1949). He was landscape architect for the Australian National University in Canberra (1964–87) but prior to this position his consultancy in Melbourne saw numerous commissions with leading architecture firms of the time such as Bates Smart and McCutcheon (BSM). Those who worked with Stevens include Grace Fraser (born 1921) from 1959 to 1964, and architecture students and draftsmen Malcolm Munro and Trevor Westmore. Prominent designs included the ICI House in Melbourne (1955–58), the now-demolished Conzinc Rio-Tinto Australia (CRA) forecourt at 95 Collins Street, Melbourne (1961), Melbourne's Monash University (1958–63), and many aspects of the Australian National University campus.

At Monash University Stevens conducted the first foot survey and this identified significant aspects

that became pivotal to BSM's original master plan. His ongoing role included everything from detailed design and management of kilometres of perimeter planting through to small courtyard spaces. Of particular note was the Science Courtyard (1961), a project constructed by Eric Hammond under the foremanship of Glen Wilson. Approximately a quarter of the site was taken up with a shallow U-shaped pond featuring a promontory of boulders protruding from flax-leaved plant material. Like countless other planting structures that Stevens and Grace Fraser designed, the Science Courtyard's native plant scheme had strong spatial arrangement. Such qualities emerge over time and serve as a compelling reminder of the protracted delays when designing with plants.



John Stevens was self-effacing about his own role in the past. I have only one photograph of him and it was obtained by default. We were rummaging around his darkened garage, looking for an old door that had belonged to the original home on his property. He explained that his garden's design derived from a previous structure. But in his garden, I experienced something of an intrinsic nature. Stevens's great passion for plants defined his autonomy as an artist.

**Dr Andrew Saniga**

Lecturer

The University of Melbourne

# *Fact or Fancy? C.G.S. Hirst's view of Erin's home, Boggo*

*Glenn R. Cooke*

Researchers in the field of Australian garden history are generally delighted when they discover watercolours which document gardens of the colonial period.

But can these images be believed? Are they fact or fancy?

The Queensland Art Gallery was delighted to acquire this 1876 watercolour by Charles Gordon Sebastian Hirst (1826–1890) from a Canadian collection in 2003. It depicts 'Erin's home', the farm of Mr and Mrs J. Strong at Boggo (now an inner Brisbane suburb). We know little of the early Australian water colourist C.G.S. Hirst, except that he was an itinerant artist who sketched mainly in south-eastern Queensland from the early 1870s. He claimed to be a member of the Madras Institute and to be an author and architect as well as an artist, although the multiple viewpoints evident in the delineation of buildings suggest his claim to architectural training is suspect.

*Though Hirst's clientele were small landholders rather than wealthy squatters on the Darling Downs, they were just as proud of their material success in the colony*

Hirst produced a series of charming, if somewhat naive renderings of houses and public buildings in Brisbane, Ipswich, and Toowoomba, of which 'Erin's home', Boggo, Queensland, is a characteristic example. It is likely that owners commissioned Hirst to produce views of their properties—in this regard Hirst performed the same function as Conrad Martens some twenty-five years earlier. Though Hirst's clientele were small landholders rather than wealthy squatters on the Darling Downs, they were just as proud of their material success in the colony.

It is fortunate that Hirst conscientiously annotated his subjects as we can now trace his progress from surviving works. His earliest Queensland subject, in the collection of the Brisbane's John Oxley Library, is titled 'Ferriestown: The Farmstead of Mr John Campbell, at Laidley Creek: 26 miles

from Ipswich, Queensland' (August 1873). The Library also holds 'View of part of the township of the "Rocky-water holes" on the Brisbane and Ipswich Road, 5 miles from Brisbane' (1875), together with another four works. During 1879 Hirst obviously travelled to Toowoomba, the major regional town of the Darling Downs, as 'The new courthouse in Toowoomba' and 'The Toowoomba Botanical Gardens', both in the collection of the Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, are dated from this year. Hirst's last identified work, 'Claremont House, the residence of Mr George Bashford, near Ipswich' (April 1881), is in the collection of the National Library of Australia, Canberra. No artworks from the last decade of his life have been identified, perhaps a product of Hirst's ultimate cause of death in a Brisbane boarding house from an overdose of laudanum.

