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**Williamstown Botanic Gardens  
Oral History Transcript**

**Iris Whitehurst**

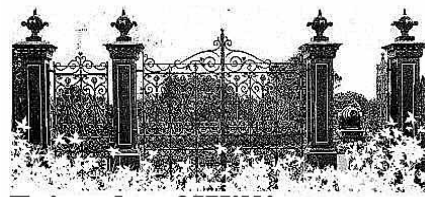
28 May 2014



**Hobsons Bay**  
CITY COUNCIL



**WILLIAMSTOWN  
BOTANIC GARDENS**



**Friends of Williamstown  
Botanic Gardens Inc.**

This is an interview with Iris Whitehurst on behalf of the Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens. It is one of a planned series to document personal memories and experiences of the Gardens.

Iris was born in Williamstown and has memories of the Gardens from an early age. In the interview she talks of playing on the cannons, memories of the Gardens appearance over the years and the contribution of the Friends of the Gardens.

The date of the interview is 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and the interviewer is Lindy Wallace.

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IW I'm Iris Whitehurst. I was born I was born Iris Webb. In fact I was born in Cole Street in Williamstown so I have spent my whole life here. My parents' names were Tom and Jean Webb who loved the Gardens and so introduced me to them when I was just a little child.

LW Okay Iris, let's just start with your first memories of the Gardens when you were a child – I'll just let you chat.

IW My very first memory, and I possibly was here before this memory, but my very first one is sitting out under the pines at the back making daisy chains, and I know now it was cape weed, but there I sat as a prep – so I was five, five and a half years old. It must have been an excursion from Williamstown North State School and we'd walked down all the way from Melbourne Road. I can still see that day sitting with the daisy chains with my little friends. So that's my very first.

With family it was more summer time visits. I can remember them very well because a number of connections of family lived in Williamstown and then they'd invite their over the river relatives to come here for the big Boxing Day picnic, sometimes New Years Day, ANA Day now Australia Day, they used to call it ANA Day. We'd have the sandwiches and the billy to make tea and the picnic rugs and we'd sit on the – and I still remember that buffalo grass, it was always green and tough, it never wore out. Father would go over to – there was a kiosk where the St John's Ambulance Museum is now, there was a little kiosk just a tiny little building and they sold hot water – I don't know if they sold it or perhaps gave it to us for free. You'd go over there with your billy for your tea and then walk across the Fearon back to the Gardens. There was a sign somewhere saying 'no hot water on the lawns' and I thought 'where was the hot water' but they didn't want hot containers and whatever on the lawns. I remember that – that Father would totter over in all the heat to get this boiling water to come back when it wasn't boiling to make tea and then not be allowed to put the billy on the lawn. I was only a little primary kid then.

LW Iris, can I just ask you – was that actually inside the formal part of the Gardens or did you picnic on the Pinetum.

IW No no – we did both but most times we would in here and I remember that we used to come in here to shelter. There'd be a really hot days when we came here and if the north wind was blowing you'd have to go off the beach – this was where we came to shelter. You were some degrees cooler and quieter in here.

In my teenage days and later and as a young mother we used to have picnics out in the pines because there tables and things there – we just used to sit on the lawns in here of course.

LW Where the tables were out in the Pinetum, did they have shelters over them

IW No not that I recollect. I do remember out in the pines area that's where the City Band played on that raised platform there, that's still there with the clivias or whatever around it – that's where the City Band – the fellows in their blue uniforms played. I don't know how often. My parents were connected with the band with charity things – you know fund raising for the hospital and things like that so I remember coming here as a little girl to hear the band.

3:40.7

LW Can you describe that raised platform – was there a building there

IW No building – they only put their folding seats, as I remember, on this raised area and it wasn't concrete or bitumen or anything like that – it had plants around, I remember that. I don't know when they stopped using it, I don't know if it was used often. I only have that recollection of hearing the band when I was little.

LW Sorry, when were you born?

IW 1943

LW So when you were little – we're talking about late forties early fifties?

IW Yes

LW Can you describe what the Pinetum was like then? I know the fence lines changed here – I don't know if you remember

IW I can't be very clear about that but I remember it was a wooden fence down the side – the long pickets – there was no wire fences or anything like that. I don't remember big gates at the beach end. Perhaps you had to go in and around so that the bikes couldn't come in – I think that's all I remember about getting into the Gardens.

