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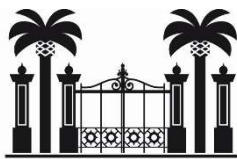
**Williamstown Botanic Gardens
Oral History Transcript**

Cyril Curtain

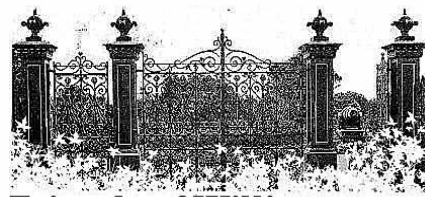
24 July 2014



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL



**WILLIAMSTOWN
BOTANIC GARDENS**



**Friends of Williamstown
Botanic Gardens Inc.**

This is an interview with Cyril Curtain 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.

Cyril was born in Williamstown in 1928. He attended North Williamstown Primary School and Williamstown High School. Shortly after marrying he purchased a house on the Esplanade, where he still lives and in which this interview took place.

Cyril's work in conservation of the natural and built heritage is highly regarded. The recently developed Cyril Curtain Reserve in Williamstown is named in his honour.

In this interview Cyril discusses the Gardens and the foreshore area including the beach and L A Parker Reserve.

He also talks of:

- The seats from the old cable or grip trams being used in the Fearon Reserve
- The 1951 production of *Midsummers Night Dream* on the band platform in the Pinetum
- The different trees growing in the area
- His early use of infrared photography to monitor the condition of grasses and trees.
- The destructive storm of 1934
- The development of the beach and Gloucester Reserve
- The 1994 merger of local councils

The date of this interview is 24th July 2014 and the interviewer is Lindy Wallace.

1:25

CC I'm Cyril Curtain and I was born in Williamstown on 29th January 1928 and I've lived in Williamstown excepting absences overseas all my life.

Well for a start, the Gardens were always there. Time seems to blur a bit with places that are always there and haven't been changed for the worse. My first recollection would have been walking along the Esplanade with my mother and past the Fearon Reserve which were always regarded as part of the Gardens. One of the things I remember for some reason the fact that that the seats were old cable tram car, grip cars. They were built completely open. They had a roof and they had seats running along sideways and of course they made quite good garden seats. As the cable trams were pensioned off – when I was a child there were still cable trams running in Bourke Street. They were replaced by buses before the current electric tramway system went in much later. So I remember those. In the Gardens there was an aviary and also separately a small structure that contained white rabbits which were an attraction to children.

LW Cyril do you remember where the aviary was in the Garden?

CC Yes it was on the – just trying to get the points of the compass – on the north western corner. If you look at the pond at the moment, which has always been there of course, it used to have golden carp in it, and you go over to the other corner and there would be the aviary and if you just keep running I suppose west nor-west towards the western side of the Gardens

LW Near Fearon Reserve?

CC That's right. Now there's some blurring there because that was certainly when my own children were taken along. The cable tram car [seats] had gone of course.

LW Were those seats in the formal part of the Gardens?

CC No, they were in the Fearon Reserve. The Fearon Reserve was much more an informal sporting area with a rather shabby timber pavilion and not quite the spruced place it is now and has been for some years. If I remember correctly the lacrosse club was formed probably in the 1950s and they took over Fearon at that stage and still continue using it.

4:34 Most of recollections date from that period. My connections with the Gardens much later on of course were just part of this whole package that's Williamstown. I was involved with various movements to either stop undesirable things from happening or make desirable things happen. The Gardens were never under any threat but they were very early on registered by the National Trust and much later on when Victoria set up the Heritage Council and started a list of places of state significance they were put on the State Register. That bit of history is well documented, you can get those dates quite easily. They have never seemed to be under any particular threat. I was never involved in any direct way even though I was very much involved with the Williamstown Beach Committee although to be perfectly frank as a child and as an adolescent I was a great user of Williamstown Beach and I belonged to the lifesaving club so I had an interest in the foreshore even though I didn't live near it, I lived in Kororoit Creek Road then.

After I married, my wife had a very poor opinion of Port Phillip and the beach and the first thing we did – she wanted a new house in her life as well so we bought a block of land at Ocean Grove and built the house there. That became our beach and we stopped using Williamstown Beach so to some extent the Gardens and that end of the Esplanade really didn't play a very large part in our lives. The children may have been taken along once or twice but even then before that became a dog walking area there were children's swings across there and of course you can't have those were there are loose dogs and they were removed. The children were well into their forties when that happened.

