

**Productivity Commission Inquiry  
– Conservation of Historic Heritage Places**

Submission from  
The Australian Garden History Society

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[www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/heritage/index.html](http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/heritage/index.html)

**Initial Submissions due 29 July 2005**

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**Background to the AGHS**

Mission:

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. Formed in 1980, the AGHS brings together people from diverse backgrounds united by an appreciation of and concern for our parks, gardens and cultural landscapes as part of Australia's heritage.

The Society promotes knowledge of historic gardens and research into their history. It aims to examine gardens and gardening in their widest social, historic, literary, artistic and scientific context.

**The Australian Garden History Society**

- Is a non-profit [membership](#) based organisation with approximately 2000 members throughout Australia. [Membership](#) is open to everyone.
- Publishes a [Journal](#), Australian Garden History, five times per year, which each member receives as part of their membership.
- [Publishes books, booklets and conference proceedings](#) on relevant topics respectively
- Holds a national [conference](#) each year.
- Has a special fund - the Kindred Spirits Fund - to foster the scholarly, literary and artistic aspects of the Society's interests nothing available yet
- Has active [Branches](#) in all states which arrange local activities and act as advocates for issues which are of interest to the Society.

The AGHS is managed by the National Management Committee ( a voluntary body) and its head office is located in Melbourne. There are members in all States, Territories and overseas. Voluntary Branches in each State and Territory (except the NT) manage and organize local projects and activities.

Each year the Society organizes 100+ site visits, a National Conference, approximately 50 lectures, and produces a national public educational journal. Every second year the Society publishes a scholarly Journal which is refereed. As well the Society has a distinguished record in publishing key records of Australia's cultural history in books such as "The Oxford Companion to Australian Gardens", "Planting the Nation"(to mark the Centenary of Federation) and regular collections of the papers presented at Conferences. As well there is a steady output of specific publications

addressing the history and in some cases the conservation of specific sites around Australia.

In other words the Society performs a major educational and communication role concerning the study of this aspect of Australia's cultural history.

The Society's Annual Conference, held on rotation around Australia in both capitals and regional centres, regularly attracts up to 300 delegates. Papers from distinguished historians, geographers, architects and landscape designers, cultural theorists and natural scientists in botany and horticulture are presented. Field visits to key regional sites are carried out before, during and after the conferences.

We estimate that of the 2,000 members, plus friends and other supporters we contribute 100,000 hours per annum in educational, cultural analysis and actual restoration work PRO BONO. There is one part time paid employee.

The Society turns over approximately \$175,000 pa. All of this is generated by the members.

We have had some grants from Federal and State governments for specific projects. We have attracted some philanthropic support and indeed have established a Fund for this purpose.

Despite apparently meeting all the criteria for Tax Deductibility as a Deductible Gift Recipient we continue to have this denied to us.

#### **General concerns:**

There are approximately 2,800 historic gardens and landscapes in Australia with heritage values and which have been listed on the Commonwealth, State and Territory Heritage Registers and many more which are entered in the National Trust's Heritage Lists

The AGHS brings together people from diverse backgrounds united by an appreciation of and concern for our parks, gardens and cultural landscapes as part of Australia's heritage. It promotes knowledge of historic gardens and research into their history. It aims to examine gardens and gardening in their widest social, historic, literary, artistic and scientific context.

Gardens and landscapes of heritage value include public parks and gardens, botanic gardens, landscaped areas, orchards, arboreta, educational and military campuses, street trees, memorial avenues, cemeteries, golf courses, sports ovals, railway gardens, nurseries, zoological gardens, urban mansion gardens, rural property gardens, small urban gardens, garden suburb precincts.

The benefits of these places being heritage listed is that their values can be safeguarded for future generations and the loss of these places would impoverish neighbourhoods and the Australian community.

The AGHS makes its submission to the Commission of Inquiry into the Conservation of Historic Heritage Places around the following numbered points.