It was always pretty windy. Later on as an older person coming down here the wind – because I loved to walk down here in the winter. But as a child it was always the summer winds and then when the wind would change in the afternoon the south westerly would blow in and that's when we would come in sometimes and shelter in here after the big winds.

5:48.4 I remember the lovely smells – the smell of the pines – they wouldn't have had mowers chopping up pine cones or anything but it was the pine needles and the pine cones – I always remember that smell – it was so delicious. And – some days the sea smell and then you'd come here and you'd smell the cypress – I'd just love that.

LW Do you still smell that when you come here?

IW Yes I do because I walk in from this end now – usually from the beach end.

LW Does that then evoke all those childhood memories?

IW Oh yes – I feel young again. I also remember the other smells – of the horse manure up this end – because the council used to have their draught horses up the Osborne Street end. And we had the big wool scouring mills in Osborne Street and the smell of the wool – it was a big stink.

LW Did that pervade the whole area?

IW Well, for blocks around, yes. I went to Williamstown High School – 1956 I started there – and we used to use the Fearon for our sports – mostly all the girls’ sports were held on Fearon Reserve. Coming down you’d go past the ‘pong’ you used say of H B Smiths and then you’d have a bit of a smelly horsey smell and then you’d get here. I played softball right down at the bottom at the beach end – and then you’d smell the pines. In the summer time there was not as good grass as there is now on the Fearon, there’d be weeds and pretty tuff stuff and we used to wear it out. All those aromas come into my mind as I think of the Gardens.

7:42.3

LW What do you remember about the horses?

IW I don’t remember a lot because I didn’t live near here – I lived up near North Williamstown Station so it wasn’t a place I just walked on my own – I never rode my bike down here or anything like that until I was a teenager so I don’t remember a lot about the horses I’m sorry. I remember them up near my street – there’d be clip clop of the horses and the old carts. We used to dash out – people who’d collect the horse poo to put on their gardens – I remember that.

LW Do you remember where the horses were?

IW Just the little corner up here as I remember

LW Close to Osborne Street?

IW Yes, that’s all I remember.

LW Tell me a bit more about the school picnics

IW I only remember coming here once. We didn’t have excursions like the children do now, it was a very rare day if we went outside the school ground. It must have been a very special day – I don’t know why.

LW What about Sunday School?

IW Our Sunday School picnics were never here. Lots of times we’d get on those moving vans and go off to the hills. Because our Sunday School was big, I don’t know how many vans but we would go out of town for our picnics. Then we got into the fashion of going on steam train rides – so we never came to Williamstown Gardens for picnics - that was never organised.

9:29.9 I have to say about playing on the cannons

LW I’d love to hear that

IW I don’t remember doing that when I was little because I wasn’t a very adventurous little girl. But later on with big brother and cousins and whatever. In this photo – it was the big thing to go down – I do believe that there were two down near the elm walk now (Iris was looking at a photo she had brought along to the interview) – you can’t see the figs can you?

LW No, you can’t see the figs there

IW See it's (the cannon) set on a bit of concrete or something. I remember climbing all over there – there are the cousins having a great time

LW So the cannons were almost play equipment for you guys?

IW They were, yes. And do you know I'm just trying to remember that big statue, he never came into my memory at all – the things you remember.

10:37.7

Other things I remember about the Gardens – is it called the Bunya Pine? I didn't know what it was called but because it was so different with those prickly doovers that fell down – that was of the first things I remember botanically about the Gardens and I loved the big palm walk. I remember also when they cut them down

LW Do you remember not only how you felt but also your parents felt about that?

IW My Dad – he may have been even working for the Council then – he was in the electricity supply and he went around and read the electricity meters, we had our own electricity supply – and he came home and he said 'They are cutting down the palms' and we said 'what for?' – somebody said they were dangerous or something – I don't know their reason – but he was very cross about it. But he was also cross – I'm pretty sure it was about the same time they were taking down the verandas of the Nelson Place shops – someone also said they were dangerous 'They've got to go'. So we were losing the character things around Williamstown at the same time. It was about the sixties – I don't remember the date but I do remember Dad being very cross about it – how silly – and he loved the Gardens – but what a stupid thing to do. All I remember that they were there and then they weren't. Then had little succulent things or something growing.

LW Yes they left the trunks and grew things around them

IW Yes, that's how I remember them

LW Do you remember those cannons that were down near the statue....and I know you don't remember the statue?

IW Yes, were there some up here too – near the front gate as you come in the big gates?

