GARDEN CONNECTIONS: CHINA AND AUSTRALIA
Mentioned in family diaries, oral stories, official census figures and Australian literature after the 1850s, the Chinese market gardener in Australia has not yet been the subject of substantial study. His story is a touching one. Most often lured to Australia by the prospect of a golden fortune he was later isolated as an unwelcome immigrant through legislation enacted by the new Federal Parliament - the Immigration Act of 1901. The opprobrium it engendered ensured the Chinese market gardener lived a singularly lonely existence.

In his History of Brighton, published in 1952, Weston Bate offered one of the first accounts giving some depth to the subject. More recently Diana Giese has collected oral accounts of Chinese market gardeners in Darwin and Central Australia. In Queensland the Chinese established a thriving business growing and exporting bananas. Elsewhere there are brief references in many places. These segments of information in museum archives, historical societies and newspaper files need to be gathered into a national picture and a wider context. The story is worth more than a few lines.

The past decades have seen the flora of China receive increasing attention from Australian botanists and horticulturists. In New South Wales at Kulgura, Bob Cherry developed a superb centre for acclimatising and hybridising camellias, personally collecting much of his plant material in China. Terry Smyth at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and Ross Ingram at the Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens set about developing specialist collections enabling the visiting public to see Chinese species. In South Australia the Rhododendron Gully at Mt. Lofty Botanic Gardens does likewise.

For many people Peter Valder's careful research, elegant writing and magnificent photography in Wisterias (1995) and The Garden Plants of China (1999) provided a great fillip to appreciation of Chinese plants, gardens and philosophy.

Australians are also beginning to know something of classic Chinese gardens, for instance at Darling Harbour in Sydney and in Bendigo, and they are visiting the celebrated gardens of Suzhou gaining an understanding of the cultural element of the Chinese garden and its influence on contemporary western gardens.

While Marion Blackwell has designed a small Chinese garden at Murdoch University in Western Australia to-day’s immigrants from China are growing produce in collective or allotment gardens and creating their own decorative gardens in the suburbs of a multi-cultural Australia. With the new and more sophisticated groundswell of interest in Australian-Chinese garden connections, it becomes increasingly urgent that the contribution of the early Chinese market gardeners is thoroughly documented in a national picture.
This poem was written when Tu Fu was living in his famous thatched cottage in Ch‘engtu (Chengdu), Sichuan Province, between 760 – 765 AD. He was perhaps the most famous of Chinese poets who lived during the Tang Dynasty.

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Thanks to Beryl Black, Nina Crone, Di Ellerton, Nola Foster, John Joyce, Laura Lewis, Cate McKern, Sandi Pullman, Anne Raynent, Kaye and Mike Stokes, and Georgina Whitehead for packing the last issue of the journal.
CHINESE KITCHEN AND MARKET GARDENERS have received passing mention by many Australian writers. They evoked a sense of mystery and exoticism coupled with a sinister frisson.

... On Saturday, when the Chinese market gardeners carried their vegetables in a dray around the town, the children would follow it and hitch a ride on top. Scrubbed carrots and other vegetables were waiting for them as treats, and if times were hard and there were children to feed, more would change hands than had been paid for. The little cart with its burden of produce fed the town that had never grown its own, and while Ireland provided basic meat and potatoes, China added as much variety from its cuisine as it could extract from the baked earth.


... while she was a child in the 1920s Lily's family ... laboured to grow an array of crops in a climate unsuited to some of them. They produced cabbages, lettuce, tomatoes and celery, mangoes, pineapples and bananas, sugarcane for 'cooling medicine' against the heat. In the wet season they managed cucumbers and melons, pumpkin, beans, sweet corn and spinach. She remembers market gardeners like her family digging wells for water which they carried in recycled kerosene tins fitted with long bamboo spouts and used as watering cans.

From interview with Lily Ah Toy by S. Saunders for the Northern Territory Archives 10 April 1981 (NTSR226 TS1/2) and Ann McGrath (NTSR226 TS1) quoted in Diana Giese, Beyond Chinatown, National Library of Australia 1995

In vain Cheon ... danced war-dances in the vegetable patch, and chivvied and chased, and flew all ways at once; the grasshoppers had found green stuff exactly to their liking, and coming in clouds, settled and feasted, and swept on, leaving poor Cheon's heart as barren of hope as the garden was of vegetables. Nothing remained but pumpkins, seed potatoes, and Cheon's tardy water-melons.

Mrs Aeneas Gunn, We of the Never-Never, Hutchinson & Co. London

Referring to Chinese in Queensland's early days

... I have 2 [Chinese] on as gardeners capital workers they are better than Englishmen being so particular in watering &c &c ...

Patrick Leslie letter to his brother William 1 January 1853, qv. Rolls, Eric, Sojourners, University of Queensland Press 1992

... she ... pushed through the barrier of dark bamboo and paperbark trees and climbed over the fence into the darker market gardens. Here the wind dropped and her feet sank in sighing heaps of fishy seaweed mulch. Sighting along a line of gleaming cauliflowers she picked her way to the shed where Lee Tung and the other gardeners lived among piles of hessian sacks and wooden crates. By day when she bought herbs here the shed just smelt of stale sweat and shallots. Now the smell was sweeter and more acrid like boiling yams.


In historical documentation and writing Chinese market gardens in Australia have often been dismissed in two or three lines. Census figures suggest that Chinese market gardeners deserved more consideration and fifty years ago Weston Bate offered a sensitive and perceptive account of their work in his book A History of Brighton.

| Number & percentage of Chinese Males in Fruit & Vegetable Associated Occupations as compared to Mining in NSW, Victoria and Queensland in 1891 and 1901 |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                                | 1891             | 1901             | 1891             | 1901             | 1891             | 1901             |
| Occupation                     | No.   | % No.   | % No.   | % No.   | % No.   | % No.   |
| Gardeners                      | 3480  | 29.26% | 3564  | 35.76% | 2104  | 26.51% | 2022  | 33.02% | 2564  | 30.30% | 2446  | 8.89% |
| Greengrocers                   | 317   | 2.42%  | 650   | 6.52%  | 93    | 1.17%  | 252   | 4.12%  | 201   | 6.04%  | 293   | 7.03% |
| Other Agricultural Workers     | 1817  | 13.84% | 353   | 3.54%  | 530   | 6.68%  | 515   | 8.41%  | 1510  | 17.98% | 1859  | 1.95% |
| Total %                        | 45.52% | 45.62%  | 43.36% | 45.55%  | 43.66% | 45.55%  | 43.66% | 45.55%  |
| Mining                         | 1947  | 14.83% | 1019  | 10.22% | 2181  | 27.48% | 1296  | 21.17% | 878   | 10.45% | 657   | 7.76% |

Figures from 1891 and 1901 Censuses for NSW, Victoria and Qld
During the 1960s a small wooden roadside stall stood on the old Hume Highway which passes over Razorback. It displayed the produce of a Chinese market garden. There was no bok choy, no cho sum and no Chinese cabbage. But mounds of bundled shallots, iceberg lettuce and bunches of gleaming carrots were for sale.

The Hume Highway route was determined by the influence of Governor Macquarie’s former aide-de-camp and friend Major Antill. It passed through John Macarthur’s grant and Camden before crossing the Nepean River. The fertile alluvial soils of the river flats supported vineyards, orchards and market gardens. The Chinese market garden was thus on land that during the nineteenth century had been cultivated by emigrants, some of whom had been brought out by the Macarthurs, but frequent flooding left little evidence of their use of the land.

The first migrant farmer of note was James Ruse who was given one and a half acres of cleared land on the banks of Clay Cliff Creek, near Parramatta, to the west of Sydney, in 1789, with a promise from Governor Phillip of a thirty-acre grant if he could support himself through farming.