### ***1. The main pressures on the conservation of historic heritage places***

- Gardens are enormously labour intensive for maintenance and it follows that they are difficult to maintain from an economic point of view. Therefore the role and function of volunteers is quite critical as a resource.
- Development impacts on the significant vistas from historic gardens and landscapes and views to these places.
- Lack of suitable settings to historic gardens and landscapes making them vulnerable to environmental impacts from adjacent areas including visual, noise and atmospheric pollution.
- Development pressures on urban areas promoting subdivision and urban infill with lack of research on potential heritage garden and landscape values prior to a development application. Many local governments do not have a heritage ethic and tend to treat heritage as a liability rather than it being a substantial health, environmental and cost benefit to a community e.g. Central Tilba and Braidwood in NSW and Berrima, the only surviving 'Georgian' mainland village \*\*
- Insensitive redevelopment of parks and gardens without preparing heritage management plans to conserve the heritage values
- Lack of recognition that this 'type' of heritage is as significant and worthy of funds, care and active management as others, such as 'natural' and 'Aboriginal' heritage. Any comparison of funding, legislative effectiveness and level of care and protection would support this assertion. Similarly, historic landscapes, parks and gardens are (one of) the 'poor cousins' of cultural heritage, receiving far less serious attention in terms of heritage studies, assessments, listings and statutory protection, and active practical management (cf, say heritage buildings).
- Another is the loss of experience and knowledge as elderly property owners, managers and skilled tradespeople either die, retire or cease to be able to be involved, even in an advisory capacity. Parks staffs are much reduced in numbers and time dedicated to each park/task, compared to the past. Budgets are shrinking and this means more generic care, at a lower standard, is given. The lack of appropriately trained staff, or opportunities to gain training or experience, working alongside or under supervision of those with experience, is a threat to historic parks and gardens.

Australia lacks any serious training course (tertiary institution, TAFEs, etc) covering the history of garden and landscape design, conservation, management and proper maintenance needs thereof. Where 'heritage' courses exist, they are generic and based strongly on building conservation issues, materials conservation, or archaeology. They do not cover heritage management in any thorough, practical sense, nor less focus on historic landscapes, parks or gardens. Some (University of Canberra) have stopped providing the courses, even when they were practical and focussed. Others (Sydney University) are getting less and less practical, including a new BA (Heritage Management) to be offered at that same institution (with no practical component).

Training and skills transfer comes from public sector programmes, not the private sector, and demand for skills to some extent should be driven by Government. State Heritage legislation and listing requiring minimum standards of maintenance has proven effective in making private owners look after heritage places, at least to a basic level. Unfortunately the lack of local-government applicable minimum standards of maintenance at present means that locally-listed heritage items are only 'protected' by legislation requiring approval of any demolition, or by 'public safety' provisions in the Local Government Act. This is hardly adequate!

A challenge recommended for the Federal Governments is to provide targeted skills-based training focusing on these gap areas. As the 'market' in Australia is small, this should be concentrated in one location, and must include practical experience components, working in real situations with real problems. The Commonwealth Government is best placed to both survey gaps in such training provision and make funds available and policy guidance to ensure it is provided. Private sector will not 'step in' to provide such training opportunities, at least in any realistic scale that might serve both the wider community and 'industry', as opposed to isolated single gardens that might be privately owned and staffed.

Including heritage landscape/park/garden components in all relevant tertiary courses such as landscape architecture, horticulture, arboriculture, urban design and town planning (not neglecting the latter two areas) would be the best way of ensuring some basic awareness, and assisting to ensure that vital knowledge and experience is sought for appropriate tasks, fostered and kept alive in the 'industry' and community, well beyond the lifetimes of current 'experts' and sources of knowledge, in terms of individuals.

## ***2. The economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia***

### **Benefits**

- Historic gardens and landscapes represent similar storehouses of both public information and memory, of cultural intentions to those of other historic places
- The Australian community appears more interested than ever before in this aspect of their cultural heritage
- the local environmental and visual benefits of private gardens
  - *e.g. green lungs and open spaces of urban areas,*
  - *the time depth that people can enjoy in historic heritage gardens with added trees and historic structures*
  - *the garden matrix for suburbs and the cooling effect of garden trees in any neighbourhood particularly in garden suburbs such as the heritage suburbs of Haberfield and the Canberra Suburban Garden Precincts*
  - *the reduction of particle pollution*
  - *reduction of stormwater runoff*
  - *latent storage of water in tree canopies*

