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Williamstown Botanic Gardens

Oral History Transcript

Chic Wyatt (nee Anderson)

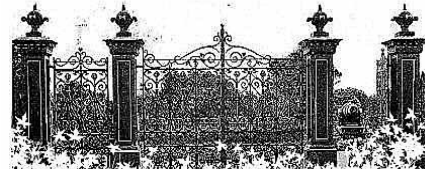
27th December 2013



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL



**WILLIAMSTOWN
BOTANIC GARDENS**



**Friends of Williamstown
Botanic Gardens Inc.**

This is an interview with Chic Wyatt (nee Anderson) on behalf of the Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens.

Chic is the daughter of Ernie Anderson who worked at the Gardens from the age of 15 until he retired at 65. Ernie's full name was Ernest Rupert Cyril Anderson. Chic verified from her Mother's bible that her Father was born 19th June 1895. The Anderson family moved into the Curator's Lodge in the grounds of the Gardens in 1938 following the death of the previous Curator, William Joseph Crowe.

The purpose of the interview is to discuss a collection of photos she lent to the Gardens for copying (registration no. 2013.001); to recall memories of her Father and of living in the grounds.

The interview took place at Chic's home in Mermaid Waters, Queensland on a hot summer's day. Noises in the background are not too intrusive and are the whirring of the fan, running water in an outside pond and passing traffic.

The interview was interrupted a couple of times by the arrival of Chic's family.

The date of this interview is 27th December 2013 and the interviewer is Lindy Wallace.

CW My name is Chic Wyatt, nee Anderson, born in Williamstown on 28th September 1930.

LW Your dad was Ernest Anderson and he was the Gardener and Superintendent of Williamstown Gardens

CW That's right

LW Was his full name

CW Ernest Rupert Cyril (laughs) – never named any of the children after him (laughs)

LW Would you tell me the story about your dad being the Curator at the Gardens, when he first started there and then we'll just chat

CW Well, he started when he was fifteen, first job, only job. He worked his way up from an apprentice gardener right through to being the Curator. He retired at sixty-five, because he had to – it was mandatory that they retire at sixty-five. It was the only job he ever had all his life. He was dedicated - so dedicated – he would get up at midnight and go out and move the sprinklers if the sprinklers needed moving. We had huge big sprinklers – in those days there was no water restrictions – we had huge big sprinklers on rollers and he would just go out and move them around from lawn to lawn – he'd go out at six o'clock or come in and have dinner and then he'd go out and move them and he'd get up at midnight if need be and go and move the hoses – he was so dedicated.

3.00

And I can remember when he used to clean the fish pond. We had two big bath tubs in the back of the yard – he'd have to get all the fish out and there'd be a seething mass of fish in these bath tubs while they cleaned he pond. That was a big job when you think about it. Then you'd have to go and put them all back in the pond again.

LW As children did you help him?

CW Oh we used to think it was great. We didn't help him but we used to think it was great to go down and stir the fish up in the bath tubs – we used to think that was great to go down and do that.

But it was lovely at night to lie in bed and listen to the frogs croaking from the pond – from the fish pond you'd hear them croaking of a night. You could see them actually, sitting on the lily pads – to hear this noise at night. Now – it probably annoyed me then – but when I think back it was a lovely noise, the frogs croaking.

LW So your dad started as an apprentice at fifteen and he lived in Williamstown?

CW He lived in Williamstown yes

LW Do you remember when you moved to the Curators Lodge?

CW When Mr Crowe died. Dad moved in a couple of weeks after he died. When the family moved out we moved in. I was about seven I suppose, round about, seven or eight, about that age. We lived there until I moved out, Dad was still there when I got married and then when they retired at sixty-five they bought a place at Belgrave and then they moved to Belgrave. Didn't live up there very long – he was sixty-five and he died when he was sixty-nine. So he didn't get much of a retirement – but anyway that's what they did.

They had a trip. They went to England. They were away for twelve months and I was very cross – had they told I didn't whether I'd have got married or not – I might have gone with them. I was very cross that they went away. They were away actually for nearly eighteen months on their trip. That must have been just after he retired I think. I think it must have been after he retired because they couldn't go away for eighteen months while he was working in the Gardens. Yes, he'd retired because I had my daughter – I had Julie and she was – I had her just before they left and then they were away for about eighteen months – and when they came back she was just toddling – and they were away all that time. He started to do a diary and he only did it - on the trip – he only did it for about - oh the first port of call and then he stopped doing it for some unknown reason – he didn't write it up anymore. So we don't know where they went or what they – or we do know they went.