LW You do remember those?

IW Yes

LW Did you play on those?

IW Oh no! They were in the garden beds. Did I say before, you weren't allowed to walk on the grass borders – there must have been little signs – they were all mown and kept beautiful – we were not allowed to walk on them. You were always on the gravel paths.

LW But there were areas where you could have picnics?

IW Yes. Behind the mound there was our favourite spot because it was a fairly protected area.

LW You mentioned when we were talking earlier that you remember the gates being locked at night time

IW I had in my memory that there was a time when you had to be out of the Gardens – that probably would have been when I was a teenager when we were down here from the beach and whatever and there was a time that the gates closed – that’s all I remember. I was never here to see the man with his key or anything like that.

I remember coming here as an eighteen, nineteen, say twenty year old – 1965 – Williamstown High School was fifty years old and they had a garden party and all the ladies came with their beautiful hats and gloves and everything. There’s lots and lots of photos of it. I was a teachers college student by then I think and we came down – we were the ones without the hats. But nearly everybody else – the older women – when I look at the photos, there was hardly a man here. All the girls came to enjoy the Gardens – the whole afternoon the Gardens were open to the high school event. It was a big big event. I remember down for that.

We used to come for little reunions. People would want to see you over the holidays and this was the place – you know – four or five people or ten people would just come to meet up and have an ice-cream or something. So it’s always been a nice meeting place for me.

15:24.8

As my children were growing up and my daughter, when she was only about six or seven, she said ‘I want my party near the roses at the Garden’. It was a little rose arbour, you know where the Golden Elm is, there was a little rose arbour, I’m calling it an arbour but it was a trellisy thing with lovely old fashioned climbing roses on it, and she said ‘that’s where I want my party’. So we came down with two cars full of children and the hot sausage rolls out of the oven and put the birthday cake on the grass, lit the candles and the cake set fire because it had paper around it. The kids were in hysterics and everything and I’m trying to put out the fire in the birthday cake. My daughter especially when she was little loved the Gardens, she loved going over to see the birds in the aviary.

LW Can you tell me about what you remember about the aviary?

IW I’m sure that when I was little there were little rosellas, parrots, those sorts of birds but when my children were small it was little quails and doves and finches – lots of birds. But when I was little I think they were the more colourful birds – little cockatiels and things like that. It was right over on the Fearon border. There’s some pine trees near-by. You’d come in the gates on their little bikes or their pusher and they’d say ‘come and see the birds Mum’. So we’d go to see the birds first before we ever walked around to see the flowers. One day I brought my little girl, she was about two, with a girlfriend and her little babies and we were walking – and I can see the man now trimming the cannas as high this maybe more, beautiful orange and red cannas, gold – they were so gorgeous. He was cutting them right down and he said ‘Oh would you like some’ and I said ‘Oh yes!’ So I took mine home and mine never made it more than a foot high. I haven’t got them now I can tell you. But it was very kind to give us a bit out of the Gardens, we wouldn’t do that now.

17:39.3

LW You were talking about the man who cut down the cannas, do you remember seeing lots of gardeners here?

IW Oh yes. Even when my children were small there’d be a team. You’d be passing and one fellow would be working trimming over near Gifford Street and then somebody would be

attending to the paths or something over the other side. It wasn't one gardener, it was a team.

My story on the gardeners - when I was a late teenager and came home with a few girlfriends from other suburbs. I'd say 'come over to the Gardens and we'll have our lunch in the Gardens' and over we came. We had our bathers on and our skirts on so we didn't have a top we just had our bathers at the top and the gardener came up and said to us 'clothe yourselves' - this is about nineteen-sixty - we nearly expired - this man would tell us 'to clothe ourselves'. It was a very old fashioned setting. There's a sign out the front that says no bicycles - I'm sure there was one that said 'no bathing costumes' - a big enamel sign down in the pines before you came into the Gardens. You weren't allowed to wear your bathing suits here so obviously the riff raff able to have their bathers on out there perhaps. Perhaps we had to clothe ourselves in both parts but - it was so funny to have these signs - you know no hot water on the lawns - so we knew how to behave here.

LW Did it kind of instil in you - not a feeling of reverence - but of

IW Yes - it wasn't as bad as going to church but it was like you were going to a special place - and - it was different to the beach, it was very different to the Fearon where you would run around like a maniac and you'd fly kites and throw balls and do that. You came in here and it was to picnic and meet your friends and have a quieter time. I always loved that.