- the habitat values of trees in all urban environments
- heritage parks and gardens are the repository and breeding areas of living plant specimens both native and exotic, some of which are extinct in their native habitats
- parks (most major parks are heritage features) provide for pleasant and beautiful venue for community festivals (*need some examples eg Canberra's Floriade attracts thousands of visitors*, the Art in the Garden festival at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney; rock concerts, the popular events programs run by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW in the gardens of its house museums, and family events (weddings) etc
- events held in our public parks and gardens bring enormous revenue to businesseseg; The Domain in Sydney with Sydney in Bloom, Carlton Gardens and the exhibition Building Melbourne with MIFGS.
- the growing popularity of garden tourism from domestic and international sources. There are now both private businesses and not for profits like AGHS, running very successful garden and landscape tours and we believe this will grow significantly as long as the sites are protected. Australia's Open Garden Scheme's extraordinary success shows the interest in many forms of gardens including those with a historic significance. In Queensland, for example Mt Cootha Botanic Gardens estimate 11,000 vistors a week and the Roma Street Parklands 500,000 a year. According to a study commissioned in Tasmania, the Tasmanian Visitor Survey, 180,000 visitors participating in garden tourism spend \$380 million each year in Tasmania alone.

#### Costs

- ongoing maintenance is costly and historic heritage gardens and landscapes may be at a stage requiring massive new works such as fences, new paving, pruning large trees, tree removal and replanting etc.
- Historic parks, gardens and landscapes can suffer from increased popularity and visitation, and the pressures added on the 'fabric' of such places, their infrastructure, and ancillary needs such as car or coach parking, toilets, shops or other visitor services/facilities, can detract and actually destroy the very values for which these places are special. Changing a private garden into a public place can mean a great increase in the numbers of visitors, daily or over a year, well beyond the garden's capacity to support. Grass paths might have to be 'hardened' with paving to cope with increased foot traffic, finer grain plantings be removed due to the expense or difficulty in maintenance, increased theft or vandalism etc.

Limiting visitor numbers, times or days of visiting, monitoring and security issues, and charging for entry are all tools available to help conserve these places, but success or efficiency in their application varies considerably across the country, with budgets, visitor loadings, and political issues involved. Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens is now listed on the World Heritage List, and can

thus be expected to attract more tourists, both domestic and international. What impacts will these have on its delightful grounds?

**3. *The current relative roles and contributions to the conservation of historic heritage places of the Commonwealth and the State and Territory governments, heritage owners (private, corporate and government) community groups and any other relevant stakeholders***

The Federal Government was once known for strong leadership on heritage matters, passing legislation in 1975 establishing the Australian Heritage Commission and Register of the National Estate, and funding national surveys, including a survey of historic gardens, undertaken c.1979-80 in most states. This led to National Trust classifications and some RNE listings, but has not in many cases led to statutory listings or protection (eg: State Heritage Registers/Local Environmental Plan listings in NSW). A similar national survey was funded by the Federal Government on designed landscapes in the 1990s.

Such work was laudatory, and needs to be followed up by further Federal leadership, to ensure that the findings of these older surveys translate into appropriate statutory protection for significant historic parks, gardens and cultural landscapes, including on local and state registers. The AGHS has sought state listing of some (eg: Edna Walling-designed gardens in Victoria) but has limited resources available to pursue this.

Further surveys need to be done, to ascertain what condition these places earlier identified are now in, their conservation status and management needs. Wider surveys of post 1950 landscapes, parks and gardens need to be undertaken at a national level, as some important 'modern' landscape-making is already under threat from lack of understanding or statutory protection.

An example of this is the 'bush parks' created around Sydney Harbour and suburbs under progressive local Councils and the first wave of landscape architects such as Bruce Rickard, Harry Howard and others. These were subject of a feature article in the AGHS's first 'Studies in Australian Garden History' by Barbara Buchanan in 2003, and a conference paper at the Society's Sydney conference in 2004.