We could read many stories into this depiction of Erin's home and its functioning farm. The simple cottage and its subsidiary buildings seem appropriate, however, there is so much activity depicted that we must accept that it is a composite image. In the foreground two women in their Sunday best prepare to ride a pony, a labourer carries a spade, a farm-hand ploughs behind two horses, a swaggie approaches with the hope of work. At the rear another woman feeds chickens where the tree stumps and the pile of manure add a note of verisimilitude. But how authentic is this view of Erin's home?

The watercolour was executed in June 1876, which suggests it is rather late for the heavy crop of pears on the many-trunked tree in the centre foreground—if pears actually thrived and fruited in Brisbane's sub-tropical climate. Similarly, we expect the pumpkin vine in front of the fence to be harvested in summer. If it is June then it is difficult to suggest the name of the white-flowered creeper that is climbing up the verandah posts





Queensland Art Gallery (accession number 2003.111)

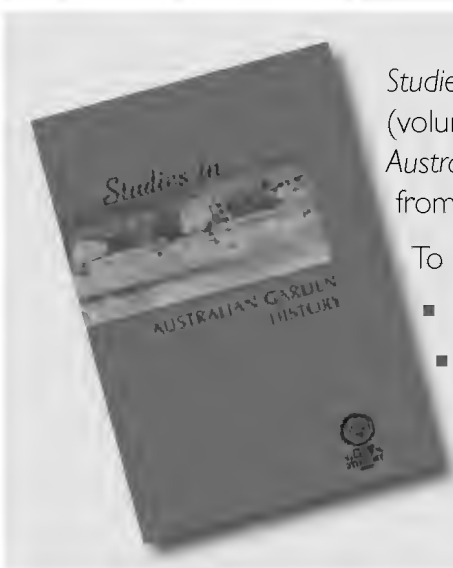
This watercolour by Queensland artist C.G.S. Hirst, 'Erin's home', Boggo, Queensland (1876), was purchased from a Canadian collection in 2003 by the Queensland Art Gallery (through the Queensland Government's special Centenary Fund). While such works remain a joy for viewers, their veracity as historical evidence needs to be treated with caution.

and it is equally difficult to identify of the creeper with star-shaped red flowers which swathes the adjoining fence. What appear to be three young araucarias (possibly hoop pines, which are native to the area) are planted in front of the house. And the spiky plants that follow the fenceline? These could be agaves which were popular garden plants during the Victorian, perhaps even *Agave sisalus* as sisal was being trialled as a crop at that time.

If we were hoping to obtain some idea of farms and gardens in colonial Queensland 'Erin's home' will provide little evidence of reality. But that

is not the whole point of the watercolour. It is an image of burgeoning life in this pocket-sized Eden where chicken and geese strut about and cows graze in the adjoining paddock. Yet behind the fence we see the untamed bush (with native kangaroos) which has so far been spared the productive hand of the farmer.

**Glenn R. Cooke** is Research Curator, Queensland Heritage, at Queensland Art Gallery and has a special research interest in garden history.



*Studies in Australian Garden History* (volume 2) and back issues of *Australian Garden History* available from AGHS office.

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## For the bookshelf

Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin, & Kylie Mirmohamadi, *Reading the Garden: the settlement of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 2008 (ISBN 0 522 85115 0): paperback, RRP \$36.95

This book is a welcome addition to the growing range of literature concerning garden history in Australia. From the title, one recognises the emphasis on evidence from private journals, published garden writings, and official documents as well as a postmodern method of analysis. These sources provide some fascinating stories of personal endeavour, achievement, and the wide variety of meanings with which we invest our private and public garden places, and other—often transient—cultural landscapes. As gardeners and scholars, it is timely for us all to reflect more deeply about what makes gardens and gardening so important in our lives and for society generally. Gardens are deliciously complex and vitally important: that's my opinion and the authors of this book have shown how true this belief is.

The book is arranged chronologically but also favours the use of themes in history, such as gardens in pioneering settlements, as memorial gardens, in schools, public parks, suburban backyards, lawns, and so on. Laced through this white-fella history is a refreshing inclusion of Aboriginal stories—about loss, memory, maybe atonement, and more. The activities and opinions of men and women and children are explored, which show change but really remain so consistent over the years. The span of time is extensive with contemporary design and recent migrant stories being examined, back through time to the 1790s. The coverage of the entire continent and Tasmania is attempted, but there is an emphasis on Victoria. As a whole, however, all this makes a rich mixture and worthy of the readers' attention. What brings the history alive is the use of first-person accounts, including recent oral interviews and diary records from all eras that tell of gardens made and remade, plants shared, memories grounded, hopes and needs expressed, all in the language of the time.