LW Cyril – the swings were across the road here [in the area across the road from 12 The Esplanade]

7:04

CC There was not much incentive to go down to the Gardens for any reason. I think the aviary – there is a point about rabbits – I had a bit of a rural background – just uncles and cousins. One of the issues of course was rabbits were vermin, you couldn't keep a rabbit because you couldn't keep vermin as a pet and boys particularly were encourage to not have a very nice attitude towards rabbits – lost half my thumb shooting rabbits (laughs). I did it in my year twelve.

LW Were you shooting rabbits locally?

CC No, on an uncle's farm at Dimboola, near Dimboola. Boys had to do something. Boys who weren't in employment, were still in school and not old enough to be recruited into the armed forces were expected to do work in the country, go fruit picking and things like that. Well, my instinct under the man power rules was to work on my uncle's farm. Rabbits ran wild because the entire male population over the age of eighteen and under the age of probably forty-five were away at the war or had left their farms to work in the factories

leaving their wives behind to do as best they could. So we did various jobs. I was a hopeless shot with a twenty-two so I was given a shot-gun and – yep – I’m afraid we had a breach fallout from the barrel and I was firing rabbits like that and a piece of shrapnel tore through. If I’d been at a metropolitan hospital I would have had a complete reconstruction but it was done in the emergency department at the hospital at either Horsham or – I’ve quite forgotten now. So boys were not expected to have a great attitude towards rabbits. You’d go driving in the country and you wouldn’t swerve, in fact you were told never to swerve except for a child and there was the monotonous thump thump thump of rabbits under your car. On long country roads and you had your headlights on high beam – some of the rabbits would scatter and some of them would be just be transfixed and you’d hear bump bump bump. Of course myxomatosis came and that partly resolved the problem. You needed more active control. They were just eating the country out so for those reasons I think rabbits were not popular. But for some odd reason they were in the aviary and they were white rabbits, New Zealand Whites. I only learnt later on as a scientist that they were New Zealand Whites.

10:33 Really after that I got into the Gardens a few times. There wasn’t much colour photography around in the late forties – Sue has some images of those – I took some photographs.

LW She’s passed them on to me

CC You’ve got those of the Gardens. In terms of just looking at the foreshore, we flew cameras around Williamstown foreshore a couple of times in the late sixties early seventies. I’ve got those slides. One camera was infrared because it was a way of picking up hidden features particularly around Point Gellibrand. The other was the standard colour Ektachrome. We did this with a pilot in the front, a friend of ours, following instructions, Betty on one side of the plane and me on the other – okay, wing down on the port side (laughs) – so the wing would go down on the port side and I’d take an infrared shot – ‘okay Chris turn left – bank – wing down on the other side. Not a really sophisticated way of doing it. We did it twice, it was great fun. He was a friend of ours, he was a Qantas pilot.

LW What year did you do that Cyril?

CC Sixty-seven, before we went overseas, and we did it again in seventy-two/seventy-three – the summer of seventy-three I think. I should hunt those out. Unfortunately I picked one up that wasn’t really the right slide. I had it on file and I’m ashamed I didn’t – I’d scanned it already but it was unfortunately of the Point Gellibrand area not the Gardens. But I’m quite sure that in the box – I’ve got about ten thousand slides – that cupboard’s crockery but the other cupboard is full of slides – before digital cameras.

LW Cyril you were picking up things with the infrared at Gellibrand Point, what was the purpose of doing it near the Gardens area?

CC We had the film in the camera. We were a bit experimental. I’d picked up the idea of using false-colour infrared. One of my colleagues in CSIRO was a parapsychologist and with my bio physics background, I was expected to advise people on all sorts of things and the amount of radiation and the amount of dryness in a paddock would depend on how easy it was for sheep to pick up intestinal parasite eggs. At a point in the dry off you no longer need to spend money drenching your sheep. You clean them out in spring and after the dry off there’d be nothing more they can get from the paddock and the dry grass. They won’t be going again at least until autumn. We had it coming up but not yet available in sixty-seven,