James Ruse only stayed on his Experiment Farm until 1794, but the question of the location of the first one and a half acres is a tantalising one for the Australian imagination. It is likely that it was on the alluvial flats close to a ready water supply. Ruse was English and the next owner of Experiment Farm and the adjacent 100-acre grant, Surgeon John Harris was Irish. Their links with Experiment Farm are well documented.

What is not well known is that by 1876 a Chinese farmer had established a market garden on the alluvial flats on the northern part of the
I. Chinese market gardens at La Perouse lie in the hollow between sand dunes.

2. Interior of shed for the tools used in the Chinese market gardens.

3. Nestled behind the sand dunes at La Perouse are the three market gardens which are still worked by members of the Chinese community using traditional methods of cultivation.

4. The sand-hills of La Perouse and in the foreground the Eastern Suburbs Cemetery. Photos: Colleen Morris.

property and by 1882 a wooden house had been constructed on the land. When surveyed in 1893, the house was marked as a Chinese Humpy. It consisted of one large room with a verandah along one side. There was an adjacent WC of galvanised iron and a well in the vegetable garden.

A second dwelling for the gardeners with an attached cart shed and a small stable had been added at the southern end of the garden by 1912. A member of the Fraser family who lived in the famous colonial homestead from 1903 to 1913 later recalled:

"Beyond our paddock in front of the house, there was an enormous garden, with many coolie Chinese. There was a creek running through the bottom of our land and through the Chinese gardens. The Chinese had several large planks of wood where the men would run along with a long pole over their shoulders and large watering cans at each end. They would dip down one can at a time and all day long this happened. We had lots of good vegetables from the Chinese..."

Just how many Chinese gardened is unclear. The Rate Assessment Books list a variety of names—many, such as Ah Tong, Ah Lung, Ah Ling, Ah Long and Ah Wong, may refer to the one person, as would Yong Sap and You Sap. For ten years from 1897 Ah Chong and Sun Hop Lee are consistently listed. When the 1901 Census was conducted five Chinese were stated as living at the dwelling of Ah Chong and another three Chinese lived in streets nearby. By the 1920s the gardens had gone. There are no photos, no records of what had been grown or, it seems, of the gardeners themselves, except for a scries of names possibly incorrectly recorded by the council rate assessors.

One Chinese market gardener at Parramatta for whom there are records was Guoc Ah-Poo. He, however, married a white woman. Born in Canton in 1843, he came to Australia in 1862 and was working as a gardener at Numbaa near Nowra, when he married Emma Ann Lowe. Guoc Ah-Poo (also known as George Harper) was naturalised in 1883, and moved with his family to Parramatta in 1890. Later his son Herbert became a landscape gardener with clients in the western suburbs of Sydney.

The most useful description of the operation of a Chinese market garden in the nineteenth century appeared in the Horticultural Magazine and Gardener's Calendar of NSW in August 1867. Editor John Gelding, writing as 'An Anglo-Saxon', visited 'John Chinaman' at a market garden in the Rushcutters' Bay swamp. He was treated with extreme politeness by the gardeners who planted using a bed system 'with entire disregard for straight lines.'
The beds were thickly sowed or planted and weed free. Crops were fed with liquid manure as opposed to solid manures and the drains throughout the gardens were kept clean and clear. He observed that the Chinese gardeners did not attach much value to potato crops but grew cabbage, cauliflower, turnips, salads, carrots, onions and eschallots - a similar selection to what was on sale at Camden one hundred years later.

For a gardening magazine which more usually reported on prominent established gardens or those of the upwardly mobile inhabitants of the eastern suburbs of Sydney, it was a refreshing departure. What the subscribers thought is unrecorded. It does imply that the rise in the numbers of Chinese taking over market gardening from their Anglo-Saxon counterparts following the gold rushes was attracting sufficient curiosity for such an article to appear.

Ideal garden site characteristics were sandy soils and a high water table. Market gardens were farmed by the Chinese on the sandy and swampy soils of Randwick and Botany, municipalities to the south-east of Sydney. In parts the Chinese gardened in the depressions between sand-hills, their presence indicated by the clumps of Phormium tenax (New Zealand Flax) near the preparation area as it was used to tie the bundles of vegetables together. The other essential feature was a well, often containing gold fish.

During the 1920s and 30s, William Stephen, a prominent member of the Botany community and one time Mayor of Botany, owned the land leased by a number of market gardeners. Rent was collected on Saturday mornings - the four shillings from each farmer was often left for the collector on a shelf of the simple dwellings. The young rent collector was always given a gift if someone was there, perhaps a carrot or onion, and at Chinese New Year a box covered with pink paper containing Hang Mee Tea, a jar of ginger, some dried lychees and Chinese fire crackers of the sort commonly called "Tom Thumbs."

One recollection is that the small dwellings consisted of two parts - one for sleeping and the other open section for the cart and the liquid manure. There were no women and the men appeared to live solitary, celibate lives except for an occasional celebratory outburst. Once a year they held a feast at the cemetery at which a pig was roasted.

Local Randwick residents also recall that the vegetables were washed in a large, central shed, cooking was done outside over open fires and that the men slept in corrugated iron huts. The gardeners left for the Sydney markets at 4 a.m., often before dawn, and on their return trip their carts carried straw manure. Nightsoil or human waste, commonly used as fertiliser, was transported at night.

In the early twentieth century, both Andersons and Sons and Austens, the seed merchants, employed a translator to write to the gardeners who, it seems, came from the same province in China. Several families who still garden in the Randwick municipality came from the Yiu Ming district of Guangdong and speak a Cantonese dialect. Advertisements for seeds, printed in The Chinese Australian Herald, indicate the range of commonly grown vegetables.
Seeds of lettuce, onion, parsley, turnip, beetroot, carrot, cabbage and cucumber were among those advertised in *The Chinese Australian Herald*, February 12, 1910. (Courtesy of Professor Richard Clough)

Photo: Colleen Morris

There were gardens at Roseville on the north shore, at Rose Bay, Banks Meadow, Marraville, Mascot, La Perouse in the eastern suburbs and at Rockdale to the south. A conservation management plan has been commissioned for the gardens at Rockdale although research has revealed their gardening by the Chinese to be for a shorter period than previously believed.¹

The majority of Sydney’s Chinese market gardeners have disappeared. Their history appearing as ephemeral as the vegetables grown. Members of the Chinese community have managed market gardens at La Perouse for over 90 years. They are thought to be some of the oldest market gardens in NSW and were listed on the State Heritage Register in 1999. Europeans are believed to have established farming of the area in the 1830s with increasing involvement by Chinese farmers from the 1850s.

The exact history of the three contiguous gardens has proved difficult to research as they are on Crown Land and operated under permissive occupations from the Crown.² In the Sands Directory, a yearly directory of occupants of all properties, Chinese are recorded as occupying the gardens from the late 1920s and early 1930s.³

The families who gardened here have passed their leases from one generation to another and have substantially retained traditional practices. Most of the work is still done using manual labour and simple tools.

The things that have changed are the main road to Sydney, now a freeway from Goulburn bypassing the Razorback Range and crossing land that proved unsuitable for intensive agriculture, and at Parramatta Clay Cliff Creek now redirected through a rigid canal leaving scant evidence of past land uses. But at La Perouse the change seen is an increase in production of Chinese vegetables – a response to the rise in Asian immigration over the last twenty years and to the market forces of a multi-cultural population.