LW So you like that even today?

IW I still do. When they say you should let people have barbeques in here - N O. Does it say no alcohol anywhere, has it ever said that? I don't remember. Nobody brought alcohol in here. You brought your tea billy and your soft drinks and your cordial. It's always been a very reflective place for me, I love that, yeh.

20:33.7

I was trying to think of some of the plants and things. The thing that I remember first was that Bunya Pine and the pine cones and the figs - the Moreton Bay Figs - loved those. Of course they are much bigger than when I was a kid but I love those trees. My favourite, when getting older, was the peonies out the front. They come out near my birthday so I love to come down - that's a little ritual that I come down to see the peonies in bloom.

LW That's beautiful. What other plants do you remember from when you were younger?

IW The petunia patches and - is it salvia - and the red - the little plant they put in and that little mauve pom pommy thing that comes out. I remember the flower beds coming out - there wouldn't be much there and then we'd come and they'd be in bloom. I love all that and still and still want to see them. The delphiniums and irises and all that. And over here on the Fearon side there were lovely planted beds there.

LW So that was something that you looked forward to, was coming here and seeing that

IW Oh yes. Like I said, summer was our more often visit when I was small but as I got older it's every season that I'm down here now. With children, even if the wind was blowing a gale, I'd still come down here for a wander with the children. We've had some lovely birthdays here and I've been to a few weddings here and a couple under the Golden Elm. They're my children's age - in the nineteen-nineties - the weddings I've been to here. Very nice attitude (atmosphere) - a lovely place for people to meet.

LW With the weddings – I was talking to someone the other day who is much much older and she said ‘Oh no, no there were no weddings there because everyone got married in a church. Do you recall when they first started to have weddings here?’

2240.2

IW the first one I would have come to here would have been about nineteen-ninety. I hadn’t been before then. I remember people lined up at the gates to have their photos taken. I think that may have been the start of people saying ‘I want to have the Gardens’. I remember the cars pulling up and the photos being taken because the gates were white then. I can’t tell you before then. People would have to come with their umbrellas and everything. One I came to we stood under the – it rained and rained – under the golden Elm – with our umbrellas up

LW Do you remember, where the Golden Elm is now

IW I remember when it wasn’t a Golden Elm

LW That’s what I was going to ask you

IW My daughter can say ‘I remember when the elm was little’. She’s forty-five this year and it’s in her memory that that tree was just a baby when she came

LW Do you remember what was there before?

IW Just lawn as far as I remember. It wasn’t a flower bed – I don’t remember flowers there. I remember – is it a blue gum over here – past the lake – I remember that for me that was just a lawn area when I was a kid.

We haven’t talked about the beautiful pond, lake – and the bridge! See the bridge has more memories for me and for my kids. After seeing the birds, it’d be over the bridge. We used to love to run over it and it had bougainvillea on it for a while and I think it might have had that damask rose, you know the little yellow rose on it for a while. Now it’s clear isn’t it?

LW When you say the bridge had plants on it – were there railings or a trellis or something?

IW It would have been railings and it would have been grown over that. I don’t remember it being a high trellis but I remember the gorgeous bougainvillea and I’m pretty sure it had damask roses for a while. I loved the gold fish and the water lilies. It’s not a thing that you could be in the water, you had to stand back and observe the succulents and all the things. I’m sure part of my interest in succulents comes from here. I love the cactuses and the succulents down on the Fearon side. I have to go there before I leave the Gardens – I love them – and the water – having a drink at the water fountain. It has a sign on it now – 150 years of Williamstown City

LW Jubilee Fountain

IW Is it? Well we didn’t know it was called that – going up to get a drink and spraying all your friends with water – oh yes – I remember all that

(Iris spent a few seconds looking at some things she had written before the interview).

And now I just love coming down near sunset time – you can see the sunset going down over the beach and wandering through here. Sometimes there might only be two other people, a



dog and an owner and that's about it. You know that you're not going to be pushed around by bike riders and skateboarders and all that stuff. It's just a lovely place to walk through.

LW Sunset would be lovely because you get that reflection up from the sea

IW Yes, and I'm never up for sunrise (laughs) it's not my thing

25:50.2

But I did come down – a couple of Christmases ago it must have been when a red flowering gum was out – oh I couldn't believe how beautiful the tree was. I went off to a friend's a couple weeks later and said 'You've got to go down to the Gardens, you must go down and see that red flowering gum. She's into botanical painting – 'go down and have a look' – and when we came down it was absolutely raided by the parrots – is it the rainbow lorikeets? Absolutely wrecked, there were no flowers on it.