I also know he came back with – they went to visit the Queen Mother's garden in England while they were over there – and he came back – because in those days there wasn't the customs like there is now – and he had some begonias from the Queen Mother's garden that he'd pinched – helped himself (laughs) – and we had them growing in the backyard and they were huge big begonias, which you only see now in the hot houses – and he had them growing in the back yard – and he brought them back from the Queen Mother's garden.

LW It would wonderful if they were still in the Gardens

CW They wouldn't be there now but that's a story that not many people know (laughs).

LW Can you describe the Curators Lodge when you lived there?

CW Very easily. You walked in the back door, the kitchen was on your right, you walked straight down a long passage, the bathroom was on the left, the dining room you used to walk

through from the kitchen, there was a door that took you through to the dining room, there was another that took you out to the hallway, then at the front of the house on the right hand side was the lounge room and on the left hand side, where the bathroom was, you went just down around the corner and there was a bedroom there and further up the hall there was a second bedroom and then the third bedroom, straight up to the front. The bathroom I always remember had little window in it that you could lift up and – it was vestibule as we called it – as you walked in – the vestibule – and that’s where the phone was - but there was a window that you could lift up in the bathroom – I don’t know why - but you could see out into the vestibule. Why you’d have a window in your bathroom like that I don’t know. It had a heater, one of those gas heaters that you had to light for your bath and shower. The kitchen had a stove which Mum replaced, that was a wood stove, and Mum replaced it with a – she was very modern – she had a stove that way back then was gas on the top and an electric oven – and that was way back when refrigerators and things first came into being she had that. She put that in the little alcove where the wood stove had been in the kitchen. The window from the kitchen that looked out into the Gardens, Dad used to put a piece of wood across from the fence to the window and the possums used to come across it to be fed – we used to feed the possums of a night.

8.54 In the kitchen you used to look straight into the Gardens. Outside the house was the – the wash house we called it – you couldn’t call it a laundry – it was a wash house – had the copper and the two troughs and Dad had a big chest of drawers in there. Then you walked through – from the backyard you walked through, down, and you went left and there as the outside toilet and on the other side he had a beautiful fernery with lots of plants and things in it. Then you went round the corner and back into the yard where he had all his vegetables and fruit trees and everything growing there. Then you went further down, went to the left and then you went down to the work part – where all the men were – and then the stables and everything was kept down there. Just further around from there was the bird aviary where he had birds and rabbits and all sorts of things in there. I don’t know if they’ve got it now, I don’t even know if it’s still there is it?

LW No it’s not

9.59

CW It had little finches oh we had all sorts of birds from cockatoos and galahs to finches, every bird imaginable – and rabbits running around the bottom, little white rabbits. Then at the back of that again, that’s where you went through to the big dahlia bed that was over that side. Out the back of that was the oval, the sports oval where they played lacrosse and football on a Saturday. Then during the war we had an army camp there, the Americans camped there during the war.

They had search lights – we used to look up and see the search lights of a night. We had a bomb shelter thing outside our house in the street. Dad was a, he was an ARP warden as they called them in those days. He used to go out and check that you couldn’t see any lights around the streets – he used to check and make sure the blackout curtains were all down and you couldn’t see any lights. We all had gas masks during the war, I can remember that.

We also had a peeping tom that used to come to this dugout and watch my sister get undressed of a night. Dad caught him one night – he used to come in and look and then go out through the back down through the back of the house and out on the reserve – and Dad went round the other way and met him coming up and the peeping tom swung his boots at

Dad and Dad went to move and he went on a stake and broke his ribs – and I slept right through the whole thing – didn't know any of that – I slept right through it. There were quite a lot of incidents.

11.55

LW Chic, this air-raid shelter – it wasn't in your grounds, it was out in the street? What was that made of?

CW Oh it was just a dug-out, just a dug-out. You used to go down steps, it was just a big slit – just dug-out type thing – nothing over the top.

LW Can you tell me who used to use that, was it just you or everyone in the street?