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1 Rate Assessment Books, Anderson Ward, Borough of Parramatta
2 Detail Survey Branch, Sydney Water PB No. 2356
3 Helen Cunningham, National Trust of Australia (NSW) Experiment Farm file.
4 1901 Census, Parramatta, entries for Hassall Street and Barrack Lane
5 Joanne Ewin, Meet the Pioneers, Early Families of the Milton-Ulladulla District with Photographs, Milton NSW, 1991, p. 2
6 I am indebted to Richard Clough for his recollections as the young rent collector on his holiday visits to his great uncle, William D. Stephen
7 ibid.
8 From Randwick; A Social History quoted in Randwick City Council, Health, Building and Planning Committee, Report, Chinese Market Gardens – La Perouse, 6 July 1998
9 Oral communication, Richard Clough
10 Karl Zhao, former Chinese heritage officer, NSW Heritage Office quoted in 'State Heritage Register, Chinese market gardens', Heritage NSW, October 1999 Vol. 6 No. 3, p. 15 and oral advice.
11 Denis Gojack, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and Andrea Humphries, Architectural History Service heritage Office Workshop, 1 December 2000
12 Oral communication, Karl Zhao.
AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY CHINESE MARKET GARDENS were thriving along the rivers and tributary creeks of Melbourne and they played an important part in providing fresh vegetables for the colony.

Hawthorn began as a rural settlement with dairies, livery stables, a violet farm and market gardens. Some Chinese settled on the river flats of the Yarra attracted by the rich alluvial soil but it was mostly too steep along the river bank so others settled the area bounded by Barkers Road, Burwood Road, Riversdale Road and Burke Road.

Sources vary in their view of the earliest market gardens in Hawthorn. Some say the early 1860s and others the 1870s. The first Chinese market gardener known in the Hawthorn seems to be Ah Fain c. 1863 who worked in Robinson's Road. He was followed by Ah Tic c. 1870 on a tiny garden belonging to Mr McIntyre on Church Street. Ah Cow and Lee Foot followed in the early 1880s. It is known that Ah Quick established a market garden on the west side of Shakespeare Grove in 1901 and in 1904 Hop Lee gardened on the east side.

In Hawthorn the size of the plots ranged from 10 acres to 30 acres depending on whether the garden was on river flats or in the suburb itself. The market gardens were usually surrounded by a wooden fence which was cheap to build. Work was done by hand or by horse. The Chinese grew vegetables such as tomatoes, cabbages, celery, peas, beans and lettuce. There is no record of potatoes or fruit being grown.

The Chinese grew their vegetables from their own seed and took great care to raise seedlings under glass. They were transplanted into neat, tidy rows and regularly fertilised with liquid horse manure. The vegetables were sold at the Melbourne markets or by hawkers going from door to door. Many local Hawthorn residents speak of seeing, at dusk, the chairmen coming back from the market asleep in their carts as the horse made its own way home.

Living conditions were very primitive, one room or maybe none. At first there were wooden huts but in the 1920s and 1930s corrugated iron was commonly used. These huts housed bagged blood and bone and equipment. Local residents said they never saw women or children working the plots, only strong men. Poor living conditions were said to be one reason why there were no women and children. The other reason was that most of the men were intending to return to China. They were in Australia to make money and then go home.

The Chinese respected the soil and returned all human and animal excreta to it. For manuring dry land crops the night soil was placed in tanks or
open ponds, fermented for weeks, and then mixed into the irrigation water. This system had been used by the Chinese for 4,000 years and they were renowned for growing excellent vegetables.

At the turn of the century Hawthorn had no sewers and curious stories circulated that human excreta was hidden in the middle of manure piles. There is no hard evidence to support this story but it is most probable that age-old traditions were followed. The market gardens were often the source of complaints about the foul smell in some neighbouring areas. Health inspectors regularly checked the gardens and reported finding piles of horse manure and compost smelling like rotten cabbage.

Buckets were used to water the gardens and were filled from water holes along the pathways. One by one the buckets would be filled, to be carried in pairs on a rod that went across the shoulders. The gardener would water two rows at a time, flooding the hollow between the rows. When water was scarce over the summer period, the Chinese would buy it from the Board of Works.

The Chinese were well respected for their ability to grow excellent vegetables and this skill was generally valued more than that of Chinese cooks. Nevertheless, they were often the object of children's playful jibes or adults' practical jokes. This was partly because of the Chinese stoical patience and endurance and partly due to the racist attitudes of the times. In general the Chinese were the butt of ridicule with only a degree of sympathy or pity.

Tending to be kind, peace-loving, hard working and law abiding, the Chinese rarely appeared in court. However, on 23rd November, 1908 Hop Lee was charged for illegally discharging a firearm. He claimed that he was shooting at a bird after a friend had dared him. An eyewitness claimed he saw the friend of the accused dive naked into the Yarra River (for which he was charged with indecent behaviour) to retrieve the bird. The Hawthorn and Camberwell Citizen commented that the accused put on a most 'stolid look of innocence' and simply shook his head and said 'No savee' every time the court addressed him. Constable Feehan pointed out to the court that Hop Lee could speak English as well as any Englishman.

In Hop Lee's trial, he stated that he was a Christian but the attitude towards the different races attending the local church was hypocritical. The Anglican congregation at St Columb's Hawthorn was made up of Anglo-Celtic people no longer concerned with farming but rather with their social status within the community, but it was sufficiently concerned to reserve the back pew for the Chinese to protect them from prying eyes and from pigtail pulling. Previously however when the Church of England Minister, the Reverend Carey Ward, suggested in 1894 that the monthly pew fee should be waived for the very poorest parishioners, the congregation was 'horrified' and refused the suggestion.

After the First World War farming and market gardening suddenly began to disappear. In 1919, a well-known landmark, the Urquhart Estate consisting of 40 hectares in Glenferrie Road and owned by the family since 1850, vanished. It had been a bastion of Chinese market gardens since the 1880s and was sold and subdivided for houses. This landmark tied rural Hawthorn to the past but the subdivision of land projected Hawthorn into the future.

Another factor that caused the decline of market gardens in Hawthorn was that the Yarra River flooded regularly. All the market gardens situated along the Yarra had great dykes built to prevent the water submerging them. In 1934 the great flood washed away the Toorak Road Bridge. It was this inundation that saw the end of the Chinese market gardens in Hawthorn.

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1. McWilliam, G Hawthorn Peppercorns Brian Atkins, 100 Moring Road, Hawthorn (1978)
3. Ibid.
4. Rolls, Eric, Flowers and the Wide Seas Queensland University Press
6. Peel, V., Zion, D., Yule, J. History of Hawthorn Melbourne University Press Carlton in association with the City of Hawthorn 1993
7. Ibid.
After visiting Melbourne, Hong Kong, the Republic of China and working in London, where for a short time she had her own soft landscaping business, Terry Smyth settled into the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne as a gardener in 1988.

This was before the development of the RBG Master Plan but it was a dynamic time. The growing public interest in gardens was enhanced by Victoria’s concept of ‘the garden state’, by the inaugural years of the state, later national, Open Garden Scheme, by the heightened profile of the Friends of the Botanic Gardens and by the celebration of Australia’s bicentenary. Keen young gardeners like Donna Sommerville were promoting particular areas of the Gardens such as the Perennial Border and plans for the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Gardens were occupying management.

Between the lake and Alexandra Avenue there was a triangular bed of assorted Asian and Indian plants which had survived through periods of what Terry describes as ‘on again/off again’ care. She recalls that it was when the Lagerstroemia subcostata was moved from the bed to the lawn point that she saw the possibility of rejuvenating the neglected area and developing this collection.

In 1990 she became responsible for this area. Realising how much she needed to know she set about reading and researching the provenance of the existing plants. Although she found some information through the World Seed Bank Register (the Index Seminum), other information was obscure or non-existent in English. Terry is a passionate advocate for carefully recording the provenance of each plant in specialist collections.

Supported by the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens she represented the RBG in China collecting seed, plant material, herbarium specimens, slides and cultural information and she submitted a detailed report in 1992. This occasioned greater interest in the flora of South China particularly that of Yunnan and led to the inclusion of the collection in the Gardens Master Plan with a five or ten year development period.