we had the possibility of satellite imagery but we wanted what we called ground truth. I got the idea of flying over properties in the Western District with an infrared camera, infrared film and photographing paddocks and doing it serially. The officer in charge of – I wasn't the OIC then – he'd been a pilot during the Korean War and then did Vet Science afterwards – he used to fly himself everywhere – so he had plenty of opportunity to do these trips. So I had the infrared experience, then by seventy-two we had the satellite stuff up and we had real ground truth. Satellites gave an overall picture of big areas, about eighty square metres at a time. We could fly up say at a thousand feet, even as low as five hundred feet with an infrared camera and shoot the grass. Because what happens is with false-colour infrared photography healthy grass and trees comes up red, dying trees come up sort of a brownish-green colour. So it's a good way to check your dry-out. So I was very experienced at doing that. We were also interested in photographing any gardens to see if we could spot any sick trees. It had been done – when they got the North Sea gas in Holland – natural gas is very dry. When they started pumping the natural gas through the old mains, leaky mains in Amsterdam, they found the trees starting to die and being stressed because the mains were leaking. The gas was removing the moisture from the soil and again infrared cameras were flown over Amsterdam - because it wasn't happening everywhere and they couldn't dig all their mains up – and you could see the beginnings of stress – you didn't have to wait until the trees were possibly beyond recovery or certainly not looking nice. If you see the beginnings of stress and once you'd done that you'd say there's obviously troubles with that gas main there – we can isolate it and not put people at great inconvenience while it is being sealed. In some European cities – I'd hate to be the town engineer with the maintenance problems of some of these places and how they manage to keep them going with plumbing an water and electricity and everything else they need these days that they didn't have when they were built.

17:07 That was part of the reason, hoping to see signs of stress in the Gardens but there wasn't. I'll check those slides because some of them may be of interest. On the table behind me – see that – its Commander Cox's - that's available in the State Lands Department. It was got for a reason but there are a couple of interesting things about the Gardens and one is that – (looking at map on the table) that's Point Gellibrand – there's the Gardens there – now I'm quite sure he never – as a seaman the big interest was all this, the soundings (indicating the water soundings on the map) but he had the town plan superimposed as 1864. There is no distinction between the Pinetum and the – none at all, it's just all planted. Where the Fearon Reserve boundary is, there's a road, there's the Esplanade, that's Gifford Street, the railway line was in by then of course and that's these two houses there, they are u shaped (pointing to the semi-detached houses where Cyril lives).

LW That's interesting that there was actually a road

CC There was a road between Fearon Reserve and the Gardens. That map and probably more of it would probably be available – you might make a note of it.

So that's probably as far as my recollections of the Gardens go, taking the odd photograph. We never seem to take visitors there, I don't know why.

LW You're talking about you never took visitors there when you were older or when you were married?

CC No, we just knew they were there and we'd go walking there

LW I know they often had Sunday concerts?

19:38

CC You have triggered a memory there. In the Pinetum there was a raised mound area which was used. My one connection with that was that I've had involvement with Williamstown Little Theatre and a few things like that – reviews and all the rest of it. We did a production of *Midsummer's Night Dream* – it was something quite ambitious - on that round platform. It might have been the Victorian Centenary of Federation which was 1951 – I assume the proclamation of Victoria as Victoria independent of New South Wales – it was certainly New Years Day and the centenary would have been New Years Day 1951. There were various things being done – the outdoor cinema I remember being involved in – that was on Fearon Reserve. There may have been other things done using that raised platform – now that's gone, I don't know when it went

LW So it wasn't just a mound –it wasn't mounded up like soil – it was what – a timber platform?

CC No, it was soil – soil held with rock batter around it. I never photographed it.

LW I believe that they often had bands playing there of a Sunday afternoon. I think the City Band.

CC Well, they had a bandstand across the road

LW Ok – so it was there

CC That bandstand was there – I have an interesting photograph. I think I mentioned when I spoke to you on the phone I had a visit from Janet Newcastle who was a descendant of the Phillips - on the mothers side, the Lamonts - she lives in Scotland. She lived in Hobart for a period and now lives on the Isle of Bute. She was here hunting ancestral connections and she had a photograph of three girls, the eldest would have been perhaps, they hadn't put their hair up so it was probably about 1910 and the rotunda quite surprised me. I had always thought the rotunda was – it somehow fits in with the art deco pavilion – I had always taken the bandstand, which is now a coffee shop or something – I had always taken it for granted that it was part of that scene. There in the photograph of the three girls with their buckets and spades in the foreground – the background is very very clearly is the Pinetum, the darkened Pinetum and the bandstand. It's definitely the same bandstand

LW In the Pinetum?

23:27

CC No, across the road. Part of that complex. I think that's worth remembering, that the Gardens are part of the whole beach experience. One of the things that might have changed things was the building of the new pavilion which is still there of course. That happened in the 1930s when the demolition of the baths in the great storm of 1934 which destroyed the remains of the baths. That more or less put a stopper on one end of the beach. Of course you then have the L A Parker Reserve which used to have a carnival occupying it each summer for a period. It was called the Centennial Reserve for many years then it was named after a councillor, after Laurie Parker.