These are real stories about real people and some are very emotionally charged. The ephemeral nature

of gardens is a recurring theme, from power-pole memorials for road accident victims to Edna Walling's creations. However, such creations remain strong in memories and meanings. I'm sure every gardener could describe their childhood garden in great detail even if the sense of scale changes. The stories of childhood and imagined gardens in this book are especially interesting. The interpretations of wider intentions and motivations of society and governments are perhaps less convincing.

This book makes an excellent start on the journey of understanding the meanings of gardens and landscapes in Australia, but there is more to be done. Like any good piece of research, it has revealed many more questions and avenues for exploration—a most satisfying prospect for garden historians and garden readers alike. The interpretation of the evidence will change over time as different viewpoints consider the facts, and new evidence creates contexts of different shadings. At times this book showed a lack of deeper understanding about horticulture which makes the reader hunger for more accuracy and wider experiences. Perhaps it just reflects the need for more Australian horticulturists to contribute to writing good histories.

It is, however, most refreshing to read about garden history with an emphasis that is not the typical design and aesthetic perspective. So much of what is designed is beyond the visual, and this book has provided a useful reminder of how differing ways of writing history are important contributions to the overall knowledge about ourselves and the things we do and make. I'm all enthused now and advocate the writing of reflective journals about personal gardening efforts. We have to make the evidence for the historians of the future to know what we are all about in the early twenty-first century! And I would like to hear more from the Indigenous peoples of Australia—their stories of old times and present times are needed for us all.

The final chapter in *Reading the Garden* provides numerous topics for discussion amongst gardeners and scholars about the future



of gardening in Australia. As the authors note, attachment to place is the basis of gardening and reflects our nation's mental and physical health. We ought to make such discussions integral to the AGHS and this journal.

**Dr Jeannie Sim**

Senior Lecturer

Queensland University of Technology

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John Walter, *SGAP: the story of Arthur Swaby and the Society for Growing Australian Plants*, (SGAP Victoria) Inc., Hawthorn, Vic., 2007 (ISBN 978 0 909 83062 5): paperback RRP \$29.95 (contact SGAP, PO Box 357, Hawthorn, Vic., for sales enquiries)

To those remotely interested in the horticulture, ecology, or botany of Australian plants, SGAP is perhaps a familiar acronym. Titles such as *Grow What Where*, *The Language of Botany*, and for Melburnians, *The Flora of Melbourne*, on the bookshelves of many a plant enthusiast, represent a tiny sample of the numerous publications that constitute one facet of this multi-dimensional organisation. SGAP—or the Australian Plants Society as the group is now known—has popped up in my own research into the cultivation and display of Australian plants in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne and Cranbourne. Wanting information on the background and work of the society I sought out John Walter's 1997 brief history published in the SGAP journal *Australian Plants*. Useful in itself, the lack of a more comprehensive account was symptomatic of the significant gaps that exist in the historiography of Australian plants, particularly in respect to their cultivation. So far the limelight seems to have been occupied by designers more than those responsible for producing knowledge about plants. With numerous entries on plant enthusiasts as well as on individual gardens and general entries on Australian flora, the *Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens* did rectify the matter to some extent.

John Walter's new book is now another valuable contribution to the field. Introducing the book, Walter modestly identifies prospective readers as current and future members of the Society. While not a member myself I found the book informative and stimulating. My criticisms of it largely arise from imposing expectations on the book that lie beyond what the author set out to achieve.

Arthur Swaby is the lynch pin of Walter's story. In founding the group in 1957 Swaby formalised what had hitherto been an extensive but loose network of individuals working mostly in isolation but connected through their unusual passion for Australian flora. Arguably Swaby's greatest

legacy was his determination to foster a spirit of intellectual openness and cooperation amongst members, which has been reflected in the way amateur and professional plant enthusiasts have combined resources of time, skill, and space to produce an impressive inventory of achievements in many aspects of the cultivation, propagation, breeding, ecology, and botany of Australian flora.