Bob Cherry of Paradise Plants led that first collecting trip. In New South Wales he was acclimatising species like the yellow camellia (Camellia nitidissima [syn. chrysantha]) and he made regular collecting trips to South China. He became her mentor. She remembers how Bob advised her to look at the natural environment of the plants she wished to grow; always to ask how they grow in the wild.

The invitation to join Bob Cherry’s next trip found Terry selling her car to underwrite, in part, the expenses for a further four weeks in Yunnan. The result was a new batch of plant material generously donated by Bob Cherry for the collection in Melbourne.

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO A LOVE OF PLANTS and a yen for foreign travel set a young New Zealand gardener, Terry Smyth, on a path that led to an impressive Southern Chinese Collection opened last October in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.
Then, another aspect of gardening began taking an increasing amount of Terry's time. Community interest was growing so there were presentations, talks to interested groups, on-site explanations to visitors, articles in journals and interviews with the press. Bob Cherry backed an eight-week collecting trip in 1996 when 9,000kms were covered in mountainous Yunnan.

Two years later the 'Friends' again supported Terry for a period of work in the Kunming Botanic Gardens as that city was preparing for the International Floral Expo of 1999. The value of this visit was that Terry experienced the culture underpinning the Chinese approach to plants and gardening, to horticultural training and to the way the Chinese people use a botanical garden.

The differences Terry noticed were the great use of casual labour particularly in summer, the lack of modern practical horticultural courses which means there is relatively little 'hands on' training in China. As research is the principal work of those permanently employed in botanical gardens in China most are set out as 'systems gardens'. The Kunming Botanical Garden is slowly moving away from this more rigid garden style and mixing the collections in a more picturesque and functional way.

Terry describes how in Kunming she used her customary method of planting, in groups of three or more, only to be told that in China plants are usually planted in twos. Was this some subconscious cultural influence where westerners were imbued with the concept of 'the golden third or golden mean' or perhaps 'the trinity' while easterners respected the principle of 'yin and yang'? Who knows?

From Terry's observation the reason Chinese people visit their public gardens is to see nature, to experience space and to take photos of each other in a beautiful setting. She saw little understanding of ecology and ecological issues although there are new efforts on the part of gardens' staff to 'tell the story'.

'Telling the story' is, Terry believes, the strength of the current scene in Australian botanic gardens. Volunteer guides, the 'Flora Explorer' program, special projects for language students, educational programs in the RBG for schools such as 'The Three Friends of Winter' all develop appreciation of the world's plants. By promoting the collections the Gardens aim to inspire a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of plants, their usefulness to humankind and the importance of conserving threatened habitats.

Does Terry ever feel she is working in isolation? Indeed not. She describes the Australian network of gardeners focusing on Chinese or Asian plants - Bob Cherry of course, but also Ross Ingram at Mt Tomah (NSW), Don Teese of Yamma Rare Plants, Judi Forrestor of Otway Herbs, Jim Cane of the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens and all the specialist plant societies. And there is a similar worldwide network.

The highlight of Terry's travels in China was the trip to the World Heritage area of Jiu Zhai Gou in Sichuan, home of pandas and magnificent plants. Now she is looking forward to showing her garden to the Director of the Kunming Botanical Gardens, Professor Guan Kaiyun, when he visits Melbourne in April this year.
He pursued a career as an art teacher and later worked in film, radio and television - often with a focus on curriculum development. The wheel of his life began slowly to turn back to his roots. His interest in the natural environment grew and he began to see plants as aesthetic, three-dimensional objects making up a particular landscape rather than as decorative horticultural elements in a garden.

In 1990 he came to the Mt Tomah Botanic Garden 'to keep records'. Two years later he was Horticultural Development Officer. Here his background in agriculture and skills in art, media and communication were put to good use in horticultural interpretation.

Convinced that 'you don’t understand plants until you understand the culture of their country of origin' Ross wanted to experience China personally. This led to his first trip in 1994 with Bob Cherry and an international group from USA, Ireland, England, New Zealand and Australia. Terry Smyth was among the Australians.

Ross explains how the visit changed forever his view of rhododendrons. No longer were they prized individual garden shrubs, they were a particular Chinese landscape, just as eucalypts or melaleucas are an Australian landscape. But if there is a timelessness to the backdrop of landscape, the culture that evolves in its precincts is marked by changing ideas. Although Ross felt an empathy with the plant hunters like Fortune, Forrest or Kingdon Ward comprehending their excitement and exhilaration in the face of such botanical wealth, his own perspective, in the last decade of the twentieth century, is different. He interprets the great era of plant hunting as form of 'imperial robbery' that is unacceptable to-day when the catch-cry is conservation.

Describing himself as an ethno-botanist Ross set about ‘telling the story’ by developing the Plant Explorers’ Trail in the Mount Tomah Gardens. He felt it would define and give meaning to the Euro-Asia collection established in 1990 by Tony Curry. Plant material collected on a second trip to China in 1996 built up his own preference for sub-alpine species such as primulas, gentians, meconopsis and incarvilleas. These small subjects provide interest in a confined area, offer good discussion of conservation issues, and nomenclature ties in with the story of the plant-hunters. Moreover the sub-alpine species please visitors while the trees and shrubs of his landscape are establishing themselves.

Currently Ross is occupied with his contribution to the Site Master Plan which aims to set Mount Tomah firmly among the world’s great botanic gardens. With over 100,000 visitors each year there is a wonderful audience for the story.

I. See Australian Garden History Vol. 9 No. 4 pp.7-12 and illus.
THE ADVENTURES of the great nineteenth century plant collector, Robert Fortune (1812-1880) deserve to be more widely known.

It is due to his enterprise that we have many beautiful Chinese additions to our gardens — Anemone japonica [A. elegans], Jasminum nudiflorum, Mahonia bealei, Weigela rosea, Buddleia lindleyana, Lonicera fragrantissima and Prunus triloba. In all Fortune introduced to Britain and the west 190 species or varieties of Chinese plants.

In my book, Empire of Flowers, I follow Fortune's footsteps as he seeks out plants in Chinese gardens, nurseries and in the wild. He was the first westerner to explore the areas around Shanghai, which he called 'one vast beautiful garden'. As the country areas were off-limits to foreigners at the time, Fortune disguised himself as a Chinese with a pigtail and Chinese gown. He travelled, with only a Chinese assistant, by canal boat and mountain chair into Zhejiang province, through Anhui and Jiangxi provinces and into the Wuyi mountains — the great green tea producing area — of Fujian province. Here he found Abelia uniflora.

One of Fortune's favourite places was Zhousan Island off the coast of Zhejian province near the city of Ningbo, where so many gorgeous flowering plants grew wild:

I here met, for the first time, the beautiful Wisteria sinensis, wild on the hills, where it climbs among the hedges and on trees, and its flowering branches hang in graceful festoons by the sides of the narrow roads which lead over the mountains ... Azaleas abound on the hillsides ... few can form any idea of the gorgeous and striking beauty of these azalea-clad mountains, where, on every side, as far as our vision extends, the eye rests on masses of flowers of dazzling brightness and surpassing beauty ... clematises, wild roses, honeysuckles and a hundred others mingle their flowers with them and make us confess that China is indeed the 'central flowery land'.

Fortune's plant hunting brought him into contact with Chinese people from many different walks of life. He met mandarins, Buddhist priests, tea farmers, wealthy art collectors, boatmen and nursery gardeners. It is as if we meet them too because he describes them and his conversations with them in vivid detail. Here he describes one of the wealthy gentlemen he met near the old walled city of Shanghai:
In the gardens of the Mandarins it is not unusual to meet with the tree Paeony of great size. There was one plant, near Shanghai, which produced between 300 and 400 blooms every year. The proprietor was as careful of it as the Tulip fancier is of his bed of Tulips.