LW I've had a couple of people tell me that their families would go there for picnics and then their dads would go and get the hot water for the cups of tea. There was a little shop or something there selling hot water. Do you recall that?

CC There probably was, I can't quite remember where it might have been but I think it may have been more on the Centennial Park side. Certainly there was a much greater blur – the Fearon Reserve – the name is a relatively late name – perhaps not. Captain Fearon was a pilot, probably from about 1890 to about the early twenties and the reserve was named after him. Captain Liley was another well-known figure whose daughters were a bit older than me. So it's beginning to overlap the change of the century from the 19th century to the 20th. I'm not terribly certain how the reserve got that name but again that would be findable, it should be gazetted. Although it is amazing how some things aren't – you don't find a public record of it and you have to go search elsewhere. Such as that map. That map is not, as far as I know, not available in the Public Records Office.

LW So where did you get this from?

CC That came from the Lands Department. They have an historic map collection. The other source probably is the University of Melbourne which maintains a historic map collection as well. Although that may not be there. I was doing a bit of map hunting recently because the great debate about the woollen mill site and particularly the sensitive areas of aboriginal occupation. There is a rule about the need for a proper archaeological study of any area within 30 metres of foreshore or stream. Now of course one of the problems is that since occupation foreshores and streams have been altered enormously. I'm spending a bit of time trying to hunt an accurate map showing where the foreshore was very close to pre-contact. A tantalising search – I've never been successful. Public Records Office don't yield anything. I have a copy of Cox's chart of Port Phillip about the same period because that was still in use for when I as a young man started sailing in the 1940s. My first chart, which I still have, is basically all this (referring to a map Cyril has in his hands). Of course the Town (Williamstown) is altered but this shore line and the soundings would just be still there but unfortunately it is the whole of Port Phillip so the detail for Williamstown is very small. I've never been able to find a copy – and the extraordinary thing was that when – it's probably at Greenwich actually – I've got the book about the Beagles Australian – Lort Smiths Australian surveys – this is post Darwin, the second trip the Beagle made. She came into Melbourne about 1838 and did some soundings – it's in the journal but there's nothing available here. You can get the Kent Group out in Bass Strait, because she almost met her end there. She got stuck between terrible storms alongside the Kent Group. That would be fascinating because those soundings would give you the extent of the foreshore and the view is that all of that Nelson Place area has been filled in. I made this comment to several people who were in the position to think about it and do something that the rule regarding archaeological surveys within fixed distance of water that things have changed so much in the last hundred, hundred and fifty years that really you are looking in the wrong place. You may have covered the area of interest by filling, you may have shifted the whole water course that way by dredging. They're some of the difficulties, it sounds as if we should have all of the records. Some you'll find – anything pre 1851 is likely to be in Sydney not here, the Public Records Office in Sydney, the Mitchell Library sometimes – it's quite difficult.

30:24 I think by the time that the Gardens were established, sixty-two [1862] onwards, you've got good local records. You've got all the council minutes and all of that information. I think that makes a big difference.

LW I think up until the sixties the form of transport was horses in the Gardens. Do you remember all that?

CC No I don't, no. That's very interesting. I remember horses being used to draw rubbish carts and the milkman had a horse and cart. This is all related to the fact that stop start operations. It was hard on the motor vehicles of the period and the horse was a good way of doing things. I can quite believe they would have used horses and drays. It's hard to say – see – steam rollers – what stage did steam rollers go out.

I went along to an old machinery day at Gisborne and there was a beautifully maintained council steam roller which had been a gift to the organisation that was running event, from the City of Essendon in 1994. Essendon had kept it probably not using it but all the same they'd kept it on the stock and all of a sudden they didn't have room for this thing. It was taken over and lovingly painted up and so on. I quite remember that and of course they were replaced by diesel rollers. There was this great overlap and I couldn't possibly remember when I saw the last horse being used for anything else but recreational purposes in Williamstown.

LW So the time by your children were around, you were living here in this house? Did they hoof on up to the Gardens?