I did enjoy going through with the Friends who took us through with the arborist who told us all the names of the trees – that was good. I took my list home so now I know a bit more about what the Gardens are really about.

LW Do you recall the curators that were here or you didn't even think of gardeners and curators

IW Not at all. I know they lived in the house. There was a house here wasn't there? There wasn't this brown brick.

LW What do you remember that house Iris?

IW Just that it was tucked away because for me it wasn't near the gate. If you came in this side gate here it was tucked away over closer to the fence. That's my recollection – I really don't know if that's true. My Dad would have pointed out that that's where the gardener, we wouldn't have called him a curator, that's where the gardener lived. There would have been gardeners walking around doing things when we were here. The team was at work.

When you said about the fence being changed I remember that a little bit. I think it was more accessible to us. I think we might have spent more of our time out in the pines and perhaps the gates were shut at certain times or whatever. I don't know that but I know that the gate in the fence was altered. That's all I can remember not when or how.

LW So from the pinetum – was there a fence dividing the gardens from the pinetum

IW Yes there was

LW Or could you walk from the pinetum straight through?

IW There was always a fence. I'm thinking that then it might have been made more accessible to us – I don't remember. It's nice now to have the old paths – see they weren't there, you just walked wherever you wanted to walk.

LW Ok so tell me about that

IW I don't remember real paths. Certainly I don't remember wheeling your pram or whatever on paths. There were walk ways – diagonals where people had made a path – that's how I remember it more.

- LW The paths that are in the pinetum, they reflect the paths in the formal part of the Gardens. Did you know that?
- IW No I didn't know that  
(looking at a plan of the Gardens)  
Oh I can see now
- LW So the circular paths are all reflected over here. It wasn't like that when you were young?
- IW I don't remember that – I don't.
- LW Do you remember when they reinstated those paths?
- IW Yes – and the new fence – yes. I think it has made a difference out there. I'd like to know from somebody who knows. Was it always just grass and trees – there's never been any planting of flowers out there?
- LW As far as I know that was always designed – and I think it was like a protection for the formal part of the Gardens from the strong sea breezes.
- IW Now they've planted the new elms – are they going to talk about having a formal entry from the Fearon? Because my vision as a history person – now I'm learning and reading more about Williamstown and its history – I can see people doing things at the Fearon and then coming in. Because there were big events held on the Fearon, big Jubilee events and when the Prince died or something – there would be events held on the Fearon. With the railway station – when they opened the Gardens people came on the steam train. That's over Osborne Street. They would have had to walk down that little Garden Street across – and I think if it was me I would be saying 'oh there's the gate' – I wouldn't have walked down here to this corner. They would have if they were coming from the Williamstown station – to the big gates. But if you were coming from the Williamstown Beach station, you would just walk across there under the cypress trees. I don't think there would have been a walkway. You'd think people would have ambled across the reserve. But that might be out in my fairyland thinking. Is that something we should look at?
- LW There are a few photos around and there's a big high fence – I think it's a Sunday school picnic and there's a big high fence but I'm not too sure if there's a gate
- IW Why would you have a line of elms if it didn't go anywhere? They go to this other gate don't they?
- LW That's true
- IW You'd think that if the gardeners had planned like a little avenue, why wouldn't you go there?
- LW It does say on that plan 'minor entrance' doesn't it? Good thought. We'll search the photos and see what we can find
- 33:11.4
- IW It's just something I started to think about as I'm getting older. It's just a lovely aspect – you're going out and looking to the beach. Why wouldn't there have been a nice entry there as well? I just might have made that up.