When in bloom it was carefully shaded from the bright rays of the sun by a canvas awning, and a seat was placed in front on which the visitor could sit down and enjoy the sight of its gorgeous flowers. On this seat the old gentleman himself used to sit for hours every day, smoking pipe after pipe of tobacco, and drinking cup after cup of tea while all the time he was gazing on the beauties of his favourite ‘Mountain walu’ [mudan hualu].

Fortune’s five journeys to China spanned nineteen years, from 1843 to 1862. It was a period of enormous political and social upheaval in China, with western aggression in the form of two wars in 1842 and 1860, and internal rebellion fomented by the Taipings. The plant collector was not immune from the impact of these historic changes. In 1853 he was in Shanghai when the Small Sword Society, related to the Taiping rebels, captured the city and killed the Shanghai magistrate. In fact he saw the murdered magistrate lying in a room in his yamen which opened onto a ‘pretty arbour covered with the Wisteria sinensis.’

He returned to Shanghai in 1855 just after government troops had recaptured the city. He was heartbroken at the destruction wrought on the gardens and nurseries he had come to know so well, and he shares his feelings with us:

One just outside the north gate, which furnished me with some of my finest plants when I was collecting for the Horticultural Society of London, was completely destroyed. A fine Wisteria sinensis, which formerly covered a large trellis, was now half buried in ruins, but was still putting forth its long racemes of blue flowers half-covered with... broken tiles and bricks... [A] noble tree of the carnation-flowered peach, which in former years used to be loaded with rose, white and striped blossoms, and admired by all who saw it, had been cut down for firewood, and the stump alone remained to tell where it grew. Hundreds of pot-plants were... broken and destroyed. The little house where the gardeners used to live was levelled with the ground, and the old lady, the proprietor whom I had known for some years, and who had managed the concern after her husband’s death, was gone — no one knew where.

While searching out botanical illustrations for the book, including that of the above-mentioned Wisteria sinensis, I found that Melbourne University had a limited edition facsimile copy of paintings from the Reeves Collection. They come from the British Museum of Natural History and there are only 400 copies of the work worldwide.

The Reeves Collection is made up of botanical drawings of Chinese plants done by Chinese artists from about 1820 to 1830. John Reeves senior, for whom the collection is named, was chief tea inspector for nineteen years for the Honourable East India Company in Guangzhou. He kept a magnificent garden of southern Chinese plants in Macao where he lived for part of each year and he sent back to England the first azaleas, camellias, tree peonies and chrysanthemums to be seen there.

The Horticultural Society of London commissioned him to organise Chinese artists to paint the plants so, for some years, he employed several Chinese artists who lived in his house and painted under his supervision.

After Reeves retired to London in 1831 he became chairman of the Chinese Committee of the Horticultural Society. It was this committee that appointed Robert Fortune as Chinese collector in 1842. His son, John Reeves Jnr, who also went to work for the East India Company in China, assisted Fortune during his travels in China. Fortune named three of his botanical finds after the Reeves — Skimmia reevesiana, Ilex reevesiana and Spirea reevesiana [cantonensis].

For me, researching and writing Empire of Flowers has been a wonderful experience. I entered a world that has long since disappeared: the world of China, its people and places at the end of the Qing dynasty; the world of the Horticultural Society of London, its personalities and its pioneering work in bringing the flora of China to the west; the world of botanical illustration and botanical journals of the nineteenth century and the world of the plant collector in an unknown country with its risks and adventures.

When I look at the plants in my own garden I now know which came from China, the places they came from and how they were brought to the west. As for Fortune himself, he has left to us his wonderfully interesting and informative books and a wealth of beautiful ornamental plants and trees.

Carolyn Blackman has had a life-long involvement with China and Chinese people. She has lived and worked in China and Singapore and taught Standard Chinese in Australian schools and universities over many years. Two of her recent books, Negotiating China and China Business: the Rules of the Game, both published by Allen & Unwin, have been translated into Japanese and Korean.

The book Empire of Flowers should be available from the beginning of 2002.

1. Fortune, Robert 1847 Three Years’ Wandering in the Northern Provinces of China John Murray (London) p. 67
2. Fortune, Robert 1850 Notes of a Traveller No. XIV The Gardener’s Chronicle p. 821
4. ibid. p. 139
The decision to hold the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879 was to have an enduring effect on the city. It gave rise to institutions that would shape the minds of its citizens and changed its physical face through a new disposition of land.

Land reserved for the Governor's private use, a substantial part of the inner Domain, was chosen as the site for the large exhibition building, the Garden Palace, which dwarfed neighbouring Government House and dominated Sydney's skyline until it burned down in 1882. Although the exact role that the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, played in the choice is unclear, the legacy was the conversion of a significant portion of land from private to public use, now a precinct of the Royal Botanic Gardens with few subtle signs of its former functions.

The construction of numerous ancillary buildings over the Outer Domain set a precedent that would prove troublesome for later Directors of the Botanic Gardens and Domain, and rendered the Domain the logical site for the current Art Gallery of NSW.

A scholarly assessment of 'Sydney's greatest event before the Olympics 2000' as Peter Proudfoot refers to it in his introduction, is long overdue. It is fitting that it appeared as Sydney was descending before the Olympics 2000, as Peter Proudfoot referred to it in his introduction, is long overdue. It is fitting that it appeared as Sydney was descending from a euphoria possibly only matched by that which accompanied the opening of the 1879 Exhibition. The book is well illustrated with a surprisingly large number of coloured plates and showcases relatively unknown views.

Barrie Dyster's essay provides a succinct background to Sydney's place in the global economy of the 1870s, discusses the differences between a free trade Sydney and a protectionist Melbourne and both his essay and that of Robert Freestone place the Sydney and 1880 Melbourne Exhibitions within the context of the international scene.

Freestone's 'Space, Society and Urban Reform' and Richard Clough's 'Gardening and the Garden Palace' are of primary interest to garden historians, although it is crucial to appreciate the short timeframe in which the building was executed and the conditions under which Charles Moore and staff at the Botanic Gardens worked. 'The Genius of John Young' celebrates the practical achievement and improvisation of its construction and it is refreshing to read of the foremen, carpenters and joiners, and bricklayers in addition to the architects.

Richard Clough's essay discusses the relatively unknown early career of Charles Moore, a Director of the Botanic Gardens who recorded little of his work or thoughts on gardening during his long tenure, although he collaborated with Government Architect James Barnet on a number of major projects. Fortunately Moore was obliged to record his creation of 'ribbon borders and carpet bedding' for the Official Record of the Exhibition. This and the inclusion of an 1880 article from The Illustrated Sydney News as an addendum provide a description of a technique previously little used in Sydney's public gardens.

Clough's essay concentrates on the area immediately around the Garden Palace and the horticultural shows that took place, complete with parochial politics, during the exhibition period. Queensland's exhibit, discussed by Judith McKay, was perhaps the most botanically impressive with a balcony where visitors enjoyed the combined delights of lush foliage and views of the harbour. Linda Young's essay explains how the general public viewed the exhibition and participated in the festivities, the grounds functioning as an essential place for picnicking, perambulating and enjoyment.

Helen Proudfoot analyses the destruction of the great dream that the Garden Palace represented, the official poems commissioned at its inception and the spontaneous poetical expression of grief at its burning as well as the real losses sustained, among those the records and collection of the Linnean Society.

From a garden history perspective, it is disappointing that the site planning for the entire area of the exhibition, including the adaptation of the Outer Domain, is not examined as one, a decision which appears to have been an editorial one. The one overall plan of the entire exhibition site including the Outer Domain (1880) is at too small a scale to be instructive. These are minor disappointments with an otherwise informative account of a previously neglected part of Sydney's history. And although the analysis of the impact of the grand event on the landscape finishes with the fire, the most impressive contribution the Sydney International Exhibition made to gardening came after the site was annexed to the Botanic Gardens and re-designed as the Palace Gardens, a fitting starting point for a writer at a later date.