Swaby is just one of many intriguing characters introduced through the book. While the names of Galbraith, Harris, and Lord might ring a bell there are many others that would not. Perhaps one reason is because self promotion appears to have been an uncommon characteristic of the average, yet often remarkable, plant enthusiast. In keeping with the unassuming character of Society members the tone of Walter's story is not hagiographic and, careful not to mythologise, Walter draws attention to problems as much as to triumphs. Taking a matter-of-fact approach Walter meticulously constructs his story from numerous primary sources and interviews but moments of drama and emotion seep through the detail. After the heady days of conceiving and founding SGAP in the course of developing organisational structure, shaping and refining objectives and functions, and devising mechanisms such as study groups to achieve the group's broader aims it was not all best buddies and plain sailing. Sometimes those remarkable people proved to be difficult personalities—the passion driving members' enthusiasm for plants inevitably leading to disputes—and casualties ensued.

Arthur Swaby's intransigence on policy led to his premature resignation. Walter's account of the rift between Swaby and members of the association he had done so much to create is quite moving.

*Walter meticulously constructs his story from numerous primary sources and interviews but moments of drama and emotion seep through the detail*

At times however the detail becomes too much. In the matter of federal–state relations and the drawn out arguments about Bill Payne's editorial role in producing *Australian Plants* the story gets bogged down in the machinations of committees and organisational bureaucracy, overwhelming the bigger issues at stake in these disputes. No doubt the minutiae of particular wrangles will be of interest to those with personal connection to the characters or positions involved, but while letters are flying and with telephone conferences underway the reader is left wondering what was going on with rank and file members who, in the meantime,

were getting the real work done. An explanation for this aspect of the book is its foundation role in the historiography of the organisation. As a starting point, the framework of the organisation needed to be set down and the work inclusive of the interests and activities shared by a geographically dispersed and diffuse membership. Walter himself flags the enormous amount of work still to be done on the state, regional, and local levels of the association.

Another shortcoming of the book is the isolation of the SGAP story from what was happening in the wider world as it related to the way people thought about and engaged with native plants. Walter stresses passion as the prime motivation driving the establishment and continuing operation of the association but does not explore other possible factors that may have fuelled this obsession with native plants. While the founding of the society was positioned in the context of an emergent, but as yet minority interest in native plants, this sense of how the society's preoccupations meshed into a

broader evolving interest was not sustained beyond the foundation years. There is almost no reference to the acute rise in popularity of native plants during the late sixties and early seventies and how that might have impacted upon membership, its interests, and activities. Conservation is discussed in relation to the group's objectives, but is not given a broader context. The spectre of nationalism is momentarily raised in relation to a name for the Society, but is not pursued as a possible motivation for native plant enthusiasm. In order to assess the significance of the Society and its achievements readers need to bring their own understanding of such issues. But as Walter himself suggests the book is not the last word on its subject. Perhaps these under-examined aspects of the account should not be considered so much as deficiencies but avenues for further research. That the book can stimulate questions is a sign of its merit.

**Philippa McMahon**

The University of Melbourne

## Just released

Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: the making of a governor* (2006: ISBN 0 522 85235 1); Deb Verhoeven, *Sheep and the Australian Cinema* (2006: ISBN 0 522 85239 4); and Emily Potter et al (eds), *Fresh Water: new perspectives on water in Australia* (2007: ISBN 0 522 85424 9), each published by Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic.: paperback (print-on-demand), RRP \$49.95

At first sight an unlikely grouping, these three titles are all part of the MUP Academic Monograph Series and represent that recent publishing trend—the D-book or POD. Each title is digitally printed-on-demand (hence the 'D' and 'POD'), each has supplementary digital content available on-line, and each caters for specialised audiences unlikely to generate a large initial print run. *La Trobe* and *Fresh Water* each contain much of interest for the garden historian, while *Sheep* and especially the stills of the heroine 'parting the fleece' from Ken G. Hall's *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933) will mean you never think about the Australian fecundity myth in quite the same way again.

Katja Grillner, *Ramble, Linger, and Gaze: dialogues from the landscape garden*, Department of Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology (Kungl Tekniska Högskolan), Stockholm, Sweden, 2000 (ISBN 91 7170 505 8): 372pp, paperback (for availability check [www.us-ab.com](http://www.us-ab.com) or your favourite internet book site)

Although published in 2000, the recent Australian lecture tour of garden historian and theorist Katja Grillner has drawn attention to her innovative

'dialogue' with the eighteenth-century landscape garden. The bulk of the text takes the form of a fictional narrative dialogue (inspired by the contemporary accounts of Thomas Whately and Joseph Heely) complemented by an extensive postscript and notes on sources.