- LW Your husband's a local person too?
- IW He is. I don't know if he would remember coming here at all. His family weren't the same as us. They were Newport people – they were further away. I was North Williamstown. His comment to me when we were talking about it this morning was that they were always free, you could always go in there for free. That's one treasure we have, it's always been available for anybody.
- I do remember when we had the Italian migrants coming in and having a little game of bocce on our lawns. But now of course they've got their own bocce rink over on Garden Street and they've got their own Italian Club then so they moved over to their own facilities. Do remember them coming in – it wouldn't have been the done thing to bring your bocce balls into the gardens. This is the late sixties. They were down on the nice lawn to do it. Whether they were allowed to do it or whether the gardener didn't notice them or we didn't have a gardener by then, I don't know.
- LW Do you remember those days – I've heard stories about when the Councils amalgamated – when Hobsons Bay came into being that many people felt the Gardens were quite neglected
- IW I would say that would be true because we didn't have the staff to be here to do what needed to be done. It was depressing to come to see things – the flower beds were dry. We've had droughts in between in recent years. It wasn't as nice visually as when I was a child.
- LW Did you find that you didn't come as often in those days?
- IW Well – my kids were growing up then – so it would have only have been me wandering through on my own. I wouldn't have been here for a big picnic or anything like that.
- I do have a photo somewhere – one day I'll find it again – of a lovely day when we brought all the play group children down – this was the early nineteen seventies – the kids all playing around and all the mums with their flared pants and everything. We did use it but now when I see how it is being used for children, I'm just so excited about what that's going to do for their future, not only for Williamstown Gardens but when they leave Williamstown, which they will have to do. They'll take those memories and perhaps take it to other venues and in their own gardening lives as well – take those memories and those experiences. It's just astonishingly wonderful for them. That's the most marvellous thing that has been happening for Williamstown kids – it's a wonderful thing.
- LW The education programme that Anja Lee and Carol Challis run here bodes well for the future of the Gardens but also for those children
- IW And for other places, it's not just Williamstown, they'll take that away – it might be only a small percentage of them but they will say 'I love gardens, I love trees, I love being in the open with other people'. It is all a free experience – you don't have to spend money. Someone has to be there, someone has to have a bit of money to do it but – you don't have to line up for souvenirs and all that sort of thing. It's just a wonderful – not just for learning but that wonderful bit of life that you can enjoy until you're a hundred.
- 38:01.0
- LW Iris, would you talk to me about how you feel – I know when I first moved here I didn't know about the Gardens and you still really don't see it advertised anywhere – what are your

thoughts on – even Williamstown folk – their knowledge of the Gardens – whether it's undervalued because of that?

IW I'm not saying I'm a rare breed but I'm saying I'd be a minority that knows. I belong to a church in Williamstown, always have. If I sat down and talked with a gang of women, there would be two out of twenty that would use it as a recreational area – who would come down and take in the Gardens – and both of us are very botanical types – love the plants and the trees. But when there's a function on like the art show you would have got say eight or ten of that twenty people here. So the functions attract people that wouldn't come down here for recreational purposes or botanical purposes. When the sign goes up out the front for Twelfth Night or the art show, the advertising of those things rubs off and you'll get some. Going to the undervaluing of them – I have friends now that do the yearly visit to Europe and I would say some of them wouldn't even know what's in Williamstown Gardens but come back and tell me about Paris and – I've fortunately just had a recent trip and I came back saying that Williamstown has so much more to offer with bird life, the flowers, the trees – our Gardens are as precious as anything I saw.

40:38.0

So, the ones that say 'Oh you've got to go to Europe' I say 'You've got to go and see Williamstown Gardens, come down and really soak it in. We've got a treasure, an absolute treasure here. But the ones who say Oh Williamstown – there's Nelson Place and whatever – and they come on the ferry and they'll do Nelson Place and they buy things and whatever, we need something at Gem Pier information centre to say 'Did you know', 'Are you aware' – especially for the bird lovers too. You can come down and watch the little honey eaters and things here without having to have an aviary. We've got the natural birds here now – the magpies and the wattle birds are all here. We've got to let people know as they come from Melbourne and outside of Melbourne – get off the ferries or drive their cars and have their latte that there's this other treasure that they need to have a look at. I'm sure that a bit more advertising will be good for us.

I've seen the little pamphlets and things and the Historical Society is pretty good I think but they're not open every day or every week now so we've got to have a more accessible bit of advertisement material available. That's me.

42:15.6

LW I totally agree with you. What have we not discussed Iris

IW When I come in my wheelchair (laughs).

LW So we want it wheelchair accessible?

IW It's pretty good isn't it. It's wonderful access for disabled people – that's another plus. Do you want me to be really brave and say when are the Fiends going to have a space here – is this a political broadcast?

LW Do you want to talk a little bit about the Friends?