Colleen Morris is a landscape heritage consultant. With Richard Aitken she co-authored the draft ‘Governor’s House Sydney, Master Plan for Garden and Grounds’ and has recently participated in the team undertaking a Master Plan for the Sydney Domain.
Arborist John Fordham was engaged by the Environment Defenders' Office on behalf of the Phillip Island Conservation Society for a tribunal hearing on a proposed development at the Isle of Wight Hotel in Cowes, Victoria. He reports.

The plan was for a nine storey, including two underground, development which threatened two trees, notably a Moreton Bay fig (Ficus microphylla) in good condition on the corner of the Esplanade and Bass Avenue. Its estimated age is 131 years, its height is 16.25m. with a spread of 28m. A plaque beneath it reads Moreton Bay Fig planted in 1869 by Baron von Mueller, Director Botanic Gardens Melbourne. An Australian Bicentennial Project.

The local shire has laid down conditions that no works were to occur within five metres of the canopy edge. This was a good condition, an ongoing advance for decent tree care on such sites.

Towards the hotel the radius of the tree was 13m. thus 18m. was the closest any building could take place. Currently the canopy of the tree extends two metres over the bottle shop roof so the tree was going to benefit from the new specification.

The line on the picture indicates where the root zone would be protected but I had a further concern. Given that the excavation site would be two storeys deep I believed there was a chance that the edge of the protection zone might collapse into the hole thereby compromising the set condition and possibly exposing roots.

I argued that a further radial distance should be added to protect the end of the roots from exposure. Although unsuccessful in this, I succeeded in convincing the developers and the council of the importance of the existing conditions.

Close to the Moreton Bay Fig there is a large Hoop Pine (Araucaria cunninghamiana) and another part of my brief was to evaluate the prospect of moving it. I opposed the idea of a move for several reasons

- The very size of the tree
- The proximity to the roots of the fig tree. If it was moved the required root ball would have done great damage to the roots of the fig.
- The timeframe needed to prepare the tree for the move was too great for the developers

The final resolution was that the development in its current form will not go ahead and the trees will form part of the height control for any other redevelopment.

John Fordham worked for the Shire of Eltham, the University of Melbourne and at the University of California's Berkeley Botanic Gardens before establishing his own business which includes assessing historic trees for the National Trust.

Above left: The Hoop Pine and Moreton Bay Fig at the centre of the hearing.

Above right: The line indicates the region where the root zone would be protected.
ONLINE

From time to time the editor receives requests for web site addresses pertinent to garden history. Readers are invited to email (ncrone@dsci.net.au) addresses of sites they have found enjoyable or useful.

www.english-heritage.org.uk has some interesting pages, for example 'Blue Plaques': not too many record garden designers but Charles Bridgeman lived at 54 Broadwick Street, Soho W.1

www.maxgate.co.uk For the Thomas Hardy fans who may not realise the author was a most competent designer. Max Gate is in Dorchester.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/regions/southern one of the reliable National Trust sites. Two gardens on my visiting list will be Standen (West Sussex) designed by Margaret Beale, wife of the original owner. The 12 acre grounds, reflecting the William Morris decoration in the house, are divided into a series of small compartments – the Bamboo Garden, the Orchard and the Quarry Garden for example. For Art and Craft Movement enthusiasts, Hinton Ampner (Hampshire) is the creation of Ralph Dutton who described himself as 'not a very knowledgeable plantsman'. Through trial and error he created one of England's finest 20th century shrub gardens.

The next issue will consider some American sites.

MAILBOX

Dear AGHS members,

I wish to thank delegates to the Bowral Conference for the overwhelming interest shown in our display. We did not expect such a response to our collection so I apologise to those I was unable to talk to in greater depth.

The amount of time I had to talk, explain and of course learn from you was very short. I would like to hear from anyone who has a story to tell about the history of gardening as it relates to tools.

Thank you for your enthusiasm.
We look forward to hearing from you.

Richard Bird – the Old Mole

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AGHS Office, Royal Botanic Gardens, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra, Vic. 3141

Phone (03) 9650 5043 Toll Free 1800 678 446 Fax (03) 9650 8470

THIS FORM CAN BE PHOTOCOPIED SO THAT THE JOURNAL CAN BE RETAINED INTACT
MARCH

14 Wed.
South Australia, Adelaide
Professor Judith Brine on 'How we should treat the Adelaide parklands?' 7.30 p.m.
Gartrell Hall, cnr Prescott Terrace & Alexandra Avenue, Rose Park.
Members $2 Non-members $4

17 Sat.
Queensland, Brisbane
Talk at Botanic Gardens, Mount Coot-tha. Beth Wilson
Thirty Years of Landscape Design in Brisbane. Glenn Cooke (07) 3846 1050

17 Sat.
South Australia, Mylor
Nursery Visits
11 a.m. Tupelo Grove Nursery, Bradbury Road, Mylor, visit and talk ($5 donation) followed by visit to Malurus Nursery at Warrawong, Stock Road, Mylor

17 & 18 Sat. & Sun.
Victoria, Castlemaine
Discovery Weekend 'Glimpses of the Castlemaine Goldfields – its Landscapes & Gardens' Interstate participants most welcome Libby Peek (03) 9866 2869

25 & 26 Sat. & Sun.
Sydney Kitchen Garden Festival at Vaucluse House, Wentworth Road, Vaucluse
Enquiries (02) 9388 7922
This exciting event celebrates the estate's kitchen garden and its reinstatement based on 19th century archival sources. AGHS will again be setting up a promotional stand and needs volunteers for both days. If members can help on either Saturday or Sunday please contact Malcolm Wilson (02) 9810 7803 or Colleen Morris (02) 9660 0573.

31 Sat.
Victoria, Olinda
Working Bee - Folly Farm Helen Page (03) 9397 2260

APRIL

4 to 8 Wed. to Sun. (inclusive)
Melbourne
International Flower and Garden Show

19 Thurs.
Victoria, Melbourne
Lecture 1 Paul Thompson
Forty Years Down the Track 7.30 p.m. Mueller Hall, Herbarium, South Yarra
Suzanne Hunt (03) 9827 8073

29 Sun.
Victoria, Kalamunda
Working Bee - Ridge House Annette Zealley (03) 9738 1490

30 Mon.
Sydney
Garden History Research Forum 6.30 – 8.30 p.m. Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill. Refreshments will be served. AGHS Members $8, Non-members $10. The evening offers something different for all members, friends and students of garden history. Expressions of interest are invited for participating in this event where members can 'show and tell' about individual research projects they are researching or a project they have completed. Presentations will be limited to a maximum of ten minutes duration.

15-17 Fri. to Sun.
Victoria, Geelong
'Bunce, Bunyas and Beyond' Conference of the Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens (Victoria) hosted by the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens. It will mark the 150th anniversary of the Geelong Botanic Gardens and will coincide with an exhibition of botanical art at the Geelong Art Gallery. Jane Salmon (03) 5243 5004 or Annie McGeechey (03) 5243 7728

OCTOBER

26-28 Fri. to Sun.
Victoria, Melbourne
AGHS 22nd Annual Conference '2001: a Federation Odyssey' Australian Gardens and Landscapes 1890-1914
Georgina Whitehead (03) 9572 1223

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

Australia ICOMOS National Conference Adelaide University
20th Century Heritage: Our Recent Cultural Legacy
Contact: All Occasion Management, 41 Anderson St, Thebarton SA 5031 (08) 8354 2285 Fax (08) 8354 1465
Email occasion@camtech.net.au
Paper Contact: Dr David Jones, School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture & Urban Design, Adelaide University, SA 5005 (08) 8303 4589 Fax (08) 8303 4377
Email davidjones@adelaide.edu.au
THOSE ON THE POST-CONFERENCE TOUR WERE INDEED FORTUNATE. Accompanying them were Trisha Dixon with a life-long knowledge of the area, Clive Lucas, expert on Australian architecture, and Stuart Read who with an enthusiasm for Australia's garden heritage and an instinct for botanical detective work, documented in detail three fascinating days.