Roger Spencer, Rob Cross, & Peter Lumley, *Plant Names: a guide to botanical nomenclature*, 3rd ed., CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic., 2007 (ISBN 978 0 643 09440 6): paperback RRP 39.95

Some trusted names here to guide you through the maze of plant nomenclature, its history and usage (including wild and cultivated plants). Published under the auspices of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, this updated and greatly expanded edition deserves a place on the bookshelf of every serious gardener (and editor!).

Chris Viney (text), *People, Places and Plants: the influence of the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens on Tasmania's cultural landscape*, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Hobart, 2007 (no ISBN): 32pp, wrappers, RRP \$9.95 plus postage (available from the Botanical Shop at the Gardens).

A well illustrated reminder of the state-wide work undertaken over many years by the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens in the provision of plants and expertise which have shaped Tasmania's distinctive cultural landscapes. Based on detailed research—although curiously uncredited—by Hobart-based historian Gwenda Sheridan.

## Nina Crone Award

This award is to honour the outstanding contribution of the late Nina Crone to the Society through her editorship of *Australian Garden History* and her involvement with the Victorian Branch and the National Management Committee. The award of \$1000 is to encourage new and emerging scholars in the writing of Australian garden history and to recognise excellence in such writing. Entries of 1000–1500 words suited to publication in *Australian Garden History* are sought. The closing date is 31 July 2008 and full details are available on the Society's website.

Links: [www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au)



Photo: Anne Vale

Victorian Branch secretary Helen Botham (centre) and chair Pam Jellie (right) with Graeme Crone, brother of the late Nina Crone, at a recent fund-raising event for the award to honour Nina's contribution to the Australian Garden History Society.

## AOGS 20th anniversary

The celebration by Australia's Open Garden Scheme of its 20th anniversary culminates in the annual plant fair. Appropriately this will be held at Bolobek, one of the first gardens opened in the infancy of the Scheme in 1987. On Saturday and Sunday, 1–2 March 2008, about 40 exhibitors will showcase perennials, rare trees and shrubs, Australian plants, bulbs, and succulents, as well as specialist tools and garden sculpture. Refreshments will be available all day and there will be a 'plant creche' in which to leave purchases while strolling around the garden (see article on page 3).

Entry is \$10.

Links: [www.opengarden.org.au](http://www.opengarden.org.au)

## Recherche Bay

The management plan for Recherche Bay has recently been completed and the Society participated as part of the community reference group established to advise and assist the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. Max Kitchell was the convenor of the reference group and volunteered his time and expertise to shape the group's recommendations into a draft management plan.

Links: [www.tasland.org.au](http://www.tasland.org.au)

## Albury conference

Selected papers from the AGHS 28th annual national conference—which took as its theme 'Interpreting the landscape of the Albury region'—are now available on the Society's website.

Links: [www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au)

## English Garden in Canberra

Created over the last seventy years, this parkland and mature collection of specimen trees adjoining Weston Park was established as a trial and demonstration site for in Yarralumla Nursery. The ACT, Riverina and Monaro Branch has been commissioned by the ACT Government to undertake two projects. With the assistance of members and other interested locals, former Branch president Madeleine Maple is managing the production of a self-guided tour brochure and marked walk. A detailed inventory is also being compiled by Max Bourke and retired Yarralumla Nursery manager, Franz Grossbechler. Despite severe drought and the loss of some key specimens (including a row of mature *Pinus torreyana*), the majority of trees are in good health. These projects complement the proposed new Canberra International Arboretum.

Links: [www.cmd.act.gov.au/arboretum](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/arboretum)

## Share your opinions:

We always welcome constructive feedback on the journal and tips for subjects that you feel should be covered in future issues.

# Diary dates

## FEBRUARY 2008

### Thursday 14

Victoria

#### Clifton Hill walk and talk:

A member of the Merri Creek Management Committee will speak about the landscaping and re-vegetation programs that have successfully created a wildlife corridor along the creek and so enhanced the area's recreational amenity. Half-hour walk follows talk, viewing newly created wetlands and indigenous plantings. Meet at 6 pm in picnic rotunda at Quarries Park, Clifton Hill (corner of Wright and Dwyer Streets), and follow path to right. BYO picnic and rug/chair. Contact: Bronwen Merrett on bronm@bigpond.net.au.