IW I do. As soon as I saw that there was going to be a Friends set up I went to some meetings – I don't get to all of them and I don't do as much as I'd like to do but I am absolutely thrilled that that has started. It sort of runs itself because of the education programme and the growing group and people putting their energies in – the history part – and there'll be other

avenues opening up that I think it would be lovely to have a small meeting space on site – and people would say this is why we’re friends - I didn’t go to Geelong, I saw Ballarat and I thought how marvellous – and then there would be people coming and going out of the gate meeting people on the footpath – why are you here – we’re friends of the gardens. That word of mouth stuff is the best publicity you could ever get. I love the thing about people wanting to grow things and be here and actually have their hands in the dirt – I’d love to see more people being able to do that. Getting back to the disabled – how marvellous to have a bus load come down and being able to pot up some plants.

LW As you say, you need the facilities to be able to do that properly.

44:43.0

IW Yes and you need support from the council to be able to do such things I understand that. The doors are open now

LW So, you see the support from a friends’ group for the Gardens as a positive thing?

IW Absolutely yes. When you hear that the Friends of Geelong and Ballarat have been going for a much longer period of time, what they have achieved in Williamstown in this short period - for me it’s only a short period in our history is just amazing. I can only say good on them, keep it going, try other things.

Does the Council do these theatrical things, is that how is that how those things are – the arts group within the Council – we just need to say that we have two or three days a year set aside that are absolutely Friends. The art show – wonderful – but have another one every year that’s the Friends day – no weddings – that’s our day to do recruitment and let people know just how marvellous the Friends group is.

LW I know the Friends group is working towards that

IW And when the lovely Susan and Anja aren’t here it’s just an ongoing thing. They can go on their world trip or whatever and they know that the Gardens are open and there’ll be people there.

LW Is there anything else you can think about? Did you have brothers and sisters?

IW I had a big brother and he’s on the cannon – there he is (looking at a photo) with his head cut off (laughs). He’s twenty months older than me so we did a lot down the Gardens together.

LW Did he and his mates all come down?

IW No, no – they would have been at Nelson Place. The boys get cars, the girls still had bikes, we didn’t have cars. I didn’t have a drivers licence until I was a mother. The boys, they got in their cars and went down to Nelson Place to the milk bars and whatever but the girls were still on this side of town around the beach – I was a very beachy girl.

LW So the girls didn’t tag after the boys?

IW Well, we had the boys on the beach – the ones who wanted to be beach goers but the boys who didn’t want to be swimmers they got in their cars and went around past the footy grounds – the shelly beach – showing off their cars to the girls. He moved out of town when he got married – a huge number of Williamstown people in the sixties moved out of town

because there was no housing. They built new housing at Glen Waverley and Hoppers Crossing and Avondale Heights and Keilor, East Keilor where a lot of my friends went. The Gardens went out of their – they went off to Anglesea or whatever else – Phillip Island. Williamstown was just ho hum then. The surfing fraternity – the boys went off to the coast – so many of them – they wouldn't have been seen dead on Williamstown beach after they found the surf. But aren't we lucky to have that too – our kids are so lucky

LW This is such a great area – the whole precinct – the sports, the Gardens and the beach

IW And now this is getting more beautiful - the Stan Hatt – you know where the anglers hut is – that little cricket ground there, I don't know if it's still called that – it used to be the Stan Hatt Reserve – then the Cyril Curtain area. The conservationists saved all that area that goes right around behind the football ground. For me now it's timeball tower to Bayview Street, for me that's all the one precinct for me. You can ride, I don't ride, but you can ride your bike from beginning to end. You see pelicans at one end, history at the end, Gardens in the middle – that's my panoramic view. I've got some aerial panoramic views off that, of the botanic gardens at my house, done in the nineteen nineties, given to me as a gift. It's the whole sweep you can see. They took twelve photos and I've got six of the water front right around, you can see the sea and the beach and the Gardens and the housing. I've got the big picture, it's not just this little bit here – the whole peninsular – and of course you go round and round and it's the Strand and everything. After you've finished with the timeball you're in shops, industry bits, not much industry left, but you're in the commercial part of Williamstown and then the Strand. But if you see just this little sweep, it is beautiful and it's still natural. The bit over from the cricket area over there - that was horrible when we were children – no-body walked over there. People swam there at what they call the Bunburys and they loved all that but it was rocky and dirty and broken glass and horses used to be tethered over there – it was just awful – rocky horrible sea front and now it's lovely walkway and beautiful. We are so lucky – I've said it enough.

LW Brilliant – that sounds like a really good place to end Iris. Thank you on behalf of the Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens. Thank you so much for doing that, that's absolutely brilliant.