Federal Government leadership in policy making and assessment frameworks similarly needs to be revived, for instance preparing guidelines to assess historic landscapes, parks, and gardens for heritage listing - tailoring existing assessment methods and publications for this particular type of under-recognised heritage place. Also Commonwealth leadership in working with community groups such as the AGHS to 'skill up' likely nominators in what is required to support nominations, where to get information, assistance etc, and how nominations are assessed, compared to like places etc, on their way to

decisions about listings (eg: National and Commonwealth Heritage Lists).

### Grants.

*The ACT has been regularly unsuccessful over recent years in competing for heritage grants despite regularly putting forward proposals.* The Commonwealth's expenditure on heritage is

extremely unbalanced with the existence of the National Heritage Trust providing funds for natural conservation but no such equivalent scheme for cultural heritage. The grants funding for cultural heritage is now very low and ad hoc.

There is no certainty of any grants funding from year to year (unlike the National Estate Grants Program).

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### Governments as property managers

- The Commonwealth is a major owner and manager of heritage gardens and landscapes some of which are public spaces such as the Canberra Designated Land that includes Lake Burley Griffin and its foreshore parks, some of Canberra's nature parks, the National Botanic Gardens, military college gardens, official establishment gardens eg the Prime Minister's and Governor General's residences in Canberra and Sydney, ANU campus and institutional gardens such Parliament House and the NGC Sculpture Garden. The Commonwealth is required to prepare conservation management plans of all of its heritage listed assets.
- State Governments are the owners of numerous gardens of heritage significance, including some of our most significant parks and gardens such as the older botanic gardens and 19<sup>th</sup> century parks and early institutional landscapes. These require specialized heritage management, which is commonly seen as not being part of 'the core business' of the department to which they are attached eg: Health departments have responsibility for the large gardens and landscapes attached to 19<sup>th</sup> century hospitals.
- Local councils have the responsibility of managing the local parks that enrich our community life. Many of these are significant parks established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century which require specialized heritage management, particularly tree care and replacement.
- Community Groups and other stakeholders – voluntary time and energy provided in managing gardens.

### *Private Owners and how the private sector contributes to the management of heritage gardens*

- The contribution of private owners by opening their homes to the various open garden schemes is of positive benefit to the broader community.

- The AGHS has been involved in many ways of assisting the practical conservation of important historic gardens that form part of the National Estate. These include:
- working bees, recordings , financial contributions and being instrumental in obtaining grants over many years, for example, in Victoria, between 2001 and 2004 we have raised \$26,986.83 for the Bishopscourt project and have spent \$24,163.56 on professional support (tree surgeons, professional gardener, path resurfacing, fertiliser, plants, etc.) and carried out 656 voluntary days of work in the garden.
- The AGHS has been actively involved in projects to conserve the gardens at

ACT	VICTORIA	NEW SOUTH WALES	TASMANIA
Ainslie Gardens, Canberra Coolringdon, Cooma Durham Hall, Braidwood Fifield, Yass St, Omer Braidwood Mt Elrington, Braidwood	Buda, Castlemaine Belmont, Beaufort Bishopscourt, East Melb. Bontharambo,Wangaratta Churchill Island Creswick Park Lake, Creswick Folly Farm, Olinda Hamilton Botanic Gardens Glenara, Bulla Glen Harrow Meadlow, Surrey Hills Purrumbete, Ridge House, The Hermitage, Narbethong Trawalla, Beaufort Turkeith, Birregurra Tutes Cottage, Castlemaine Yalambie, Yallambie Womat Park, Daylesford Worrock, Casterton	Bong Bong Church, Moss Vale Eryldene Trust, Gordon Experiment Farm Cottage Hillview, Moss Vale Mt Gibraltar Reserve Norman Lindsay Gallery Robertson Railway Station Rowes Hill Cemetery, Mittagong St Judes Cemetery, Randwick Wynstay, Mt Wilson Yasmar, Haberfield Remembrance Driveway(part)	Astley Banks, Hobart Bishopscourt, Hobart Franklin House, Launceston Highfield House, Stanley Narryna Heritage Museum, Battery Point Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Hobart Runnymede, Hobart
<b>WEST AUSTRALIA.</b>			<b>QUEENSLAND</b>
Anzac House, Perth		Gracemere, Rockhampton Harry Oakman garden, Brisbane	SOUTH AUSTRALIA  Belair Maze Bishop's Court, Adelaide The Cedars, Hahndorf