### Tuesday 19

Sydney & Northern NSW

#### Lavender Bay/North Sydney ramble:

View Graythwaite, a remnant large 19th century estate, subdivided fragments that have been turned into local parks, harbour-front land reclaimed from industry, and Wendy Whiteley's Secret Garden. Meet at Graythwaite gates, 50 Union Street, North Sydney, 5–7 pm. Cost: \$10/15 non-members (includes light refreshments). Bookings essential to Stuart Read on 02 9873 8554 (bh) or 9326 9468 (ah) or stuart.read@heritage.nsw.gov.au

### Saturday 23

Sydney & Northern NSW

**Glenfield Farm, Casula:** Enjoy a tour of a newly installed garden around this c.1810 homestead (temporarily in the care of the NSW Historic Houses Trust) with designer Dr James Broadbent and installer Dave Gray. Meet at 88 Leacock's Lane, Casula (off Hume Highway), 4–6pm. Cost: \$10/15 non-members. Bookings essential to Stuart Read (see details above).

### Sunday 24

Queensland

**Japanese Gardens:** Illustrated talk by Keith Jorgensen. Meet at Herbarium, Mount Coot-tha Botanic Gardens.

Cost \$10/15 guests (afternoon tea included). Register by 18 February to Gill Jorgensen on 07 3341 3933 or jorgenkg@pickknowl.com.au

### Wednesday 27

Western Australia

#### Osborne Hotel and Treseder

**Nursery, Claremont:** Illustrated talk by John Viska presenting his recent research on these subjects.

Venue: TBC. Contact: Sue Monger on 08 9384 1575 or susanmonger@yahoo.com.au

## MARCH 2008

### Tuesday 11

Sydney & Northern NSW

#### Chris & Margaret Betteridge

**lecture:** Illustrated talk by two long-time members on their approach to cultural heritage and garden projects around NSW. Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill, Sydney, 6 30–8 30pm. Cost: \$20/25 non-members. Bookings essential to Stuart Read on 02 9873 8554 (bh) or 9326 9468 (ah) or stuart.read@heritage.nsw.gov.au

### Sunday 16

Queensland

**Gardens of Windsor:** Brief talk then visit to 1930s garden of Derek Lodge, the Spanish Mission home of Les & Pam Masel at 35 Mackay Street; also viewing of a neighbouring garden, and Bribie Island pine avenue planted by William Jolley. Meet at Windsor Town Council Chambers (parking in Palmer Street). Optional afternoon tea at Wilston Village. Register by 10 March to Gill Jorgensen (see details above).

## APRIL 2008

### Sunday 6

Western Australia

#### Joe Martin exhibition opening:

Opening, in conjunction with Subiaco Museum, of exhibition featuring Joe Martin, hybridist and head gardener at Subiaco (1926–42) and Rankin Gardens. John Viska will lead a walk in the gardens, meet at Subiaco Museum. Time: TBC. Contact: Susan Monger on 08 9384 1575 or susanmonger@yahoo.com.au

### Sunday 13

Sydney & Northern NSW

#### Annandale/Glebe foreshore walk:

Enjoy a ramble around reclaimed industrial lands now sporting harbour-side parks with spectacular city views, intriguing histories, giant figs, remnants of industry, historic marine villas and gardens. 10 am–1 pm, optional café lunch nearby. Cost: \$15/20 non-members. Bookings essential to Stuart Read on 02 9873 8554 (bh) or 9326 9468 (ah) or stuart.read@heritage.nsw.gov.au

### Saturday 19

Queensland

#### Mount Coot-tha Botanic Gardens

**history:** Conducted tour and illustrated talk by Ray Steward, former Brisbane City Council Director of Parks and manager of the initial development of this site. Meet at Herbarium, Mount Coot-tha, 2 pm. Cost: \$10/15 guests (afternoon tea included). Register by 14 April to Gill Jorgensen on 07 3341 3933 or jorgenkg@pickknowl.com.au

### Saturday 26

Sydney & Northern NSW

**Bilpin, Blue Mountains:** As well as the Collector's Plant Fair being held on this weekend (Woodgreen, 27 Powells Road, Bilpin), two private gardens will be open to AGHS members: Don Schofield's woodland garden, Wintergreen, Skyline Road, Bilpin (from 2 pm, \$5 per head), and Tina Brauer's garden, Kookaburra, 83 Powell's Road, Bilpin (from 4 pm, \$5 per head). More information at the Fair.