Tuesday, 7th November.

CHRIST CHURCH, BONG BONG C.1845.

Donated by settlers Charles and Betsey Throsby the hilltop church, churchyard and cemetery overlook the Wingecarribee River and site of the former Bong Bong, the first European settlement south of the Cowpastures. Christ Church is nationally significant as the oldest church between Camden and Canberra. Notable painted enamel panels c.1880's in the stained glass windows by Lyon Coutier (a Scots firm associated with Tiffany's glassmakers) show lilies, roses, chrysanthemums, iris, arum lilies and passionfruit flowers.

Two remnant eucalypts in the cemetery predate the church, being shown in an 1820's painting of the area. Funeral cypress (Cupressus finebris), Lawson cypress (Chamaecyparis lawsoniana) black locusts (false acacias, (Robinia pseudoacacia)), cherry plums, privets and firethorn pepper the gravestones. Carpets of kiss-me-quick/valerian and sparaxias. On the church’s centenary in 1945, seventeen Bhutan cypresses (Cupressus torulosa) were planted – one for each Throsby child.

THROSBY PARK, MOSS VALE C.1823

A 200 hectare remnant farm estate on the edge of Moss Vale includes an 1821/3 cottage – the oldest in the southern highlands, outbuildings and an 1834 house on land granted in 1819 by Macquarie to Throsby, free settler and explorer of southern NSW. Under varying fortunes five generations of Throsbys lived here until recently. In 1974 the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service acquired the property now managing it as an historic site. Though reduced, the core remains in an open pastoral setting recalling 1820s paintings.

Windbreaks, hedges and strays of Monterey pines (Pinus radiata), Lombardy poplars (Populus nigra ‘Italica’), English elms (Ulmus procera), hawthorns and black locusts. Remnants of old orchards, citrus and quince, and down the hill an olive tree of considerable age, its butt 1.5m thick, perhaps the progeny of Elizabeth Farm’s “oldest” olive tree in Australia. The carriage loop garden with privet hedges was restored in 1989-1990 adding shrubs and perennials to remaining trees. Monterey pines, strawberry tree (Arbutus unedo), English elm, evergreen/holm oaks, (Quercus ilex), photinia, crepe myrtle, olive, Monterey cypress (Cupressus macrocarpa), winged holly (Ilex cornuta) and Himalayan cedar (Cedrus deodara).

OLD RECTORY, BERRIMA

Picturesque 12 hectare block on the edge of town, with mid 1850's Gothic revival cottage for the “galloping parson” James Hassall, chaplain to the local gaol. In its own glen along the river, the site has a mix of remnant scribbly gum forest and sandstone bluffs with an old quarry, orchard, chook house, cleared village common, convict dry-stone walls and coach-house.

Of interest to me was the rich collection of exotic conifers and broadleaf trees, left from the nursery developed here in the 1940-50s by Paul Sorensen, garden designer and plantsman. A huge maritime/cluster pine (Pinus pinaster) next to flat topped Mediterranean stone pines (P. pinea) and a rare Californian Bishop's pine (P. muricata) with grey-green needles.
A 115-year-old wisteria cloaks the verandah while a magnificent Norway spruce (Picea abies) towers over the central garden.

Overgrown nursery rows show Sorensen's characteristic palette, including rarities Chinese/silver fir (Cunninghamia lanceolata), red horse chestnut (Aesculus carnea), big tree/wellingtonia (Sequoia-dendron giganteum), coastal redwood (Sequoia sempervirens) and Japanese cedar (Cryptomeria japonica). Other Sorensen favourites appeared like old friends - the Douglas fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii), Lombardy poplars, claret ash, black birch (Betula nigra), scented white rhododendron (Rhododendron fragonisstium), hemlocks (Tsuga canadiensis), Western red "cedar" (Thuja plicata), blue Atlas cedar (Cedrus atlantica), Himalayan cedar and Iowa crab-apple (Malus ioensis). These trees appear again and again in Sorensen gardens such as Redlands in Bowral.

There was a mystery oak with simple glabrous, only slightly lobed undulating edges. On investigation it seemed likely to be Q. x schochiana, a hybrid between the smooth ovate leaved willow oak, (Q. phellos) and the pin oak (Q. palustris).

A circular carriage loop leads to a semi-circular garden, which sits like an apron in front of the house, its low stone wall enclosing the original "cottage" (flower and shrub) garden. Such gardens were once common homestead features, close to houses and water supply, but to-day they are rare. A venerable Monterey pine and two Mediterranean cypresses sit east of the house and behind it a line of tall English elms leads up the hill to frame a horse paddock. Shelter trees around the house include Monterey pines, Himalayan cedar and English oaks.

Little other old planting remains. Recent outbuilding conversions and tight hedges formalise what may have been a simpler farm garden with more direct transitions to the home paddock and landscape beyond, but Oldbury with its memories of Louisa Atkinson is still a magic place.

Wednesday, 8th November

HILLVIEW, SUTTON FOREST
1872

The country residence for 16 NSW Governors from 1882 until 1958, Hillview is beautifully sited on its own hilltop in Sutton Forest, with expansive views, and a long driveway winding up to circle behind the house and outbuildings. The boundaries and curtilage remain in their 1872 form, with cycles of embellishment and neglect reflecting the changing tides of governmental attitude to spending and to the role of the Governors.

Director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, Charles Moore, prepared a garden layout in 1882 and this is still legible to-day, not least from its rich plant collection, particularly in tree species, featuring conifers, oak species and some New Zealand plants popular between the 1890s and 1930s. The driveway and pines from the 1890s were replaced with English elms and aspen poplars between 1934 and the 1950s. The buildings reflect their form in 1899 after completion of a period of vice-regal additions and changes.

In 1958 the property was sold to Mr Edward Klein who doubled the size of the garden, adding rustic stone embellishments, urns, ponds, terraces, retaining walls, balustrades and lookouts for the views. Klein gifted Hillview back to the government in 1985 but remained there until his death. Protracted negotiations have brought it back to private ownership and a proposed new use as a boutique hotel.

The South Highlands Branch of AGHS has done sterling work renovating and documenting the garden at Hillview. Highlights include two magnificent mystery evergreen oaks in full flower and new leaf, a fawn/golden glow. Claimed to be holm oaks, but on further investigation they seem likely to be the American live oak (Quercus virginiana), the laurel oak (Q. laurifolia), or the shingle oak (Q. imbricaria), with much larger leaves, slightly toothed, hairy below. Holm oaks do exhibit a wide variety of leaf form, but given the three or more types here and their differences in size, density, vigour and leaf details, I disagree! Near the water tank another mystery, perhaps Q. petrea 'Salicifolia', a sessile oak variety with smooth-edged, pale green leaves, tightly grooved grey bark and unbranchy form.

New Zealand plants included lemonwood/tarata (Pittosporum eugenioides), flax (Phormium tenax) and green and purple forms of cabbage tree/ti kouka (Candysline australis). Chinese plants are another theme, including kerras, beauty bush (Kolkwitzia), honeysuckles, cherry plums and flowering cherries. The garden makes good use of surrounding views and borrowed landscape and gardeners shelter with thick planting.
Tall Monterey pines, dating from 1914 line the entrance drive. All that greeted the current Burkitts when they arrived in 1946 were three Monterey pines c.1850 near the house, remnant eucalypts and a “Horden” oak seedling from the Sydney department store’s 1938 promotion. Hard work, to create shade, build stone retaining walls and mulch the thin shale soil, has led to a haven of old roses, perennials, self-seeding annuals and shrubs.