#### *Impediments to Conservation*

- Lack of understanding of heritage and a fear of the implications of heritage listing
- 4. The positive and/or negative impacts of regulatory, taxation and institutional arrangements on the conservation of historic heritage places, and other impediments and incentives that affect outcomes**
- 5. Emerging technological, economic, demographic, environmental and social trends that offer potential new approaches to the conservation of historic heritage places**
- The popularity of TV garden programs
  - The availability of online information, particularly research databases

## **6. Possible policy and programme approaches for managing the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places and competing objectives and interests**

- Tax incentives to corporations to invest in heritage parks and gardens like the Myer music bowl
- Developers being required to more funding into green developments, public open spaces or existing public heritage gardens to balance large housing/industrial developments.
- Sponsorship of maintenance and conservation work by the public and private sector.
- Re-introduction of a National grants system for owners of significant gardens and cultural landscapes such as those available through Landcare.

## **7. Nature and Current Situation of the Industry**

The 'industry' of heritage gardens or parks is diverse and difficult to define precisely. Its participants are in a sense the wider community, on a production level (through making future and keeping existing heritage gardens), and on a consumption level (visiting them, recreation).

Gardening is one of the most widely practised cultural activities in Australia, and garden visiting has become very popular (both historic and new gardens) through the Australian Open Garden Scheme and others. However historic gardens and parks are an under-appreciated resource in Australian culture as types of heritage places, compared to their place in European, American or Asian cultures.

While historic buildings or archaeological sites have a high public 'presence', level of understanding and thus to a degree funding, parks and gardens are less widely appreciated as the fragile, complex works of art and environment that they are. Their present and future are threatened by inappropriate changes based on lack of understanding, changing fashions and in some cases reluctance to learn lessons from the past and to evolve their management to be more apt to their particular places and climates.

Despite 216 years of European settlement and the evolution of many imported garden philosophies, styles, elements and plants, Australia still has much to learn about its own environment, and our 'garden-making' in it. Books and magazines carry a preponderance of English, American, 'Tuscan' and French garden imagery, along with resort and rainforest styles. These are widely and often inappropriately copied and maintained at some considerable resource cost, around Australia.

Media focus on 'makeovers' and a fashion-based nursery industry pushing new lines have not led to a deep, informed understanding of the vast range of environments that is Australia, the paucity and great age of its soils, and its general aridity. The boom in domestic and international tourism including to 'garden' resorts with associated themed landscaping has opened Australians' eyes to other styles, practises of

gardening, some appropriate here, others not which again have been imported, copied and maintained, for good or ill.

Broader approaches to the long-term sustainable management of parks and gardens in public ownership or open to the public have a wide application in Australia, both in terms of management philosophy and practice, in actual works, replanting and replacing trees and plantings as they age, die or suffer climatic change.

Australia's historic gardens and parks have much to teach willing students, by their very survival (or at least that of parts: such as layout; structure and hardier trees and shrubs). Lessons in environmental appropriateness are starting to form the basis of closer study.

This is evidenced by the 2004 National Conference theme of the Australian Garden History Society \* "Browned off \* Old Gardens for a New World". This examined modern lessons to be learnt from surviving historic gardens in the Sydney Basin, and adaptations to its various microclimates, eg: abundance of water in the coastal east, and lack of water in the inland west.

In terms of professional services in advice on management, maintenance and management works, regulation through planning or other statutory approvals, the heritage 'industry' is smaller, but again ill-defined and a part of a larger 'heritage' industry.

In terms of historic gardens, parks and cultural landscapes the Heritage 'Industry' in Australia's capacity and level of development is limited and variable at present, in both education provision, scope of industry skills available (specialisation, experience in managing, demand) and standards of practice (assessment, conservation and management). While the bulk of heritage 'work' has been and remains building-focussed, an aspect relates to the surroundings of buildings, and to spaces designed without buildings (cf structures) such as gardens, parks, and landscapes.

In terms of industry or practitioner training, most institutions offering heritage courses are architecture-focussed and generalist: covering building technology; architectural history; conservation of built fabric materials (timber, stone, masonry); some of which are applicable to horticulture/landscape management, but not covering plants or landscape in any detail.