CW None of us ever used it because there was never any reason to. I imagine it would have been for anyone in the street that was caught out if there was an air raid or something, they'd just go down there. I presume it had a cover over the top, I can't remember. I know it was right outside the house in Osborne Street, there was a dug-out there.

I was more impressed with the American army that camped out on the oval at the back. They just took over during the war. They just came and set up a camp there and took over.

LW What particular memories do you have of the army camp?

CW Mainly the search lights of a night – seeing the search lights – and they had all the tents and things set up there. We used to have walk home from the station, from Williamstown Beach station, and as you walked along you kept looking over your shoulder just to make sure. We walked on the other side of the road, we didn't walk on the camp side, we walked on the other side of the road where the houses were, from the station. But you just, you just kept looking over your shoulder to make sure there was no-one there that shouldn't be.

LW Were the men in the camp seen as a threat?

CW No, no not really. Well, I mean girls of seventeen or eighteen walking home late at night. It was in the same era as that American soldier did murder the girl in Melbourne – what was his name – Kowalski or something – he murdered a girl in Melbourne. It was in the same era so you were just a little bit wary – not that you were frightened of them at all – no – not really – no. You just had to watch. I used to – normally when we were coming home late at night we'd get out at Newport and get the bus. The bus used to come around, it used to drop us right at the gate, instead of dropping us at the corner, it used to drop us right at the gate so that we just had to run straight inside. One night I'd come home on the train and I didn't get the bus, I went to the station and I'm walking along and I'm almost home, I'm on the other side of the street and I heard this scream and it was my sister – she had got the bus but she'd got off at the corner and it was a foggy night and she's walking home from the corner of Gifford Street down to the house, and this fellow followed her and grabbed her – tried to grab her – and I ran across the road because I heard the scream – and she got to the gate about the same time as I did. She'd got on the bus to come home to be safe but got off at the corner. I used to sweet talk all the drivers to letting me off at the gate and they did (laughs).

15.26

LW Can we talk about the horses? You donated some photos to be copied – in them are some horses. Can you tell me what you remember what you remember about the horses?

CW I can remember one's name was Sox, one's name was Sox, I don't know which one, but I couldn't tell you the names of the other two. There were three, I remember there were three originally. I don't know what happened to two of them but the mare, she had a baby and I was thrilled when I went down this morning to see this little baby's head poking over the top of the stable door. When Mum used to go down she'd put milk and sugar on her fingers and this little one would suck on the milk and sugar. I'm not sure what happened to the other two, I can't remember. I don't know whether one died and other one – I don't know I really don't know – or whether they got rid of it because they didn't want any more babies, I don't know. I can remember more the mare and the little foal more than the three.

They used to be used – I can picture Dad now, harnessing them up to the carts to go round in the gardens and get all the cuttings and all the rubbish – where they tended to the bushes and the trees, they trimmed them and put it all in the back of the dray, as they called it. They'd take it back to the outside part, where the men worked and put it all on this big high pile and it got higher and higher and higher, this pile, so then they had to start another one – when that one got so high so they started a second pile – because they couldn't use the amount of compost they had, they couldn't use it all – it just got so much they couldn't use it all. There was seaweed, grass clippings and branches of trees and anything that he pulled out from the gardens that was an annual – everything went in these carts and the horse was taken through and they'd offload it into these big piles. So the horses were really valuable. This was before the Council bought a truck. Until then the horses were used for everything.

17.51

LW There's a photo here of the horse and a mower. Do you remember them mowing the grass with the horse and mower?

CW I think that might have been before my time actually. I can't remember them mowing it. I think it might have been – I don't know. Yeh look at it, they're pulling the mower. (Chic is looking at the photo). Vaguely, I can vaguely – I was probably at school when they did that. I probably wouldn't see very much of that type of thing because they'd be working through the day when I was at school. We wouldn't have been allowed to get close to it anyway. So the horses were used for that as well, they were used for all sorts of things.

LW Your dad retired at the age of sixty-five, did he use horses the whole time he worked at the Gardens?

CW No, no, the horses went and he

LW Do you know when the horses went?