California tree poppy (Romneya coulterii), kiss-me-quick/valerian, Jerusalem sage, larkspur, poppies and honesty. Shrubs include pear bush (Exochorda racemosa), mock orange (Philadelphus coronarius), pink beauty bush (Kolkwitzia amabilis) and another mystery – an unusual white tubular flowered species of Kolkwitzia (my guess) as its hairy reflexed calyces were identical, yet the flowers were quite different from K amabilis.

The wee township of Bungonia was once a thriving settlement with founder Robert Futter’s Hope Inn (1834-36) watching over the crossroads. St Michael’s (1839-47), the oldest Catholic church still in active use on the mainland, sits atop a thickly eucalypted and stone-scattered hillock while to the east, the Anglican Christ Church (consecrated 1893) sits on a bare slope skirted by a drive of old stone pines (Pinus piines). Little else remains as testament to the town’s former prosperity before the railway line to Goulburn got through and the main road to Sydney was re-routed nearer Marulan. A fate similar to Bong Bong, except for the flooding.

REEVESDALE, BUNGONIA

This 1829 Georgian stone pair of buildings, comprising a two-storey coach house and stables (now the woolshed) and the servants’ quarters (now the house) was preamble to the house which settler James Styles never built. The servants’ quarters were convict-built like a fortress with rock walls 75cm thick and a blank rear wall bearing mock door and windows to deter bushrangers.

Apart from a row of old English oaks flanked by copse of tall old manna gums (Eucalyptus viminalis), black locusts and a pair of tall Mediterranean cypresses there is little trace of early garden remains. Original buildings now gone included a winery indicating grape cultivation and Styles’s first slab sawn hut. Mrs Styles, no doubt homesick, reputedly introduced the briar rose into Australia but she would not perhaps be thanked for this.

THE PARSONAGE, BUNGONIA

Across the creek from Bungonia township and built in 1839-40 in local stone is the house built for the first parson, George Wood who was succeeded by the ‘galloping parson’ James Hassall. A serene, rambling garden and former orchard, cleared from otherwise wooded slopes, ringed by Monterey pines, black locust and an osage orange hedge (Maclura pomifera). A huge white-barked gum (Eucalyptus rossii or E. mannifera) towers in front of the house.

Most trees were dwarfed by a tall, narrow pine. It occasioned much wonder and debate. Planted early in the colony’s life for a ship’s mast, it is identified by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney as a Canary Island Pine, although some of the AGHS group strongly believed it was a long-leaved Indian/Chir pine (Pinus roxburghii). It has few major branches, towering up to its maximum height, small cones some 8-10cm long held upright and dramatic bark of fawn/grey to yellow in large plates. Others, pine experts in the party, claimed it was a Canary Island pine (P. canariensis), a very similar species, with longer needles to 30cm. More thoughts on that at Riversdale.

WINGELLO PARK 1828-1833

In a broad, open valley with scattered copse of eucalypts and wooded hills, the only indication of a homestead to come was an intermittent line of Lombardy poplars off to the horizon. A long drive in leads to tall Monterey pines, Lombardy poplars and aspen-sheltered orchard trees, the main homestead buildings and the garden.

The buildings date from 1828-33: an 1857 sale notice mentions a lawn and garden. Remnants include pines and poplars, or at least their progeny. The current garden recreates what might have been, happily including drought tolerant species suited to the climate – Jerusalem sage (Phlomis fruticosa), and the golden rain tree (Koelreuteria paniculata) and kiss-me-quick/valerian. Pillar rose ‘Evé’ flourishes along the front verandah, and around the side, a tiny 30cm bush of Scottish/burnet/pimpinell rose (Rosa spinosissima ‘Raubrücter’), pink with paler edges, semi-double and very spiny. Polite debate ensued as to whether indeed this was ‘Andrewsii’, a mystery solved later at Lockyersleigh.

SPRING PONDS C.1820 AND BUNGONIA

A drive through gum forest and scrub carpeted with a haze of lilac Kunzea parvifolia to reach the small settlement of Bungonia and on to Spring Ponds, the home of Trisha Dixon’s parents since 1946 and the Burkitt family since 1911.
Thursday, 9th November

GLENROCK, MARULAN
C. 1840.

East of the highway and close to the Sydney-Melbourne railway line. Tall Monterey pines and English elms are about all that remain of the original garden, sheltering a remarkable 1840 Greek revival two-storey house built by George Barber, Charles Throsby’s stepson who married Isabella Hume.

In 1862 the Morrices bought Glenrock eventually selling it to the Government in 1915 for soldier settlement blocks whence the house and garden went dramatically downhill. Saved in 1960 by the Hogs the house has been restored since 1964 by the Muellers and even more since 1989 by current owners Vida Muir and Charles Mendel.

The garden is going through major redevelopment, aided by regular water accumulated in recently established tanks and two lakes. Much tree planting is occurring including Monterey cypress, Chinese and golden elms, Lombardy poplars, aspens, oaks and liquidambers. A large, old mulberry and hawthorn will border the proposed walled driveway setting.

Its 1830s gardens included hops for the ale brewed and sold on site. Fruit trees planted in the 1840s and a well are still in use. One black locust/false acacia remains from that period and the other oldest trees date from its 1850s schoolhouse period—a line of elms at the rear, and a mixture of pine species, including an Aleppo pine (Pinus halepensis) and a Monterey pine.

A long-needled pine again stimulated debate. It was decided this was the Canary Island pine (P. canariensis). This specimen, unlike the one at the Bungonia Parsonage, was shorter but broad branching, with longer needles to 30cm in threes, drooping cones, 15 x 12cm, much larger than those at Bungonia. The latter’s cones were held upright on the branchlets and were small, its needles shorter, 20-25cm, in threes suggesting P. nobilis.

The garden reached its peak under the Twynam family from 1872-1969. Early garden structures also remain including an octagonal timber ‘honey house’, similar small garden shed and a 30m long timber pergola or ‘lovers’ walk’ bearing down with creepers. Behind the house grows the same mystery Scottish rose seen at Wingello Park. Owner Jean Onions (nee Ranken) confirmed it as ‘Williamsii’ saying her garden was the source for all other bushes in the district, it having been imported by Major Lockyer.

LONGREACH, CARRICK C.1824

Well-sited with wonderful views along a straight stretch of the Wollondilly River and across to the escarpment. An 1824 grant to Peter Stuckey whose slab hut was followed by an 1837 stone house nestled in trees. A large specimen scribbly gum tree takes centre stage in front of the house. Other trees include an ‘Irish’ strawberry tree (actually Mediterranean) and pink flowering Eucalyptus sideroxylon ‘Rosa’. Longreach changed hands several times and in 1902 was bought by William Ranken, grandfather of Bill Tooth who with his wife Carolyn are the present owners.

Under falling blossoms from the black locust tree we said hearty thanks to organiser Trisha Dixon and trusty guide Clive Lucas for the three thoroughly enjoyable days.

Stuart Read is a landscape architect and horticulturist, trained in New Zealand. He works for the NSW Heritage Office mainly identifying, assessing and advising on the management of historic gardens, parks and cultural landscapes, is a member of the National Trust Parks and Gardens Classification Committee and Sydney and Northern NSW Branch of AAGHS. His particular passions are the history of spice trading and plant movements.
a tour note-book from off the Beaten Track

November 2000

Church, Bang Bang showing the cemetery with Beaten Cypress commemorating the Thrushy children.

Cement foundations of former house - present site of lodge.

Order from the carriage loop with flanking cypresses and doorknockers.

Heap Street Road

Lodge at Caves - approaching the house across the carriage loop with the Chinese elm to the left of house.

Caves - landscape with elms, pines and native gum copse.