The Horticulture / Landscape Architecture Industries in terms of education are similarly generalist-focussed, and do not provide heritage-only or heritage-focussed training, to the best of my knowledge. The situation in New Zealand is similar. Courses by necessity are general, covering plant identification, propagation, amenity and commercial production horticulture (eg: nursery trade, fruit growing, cropping), pests & diseases, garden design.

To the Society's knowledge neither country has a specialist 'garden history' course per se, or courses on heritage gardens or landscape design, assessment or management. These skills are picked up casually by 'hands-on' experience of working with such places, conversations and debate with others doing the same: these from a range of

backgrounds : owners, regulators, practitioners in construction, history, archaeology, horticulture, maintenance, design services. Some universities include in their undergraduate courses for relevant disciplines (architecture, landscape architecture, archaeology, museum studies, materials conservation) lectures or modules on garden history, focussing on design styles through time, as 'art history'. These do not as a rule focus on applied management. Others offer post-graduate courses (eg: University of Sydney's Masters Course in Heritage Conservation)(UNSW Faculty of the Built Environment, RMIT) but these often tend towards over emphasis on theory or hands-on site works focussing on buildings or archaeology. Landscape focus, beyond again the theoretical or analytical, remains little practised, and little advanced.

Similarly planning and archaeology education courses appear to focus on either macro (landscape planning) or micro (site digs, focussing on built remains, rather than garden remains, pollen analysis, root castings (as in Pompeii), soil stratigraphy etc. Garden archaeology as practised in the UK, Europe or USA, appears to be gaining little traction here, perhaps in fairness reflecting its cost and the level of fine-grain detail needed to do it at all well.

Some TAFE institutions (eg: Sunraysia, VIC; Ryde, NSW) run horticulture and arboriculture training, although again this is by necessity generalist, rather than focussed on heritage or historic gardens and landscapes. Any heritage input in these courses is by necessity slight.

Further educational organisations (Workers Education Association, Centre for Continuing Education) run one-off day or night-courses on gardens, archaeology, history, some of which (depending on teacher interest/availability and 'demand') touch on garden history (eg: a recent CCE course on Islamic Gardens, run in Sydney by archaeologist Maree Brown, University of Sydney);

On-the-job training in NSW at least is limited to periodic "Heritage Adviser" training courses in dealing with the planning system, development applications and approvals. Heritage Advisers working with Local Government are given one annual training day by the NSW Heritage Office. An email network exists to share information between heritage advisers and this has spread to straddle the Victorian and in some cases South Australian borders, although again the majority of email traffic concerns buildings, building material queries, planning and tourism, not garden or landscape matters, and if so, rarely their management.

Specialist Heritage Organisations such as Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments & Sites) provide conferences on changing themes, some relevant to landscape management, most of which are broader in focus, covering a range of issues: the most recent two conferences in Sydney and Port Arthur were on heritage interpretation techniques and on disaster sites and complex place management. While landscape is undeniably a key part of both sites (Quarantine Station, Sydney, & former Port Arthur convict station) it was not the main focus.

Community groups such as the National Trust of Australia (especially where it is largest, in NSW & Victoria) provide training through sporadic conferences, workshops and seminars, some relevant to landscape and gardens, but to date these have focussed on identification and assessment and not on management, and not on

specific management challenges such as drought, water management and conservation.

Debate and conferences and seminars in Australia on cultural landscapes have focussed on the 'front end' of the process, ie: debating definitions on what such places are, identifying and classifying them. An expert charette hosted by the NSW Heritage Office in 2003 agreed what is needed are guidelines on managing such places, drawing boundaries around them, balancing conflicting values (land clearing, crop changes with economics v historic landscape pattern and land use mixes) and models for managing them well, as does occur overseas.

The Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) have for 25 years published a journal and run national conferences on some of these themes, although identification and classification remain dominant foci, over other more practical themes of conservation, change management and management. The latter are becoming more important in latter years, but as the AGHS is a membership body made up of diverse people (gardeners, academics, professionals, consultants, interested amateurs) its focus is the magazine and conferences/ publications, with some branches offering hands on events where 'learning' in a more structured sense can occur eg: Victorian branch working bees in historic gardens.