CW I couldn't give you an actual date. I think I was probably about fourteen I should think. I know there'd be a record somewhere of the first truck they bought, that they took to the Gardens. Once they got the motorised truck – I don't know where the horses went even or what they did with them. I don't know what they did with them. They just were there and then when the big truck came – I know was quite horrified that we had the truck because Dad didn't drive. Mr Biggs had to take over and do all the driving because Dad didn't. He used to just ride his bike everywhere. I suppose I was about fourteen from memory – about

then I would think. I can't be quite sure on that one but where the horses went, I have no idea what they did with them.

LW Your dad never had a driver's licence?

CW Never, never – no he used to just ride his bike – put his bike clips on. He used to go up to the Council Chambers once a week with all the time sheets – he had a beautiful hand – Dad's writing was beautiful – he had a lovely hand. You'd see him sitting at the table doing all the men's time sheets and then – I suppose it was probably a Friday, I don't know, he'd get on his bike and go up to the Council chambers – up in – I don't know what street that would be – Douglas Parade I think – I can't remember – and take the time sheets up for the men for their wages. Then they'd bring the wages down to distribute them. That was all down the back – I wasn't allowed down there very often because all the men were down there and I wasn't supposed to go down there where the men were.

21.01

I can't remember the names of the men either. I know there was Mr Biggs, there was a boy Wrigley(?) he worked with us for a while, he lived across the road and then there was Archie, Archie, what's Archie's surname – he came as a young boy – he worked there all his life actually I think.

Interview paused as Chic's family arrived.

LW We're looking at some photos that Chic has in front of her when she was a young girl with her friend Margaret McLean

CW Yes, that's Margaret and me and in that one. That's Margaret's mother and father, I can't remember their names

LW Were they Agnes and James?

CW Agnes and James, that's who they were and that would be my mother and father there I should think – my eye sight's not that good

LW There's a photo here with everyone with party hats on and I'm wondering if it was someone's birthday and were there lots of birthday parties in the Gardens?

CW This was a birthday, this was taken before we lived in the Gardens I think. It is a birthday party, there's Margaret, that's me and there's Allan – I don't know whether that's Geoff or Allan. Yes, there were lots of parties and I don't know whose birthday this would have been. It's all kids who lived in our street, they're all there – oh gosh there's Margaret, I haven't seen a photo of her for ages. Yep that would have been in the Gardens, that would have been a party.

LW Did other families have parties in the Gardens?

CW Oh yes, they were very popular

LW Do you remember any of the parties or were there weddings?

CW No no, weddings were done in church. In our day people didn't get married in the Gardens. There were a lot of picnics, a lot of Sunday School picnics, a lot of them – used to have Sunday School picnics in the Gardens but not weddings so much no. A lot of people would come down day picnicking and spread the rug out on the lawn and have picnics there.

LW Were there any repercussions from the picnics – were the Gardens looked after? Do you remember your dad thinking there was extra work?

CW They used to have them down the back part of the Gardens, those sort of picnics down where the rotunda was, where the band used to play. That was down the end that didn't have the lawns and things. There were a lot of trees and all the leaves from the trees were down there. That's where the two big cannons were from the First World War, they were down in that part. Mostly the Sunday School picnics and things they would be down there, they would congregate down there more than in the show part of the Gardens. They would all down in that part because it was all one then, the fence went all the way around, it wasn't chopped in half like it is now. It was all enclosed and mostly the picnics were down there.

25.13

LW Can you describe the rotunda for me?

CW It was just an open platform thing with a railing around it and steps going up to it. It wasn't covered or anything it was just a wooden rotunda, a wooden one, and the band used to get up there and play on a Sunday or whenever. Just two or three steps up to it and all the way around was bricks cause we used to get under the bricks to go under the rotunda and play under there. It was just a very basic wooden construction, no roof

LW You were telling me earlier that your dad used to go and lock the gates, can you tell me a bit more about that?

CW At dusk every night, whenever it was dusk, he'd get his bike and his big bundle of keys which he would take with him and around he'd go and he'd lock all the gates. Quite often people would get locked in and they would have to come to the house to go through our yard to get out because they'd been locked in. He used to ring a bell, I remember now, he used to ring this bell before he locked the Gardens – it was a big hand bell – he'd go out and he'd ring it to warn people he was about to go and lock the gates. Most people would be gone by that time anyway because it was getting dark and they knew the gates were locked. Occasionally you'd get somebody who'd get locked in and they'd have to come up to the house to get out that way. Yes, I can remember that, the bell – he used to ring that. He'd ride around on his bike and we used to go with him. I can almost tell you how many gates there were – there was one down near the toilets, one leading on the beach, then up at the other corner of the street, then was one half way down where Twyford and Gifford Street met, then there was the big beautiful wrought iron gates and there was another little gate just near our house. He used to ride around and lock all those gates.