# Under the Spell of the Ages

Trisha Dixon

In these edited extracts from *Under the Spell of the Ages*, we share author and photographer Trisha Dixon's love for the Australian country, its people, and its gardens.

It is difficult to pinpoint where memory begins and ends, and what role our memories of place play in our creative endeavours. How do our subliminal perceptions—layered like an infinite tapestry—combine in our memory to evoke time and place? To what extent do we see, feel, and experience things not just outwardly but, as nineteenth-century English art critic John Ruskin believed, with the soul of the eye. And where are those places that have either enabled or inspired each individual's creative writing. Judith Wright wrote in her introduction to *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*:

*Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's and novelist's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described, and as it were absorbed. The writer must be at peace with his landscape before he can turn confidently to its human figures.*

New Zealand artist Rosalie Gascoigne said, 'You seek out the spirit of the landscape to match your own spirit'. Such 'seeking out' is evident in this book. We read of author Elyne Mitchell's deep, almost spiritual, attachment to the landscape at Towong Hill, Victoria; the all-encompassing care that six generations of the Archer family have bestowed on their chosen land at Gracemere in Queensland; and how Patrick White turned again and again to the Monaro landscape, the place where he spent a decisive year in his early twenties. Each individual draws on personal experiences.

*Under the Spell of the Ages* starts and begins within the walls of the National Library of Australia, that grand caretaker of our national memory—home of letters and documents, of faded sketches and valuable paintings, of heart-wrenching diaries and Australia's first charted maps. As a collection, it is eclectic, wide-ranging, and massive.



Huge bunya pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*), grown from seed almost 160 years ago, dominate the homestead garden of Franklyn Vale at Grand Chester, Queensland.



A dignified old blue gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) is the focal point of the Franklyn Vale garden. Mount Beau Brummel, part of the Liverpool Ranges, provides a majestic backdrop. A path, mown once a year, accentuates the axis and leads the garden viewer into the landscape.

While it may seem to evoke a more innocent and unspoiled era, this personal compilation reflects a golden age in Australia's past. This was a time when gardens and plants were shared with friends, when the orchard was an integral part of the garden, when baskets of fruit were given to neighbours, and when books were read in the shade of a tree. The title *Under the Spell of the Ages* recalls the old-world charm of this era. The words are Norah Lindsay's and were quoted by architectural historian Dr James Broadbent in a fireside talk at Cooma's Raglan Gallery in 2004.

Beatrice Bligh evokes a similar image of her father's childhood garden. Manar was established near Braidwood in 1836 by Beatrice's great-grandfather, Hugh Gordon of Manar, Scotland. In the opening paragraph of *Down to Earth*, she describes the garden: 'The trees and shrubs met overhead along the winding gravel paths, making them into dim tunnels of green, and there seemed to be no clipped edges or real flower-beds; it was not an atmosphere of actual neglect, but one of casual, old-world charm.' Having grown up in a wonderfully old-fashioned country garden with many visits to gardens like Manar, this became my garden idyll, reinforced by nine years in Winifred West's 'school in a garden' at Gib Gate and Frensham.

Perhaps this is 'slow gardening' and I can be termed a 'slow gardener'! Just as 'slow food'

promotes traditional food, as opposed to fast food, as a source of pleasure, so these gardens of our childhood are a world away from the 'backyard blitz' gardens of today. The colonial tapestry woven by writers, gardeners, poets, and artists portrays a charmed world, perhaps far more engaging than reality. I think of these artistic creators as people who intellectualise our landscape, who can express the meanings and values we attach to our surroundings. Excerpts and images become like stitches in the fabric of our social and cultural history that link landscape and gardens to our way of seeing.

Garden philosopher Gordon Ford once said, 'We must feel part of the land we walk on and love the plants that grow there ... if we are to achieve a spirit in the garden'. Before him, Edna Walling also fell under the spell of the Australian landscape, imparting this pleasure and appreciation to generations of gardeners. Like her, Gordon Ford felt this emotional response to the landscape he loved so much. This spirit of the landscape, or *genius loci*, is intangible and comes from what is within as much as from what we see.

*Under the Spell of the Ages: Australian country gardens* is available to AGHS members at the special price of \$39.50 plus \$6 postage and handling—see order form on the Society's website.



## Mission Statement

The Australian Garden History Society is the leader in concern for and conservation of significant cultural landscapes and historic gardens through committed, relevant and sustainable action.