LW The gate that was near your house, was it ornate?

CW No, it was just an ordinary wooden gate – near our house, it was just a wooden gate and you used to come in the gate and along a little path and then out into the Gardens. That wasn't that far from the house that one – there was a garden – you'd come in there and it was just near the main path, it would bring you to the main path, then you'd come down the side path to the house. There was a garden, the railing and then our lawn in the front of our

house. It wasn't very far from the house but the one up the front, the big wrought iron ones – there was the big wrought iron ones and then there was a side gates too I think, from memory. There was a side gates you used to come, I don't think you came in the big wrought iron gates – I'm sure you didn't – I think they were only there for show. There was also a cannon up there in the garden – up there too. Between the one in Osborne Street and our house there was another cannon in one of the gardens there. When I went back to have a look years later they were gone, there was no sign of them, I don't know what happened to them.

LW They're now in the Strand. Did you used to play on the cannons?

CW Yes, oh yes. You used to climb up and climb in and you'd sit there and you could climb up onto the barrel. At the back there were sort of seats around it virtually and then the big barrel, you could walk along the side in get in the front or you could climb up and sit on top of the barrel and think you were – thinking back now it's a wonder we didn't break our neck doing that. Yes, we used to play on those quite often.

29.38

There was a big peppercorn grove where the statue is at the end of the main path – walking straight down the main path from our house where all the huge palms were – and it had the most beautiful roses all the way down there, all the way down, beautiful roses, and little pansies and things in the front and a little bit of grass alongside that – you go right down to where the statue was and on the left hand side was this big peppercorn grove of huge peppercorn trees with the big green caterpillars that used to be in it. We used to get in there too and play in there- you'd get into the middle of these big peppercorns and we'd play in there. They had these great big green caterpillars, slugs things, they used to be on the peppercorns.

From there, there was a path that took you through to the gate that took you out into Twyford Street and further down was – we never used to go down the back very much because it wasn't grass, it was all natural down there – we used to walk through there to go down – there was a path that used to go down of course and we'd go down there to go to the beach. We'd go down and go out through the gate to go to the beach.

I can remember on the summer days, as soon as we'd get up early in the morning, we'd go and put our rug out to reserve our spot. Just outside the house there was a tree that had been blown by the wind when it was growing and it was on a slant – it used to be easy to climb up and sit in the branches up there. Mum used to take a rug out and put it under that tree and that was our spot on the hot summer days. We used to have our picnics and things, even though we lived there, we used to have our picnics out there on the lawn – and you could roll down the grass because it was on an angle and we used to be able roll down the grass from where the path went round the fish pond – we used to be able to roll down the grass, which used to be fun to do. There was one railing around the edge which we used to use for doing somersaults and gymnastics and things on this one railing fence that came around the edge of the path there. We used to reserve that spot, that was our spot. On hot summer days that where you'd find us out there under that tree. I can remember that as clear as anything.

32.23

LW Having lots of open space like that, did you have lots of friends who would come and play with you rather than you go to their place?

CW Yes, yes, they all used to come even when I was older and we used to go to Sunday School and church, they'd all come back to our place for dinner of a Sunday night – yes they used to all come to the Gardens.

I used to think I was just so lucky and have such a huge garden and everything to play in. My brother and sister were older. There's seven years difference between my sister and I and ten years between my brother and I so they'd virtually grown up by the time we moved into the Gardens. Margaret was my close friend. We used to play in the gardens a lot. I had two pet rabbits, two white rabbits. I used to tie a ribbon around each of their necks and hold it in the middle and I'd take out on the grass for them to hop around and eat the grass – Peter and Wendy I called those two. I used to think it wonderful that people would stop in the Gardens and look. I thought I was a princess because I lived in the Gardens and I had all this – oh all this wonderful land and flowers and everything, the fish pond and everything and I lived there – I loved it, I loved it. It was a wonderful childhood, it was a wonderful childhood growing up there.

Mum and Dad were always there of course because Dad worked on the spot so he was always there. I can hear Mum now 'You there Ern – you there Ern?' (laughs).

LW Did your dad have a day off?

33.56

CW No no no – he worked – he was happy he was happy there. He worked seven days a week, he never had a day off; he used to work all the time because in his own speed he used to do what he wanted to do. Through the week when all the men were there they worked. Of a weekend he just maintained, he didn't do anything else but he maintained. He used to water everything – he didn't actually do heavy work of a weekend but he was always there – very rarely had a holiday, very rarely went anywhere. He used to let Mum do whatever she wanted to do. His favourite saying was 'Nearer to God in the Garden than anywhere else on earth' that was his favourite saying.

He used to just potter around – he was always pottering, always pottering. He used to fix most thing himself. He made a little fountain in the backyard in this garden we had where the begonias were and he built this fountain and the water came up the middle and he had a ping pong ball that used to balance. We used to think that was so clever that when the water came up this ping pong ball used to sit up on top of the water. We thought that was so clever. And he made a swing for me in the backyard. He was just a lovely Dad, he was always there. One of my favourite memories of him – it's a favourite memory – we had this beautiful bed of violets, they were edged around near where the cannon was – they went all the way around, these violets. I'd asked him for a bunch of violets to take to my school teacher and he said yes he would but he didn't do it before I left for school so I went and picked a bunch myself and took them to school. Around about lunch there's Dad on his bike at the school with the bunch of violets that he had promised me. I've always felt bad about that, that I went and got the bunch myself when I should have known that he would do it for me – he said he would and he did – he honoured it. That's a favourite memory I've got of him.

Another memory I've got. We had this lovely big bush of the Cecil Brunner roses and he used to pick a bunch and bring them into Mum, these little Cecil Brunner roses. Every time I see one now I think of Dad with these little tiny flowers. People used to say 'Look out here comes old Anderson' – the kids would say 'Look our here comes old Anderson' because he

looked very stern, he did have a stern look to him but he was a pussy cat, he really was – ‘look out here comes old Anderson’ – if they were doing they shouldn’t (laughs).

37.00

LW Did that happen often – did children do things they shouldn’t?

CW Oh yes they’d run across the garden or pick flowers or do something they shouldn’t have been doing, of course, they were always doing things – throwing stones into the fish pond – always doing naughty things – as children do. He wouldn’t have done anything but they used to say ‘Look out here comes old Anderson’ – I can hear them now – all scatter and run. I used to wonder why because he wasn’t that sort of man. He didn’t have to chastise us – he used to just look at you and just say do as your mother tells you and that was enough – we used to just know that we had to do what Mum said. I can’t remember Dad ever ever smacking any of us really – not ever. He was a kind hearted man, very kind hearted.

LW Chic I brought along some old newspaper articles I found and there’s one here saying how your Dad found a young lad who drowned. Can you tell me what you remember about it and any other events like that?

CW I don’t actually remember the drowning thing – children were seen and not heard in those days and they kept you away from anything like that. I can’t remember anything about that except that a lady did come looking for her son, came to the house to see if we’d seen him and me being the cheeky little sod that I was said I had seen him and he’d gone down to the beach. But I don’t think it was the same child because Dad apparently did find him but I really can’t tell you anything about because we were kept in the dark about those things, it was only what we heard them talking about. There was another time I know there was a girl who lived in the street, Gifford Street I think it was who was a pretty loose moral type girl and Dad caught her with a fellow in the Gardens one night. My ears picked up when he was telling Mum but he had to order them out because they were doing something they shouldn’t. They kept us in the dark, we didn’t know very much about what went on. So I don’t actually remember I only remember the part I played. I got into trouble because I gave the lady false hope that her son was still alive and he wasn’t at all – I got into trouble over that so I learnt a lesson there.

LW You were telling me before that your Dad found someone?

CW Yes – he was my uncle by marriage, I think it was his nephew – he’d had an accident and he had his head in a brace – one of those big metal braces – he’d broken his neck and it was to keep his head still. When Dad went to lock the Gardens one night he found him in the toilets down there dead. Obviously he’d moved his head and he died in the toilets down there. He was only a young fellow too, twenty I suppose. I can remember that one quite well – I was only young when that happened but I remember that one. I didn’t like those toilets, they were scary. They weren’t really I suppose but they were like a hole – they weren’t toilet seats as such – and you used to feel scared. There were about four on either side I imagine, with the doors. They were for the use of people in the Gardens I presume. You’d have to walk down there to go to the toilet if you wanted to, it was the only toilets around. But for some reason they were dark and I didn’t like them, they were scary.

41.17

LW There’s another article here that I found about a flower show at the Horticultural Society and it says your Dad as Curator and Mr J Biggs and staff are to be congratulated on a brilliant

arrangement. Do you remember you dad doing floral arrangements for different events at Williamstown?

CW No not really. When was it, what year?

LW 1949

CW I'd have been nineteen then – probably wrapped up in my own goings on to worry about what Dad was doing. No I can't remember him doing that. I'm surprised – I can't remember him doing that. I know he used to just love his plants, he used to love his garden – he lived for it – he really did live for the Gardens. The display of flowers – there was always a display of flowers always. I used to get into trouble for trying to pick the roses without asking – I used to have to ask him to get the roses for me. I would go and get them myself if I wanted them and get into trouble for that. But no I can't actually remember this – I suppose I was busy working and I – it would be through the day when I was at work I suppose when they did that but I don't remember it.

LW I gather from reading that they did lots of floral arrangements

CW I should imagine he would have done it at different events, I'm quite sure he would have. But I can't actually say 'oh yes I remember him doing a display'.

LW They had a lot of annuals in the Gardens at that stage is that right?

CW Yes

LW There's a photo here of the dahlia garden, what do you remember about the dahlia garden?

CW The dahlia garden was an absolute picture, it was just all dahlias, the whole thing – the poms poms, the big ones, every colour imaginable, the whole garden was just dahlias from the big ones to the little ones to the poms poms – all colours. They'd all be staked up and when it was over of course he had to – I imagine he dug them up. We always had things hanging around that he'd dug – like in stocking and nets – things that he'd dig up. I think he might have just rested that garden when the dahlias finished blooming. I can't remember seeing anything else in there other than the dahlias so he probably used to just rest it in between and then leave the tubers in there for them to come up the next year. I think he'd rest that garden for the time the dahlias weren't there.

LW Can you describe for me where the dahlia garden was?

CW Yes, it was down where the work part was, we had the bird cage then the bed next to that, that was the dahlia bed there – over near the oval outside – there was the big dahlia bed there. Then there was grass then you went down to something else further down – I can't remember what was down there. He had all different things – he had tamarillos – in those days no-one knew what a tamarillo was - we had the bush and he used to say to try it. He grew garlic and he dug the garlic up – that's another favourite memory – he dug all the garlic bulbs up and had them hanging in a bag down near the shed and Mum went down to get one thinking they were onions and cut the whole thing (laughs) the whole bulb and cut it up and put it in the stew so we had very strong stew that night – all garlicky. We had a lot of gladdies. I had a lot of gladdies too when I moved to Frankston. My garden – I must have copied Dad a bit because I had a lot of dahlias in the front garden and gladioli and daphne –

that's the thing I miss up here, the daphne – you can't have it up here. We had a daphne bush in the backyard I think – I don't think it was out in the Gardens – it was in the backyard in a tub.

- 46.03 We had a cactus garden in our backyard. You'd come in the side gate and there a little garden there with a tree where the letter box was and just a few shrubs and then up the side of the house he had a beautiful big plum tree, a blood red plum tree. Between the blood red plum tree and the back gate and this other garden, he put a cactus garden in. I've never liked cactus and he had a whole garden – all different cactus there. That was outside my sister's bedroom window. Whether he did that to stop people coming and looking I don't know. He painted all the rocks different colours, like blue and things, and he had all these cactus growing there. They didn't appeal to me at all.

The Gardens themselves – the plants he had in the Gardens – when you think back – he had all sorts of wisteria, lilac – oh we had a beautiful lilac tree – that was down near the cannon at the front garden – there was a beautiful lilac there. You'd wander through all the paths and everything was interesting. In those days it wasn't – but when I think back now. Wandering through the different paths and things – it was more just lawns and palm trees and trees when you got a bit further down towards the back part – you didn't have a lot of gardens down there. He kept the gardens virtually up closer to the house. We had a huge bed of pansies – all pansies – that was just along the path where you'd go through the horrible bougainvillea – why he ever had that growing around the pond I don't know – but you'd wander through the path and when you came out the other end, down near where the drinking fountain is, there was a huge big bed of pansies. He used to grow a whole bed of pansies. Then when they were old he have something else like poppies or something there. He used to have full beds of whatever he'd grow. He had such a lot of grass, no wonder he had a horse drawn mower.

He had ordinary hand mowers too – motor mowers – I can see them now, the men walking around with the mowers – the hand ones with the gears – wandering around the grass, cutting the grass. I remember those more than I do the horse drawn ones. He used to keep it spotless, he'd rake the gravel, get the gravel all raked of a night, he'd go out and rake that where people had walked on it. The trees down the end – where they've opened it up – I think they were elm trees, I'm not sure, I think they were elm trees right along the edge of the last lot of garden, then you had the path and then where they've now opened it up – there wasn't lawn or anything down there. That was where the band played on the rotunda, where they had the picnics and all those sort of things. I can't think of any other special plants – you name and he had it.

- 49.52 The in our backyard we had peach trees, apple trees, apricot, the blood plum. He'd grow all the vegetables and things we used. We were so self-sufficient. When I think back now, what he did grow, it was just amazing, just amazing. We had a lot of agapanthus, I can remember seeing the agapanthus around the pond. I believe that water fountain is still there.

LW Yes. They've just renovated the whole pond. It's all operating now, it's really nice.

CW The main path – that was always just a picture – because you had the little bit of grass down either side, then all the way along little clumpy what-ever's, then you had poppies or something behind and then the big rose bushes behind that – the colour was just lovely.

LW You were talking of the men who worked in the Gardens, were there many gardeners?

CW I would imagine there were about six at a time – round about six. That would be all, there weren't a lot. There was this one who I can't remember his name, then there was Archie, Archie came later and this boy Wrigley who didn't last very long, I think he might have gone into the army, but then I got married and moved away. I know my sister had the hots for Archie when he first started working there, she thought he was lovely. And apparently he's still alive too, Archie. My sister-in-law told me that he's got Alzheimer's now apparently. She knew him. Her sister still lives in Williamstown, Beryl. She lives on the Strand, she's ninety-two – ninety four she is. She said that Archie's still around so she still knows him. Mayla (?) Cook and her husband, they still live down there, they're Beryl's buddies and they still live down Williamstown. Six would have been the maximum that worked there at the time.

I didn't realise that Dad was boss and that they all worked for him, not till I got older of course. When I was young I didn't realise that he had such a responsible job. They made him the Curator from Mr Crowe and he was the boss – I didn't realise that when I was young.

Interview paused due to the arrival of Chic's daughter.

53.47

LW When we were talking about the different gardeners at the Williamstown Botanic Gardens, there was a Mr Biggs. Do you remember much about him?

CW He was second in charge. He used to look after the place when Dad wasn't available. His name was Jim Biggs, James probably but we knew him as Jim. He actually took over when Dad retired, I don't know how long he lasted there – they made him Curator for a while after Dad left and I don't know what happened after because Dad only lived for four years after he retired. Just lived long enough to get his place looking beautiful in Belgrave and then he got cancer and he died.

I wish I could think of that other man's name – it was only short name – he'd been there for years and years and years too. He retired from there actually. As long as I can remember he was there. I can't think of his name. Archie came in I think after he retired.

LW Anything else that you can think of that you might like to have a chat about?

CW I think I've just about covered about everything that I can remember (laughs)

LW You sure have, you've been so thorough.

CW I know Mum and Dad used to mind my daughter for me while I went back to work. They'd have her from Monday to Friday then I'd pick her up Friday night and have her on the weekend and then take her back Sunday night because I worked full time. They had Julie for two and a half years. Then Mum said you've got to leave work because she's beginning to think I'm her mother so I left work and promptly had Kim (laughs).

LW Thank you Chic, I really appreciate this. They're our favourite photos in the collection and are absolutely wonderful and it's nice of you to share them. On behalf of Williamstown Botanic Gardens thanks Chic.