33:01

CC They would have – they would have used the Gardens. They would have used the area across the road more. There was a bit of a joke in the family that our daughter, who was fairly hardy, would tend to have an accident across the road and fall in the water the first of September (laughs) so as to be the first member of the family to have a swim there (laughs). We would go snorkelling across – we wouldn't use the beach. The point about the beach was we lost the beach. I've got some photographic evidence of that. After the storm in thirty-four, I've seen a photograph of waves coming up the front fences along here. A great filling-in project went on and Gloucester Reserve – that other end is more low lying – and the waves actually got lapping the front of the houses. There was a combination of very high tide, a king tide, low atmospheric pressure and a violent south westerly wind, blowing around seventy or eighty knots I think. What was done after that was the great wall was put along the front of the Gloucester Reserve down that end. Even that wasn't sufficient because the next storm, it started to fall apart and they put this very ugly rock batteron, those massive rocks along there - they were put there later. But what they did was to reinforce the whole wall along the beach and the inevitable happened, the waves come in, hit the wall and out goes the sand. So by the 1950s it was possible for the Metropolitan Beaches Association to hold a carnival in Williamstown with all the march pasts and all the things of a beach life saving carnival and ten years later the sand had nearly all gone, it was just a small beach left. The current beach is basically shell grit and some sand dredged from Port Melbourne, or Albert Park actually, brought around a dumped there. That's what the current beach is. And of course the sand is much coarser and it's not as nice but it won't be displaced as easily. So all of that tended to make the beach a bit less attractive. The lifesaving club acquired a training pool. So they are the changes that happened. But as far as I know the children, when they were at the stage of using play equipment, they would. Later on at Ocean Grove we'd go surfing or we'd go bush walking. My daughter got horse riding when she was about fourteen and so on – yep. But the Gardens were always there – any threat and no doubt I'd have been on some committee or other trying to stop the

threat. There have been some controversies about the restoration and the need to have them done.

36:4 One of the big changes in Williamstown of course was the merger. Because we suddenly changed from being – we tried to annexe Altona. When the petro chemical industries in the growth stage at Altona, the City of Williamstown tried to annexe Altona, which then the Borough of Altona. If it had been added to Williamstown the boundary would have shifted west. What happened with the merger was that that came to pass. What happened in the meantime was that Altona was a much richer neighbour with the big rate take from the industries and newer housing stock, which counted in those days. Land values were less, now it's the other way around, land values are critically important. But it made a big difference I think to Williamstown. It also meant better governance to I think. With small suburbs you have a lot of trouble getting enough people who are competent to serve on councils. I think five councillors out of twenty-three thousand people, which was what we had – it was a bit of an ask. We had a few good people there is no doubt about that. A few good people did a lot of work and often with obstruction or indifference on the part of the ones who were not so good.

LW So when there was that amalgamation of the councils, did you notice anything happen or not happen with the Gardens?

38:39

CC Well, it's a bit hard to say with the Gardens, just the general upgrading of maintenance. I do remember that when the merger occurred – I don't think anyone from Williamstown Council was on the new council – but certainly one of the former Altona councillors was on the new Hobsons Bay Council and he made the remark to me that Williamstown was less than a quarter of the area but it was half the trouble and expense for the City of Hobsons Bay (laughs). The infrastructure was so run down and not well managed I think. In so many ways a whole lot of things weren't done well. Not outrageously not done well but just not productively done. There was a completely new level of professionalism on the Council staff. In terms of Williamstown it was a good thing in terms of the staff because a lot of the old senior staff were approaching retirement at the time of the amalgamation and it meant that when we had the new municipality it was a bigger and more attractive and you could get more dynamic younger people in. Although the trouble about that was dynamic younger people keep moving on. You'd establish a relationship with somebody in the planning department and they wouldn't last two years and then go off, either to a richer council or into the burgeoning private consultancy area – or in some cases join Heritage Victoria, which was quite good actually – or the National Trust interestingly.

LW I know the Gardens on the Heritage Victoria listing, did that take lobbying on behalf of the local people?

CC No, it just happened. The Trust situation is an interesting one. They started off with what you call the crown jewels – it was founded in 1956 following the threat of the demolition of several significant buildings – so the Trust targeted those first. It was a central thing – there was enough of what you'd regard corporate knowledge in the Trust to know what was significant and places like Williamstown Gardens were just automatically catalogued. The Trust set up quite a rigorous process of classification, expert committees to go through – volunteers of course – to go through the case. What then happened of course with the

Planning and Environment Act of 1987, I think that's right, we had a properly systemised State register created - it was possible to easily transfer a lot of those Trust classification arguments across to the State – most of those crown jewel type of things - and a lot of other smaller items. The Trust into, recently heavily, in fact our branch is having the person who is handling the Historic Trees Register at the Trust talking to us in September. The Trust recently has got very much into historic trees and so has local government. Whereas very very few trees are on the State Register. There are a lot of uncertainties like that. As I said the Gardens got onto the Trust Register very early and they then got onto the State Register more or less by transfer. There would have been a process but I should think – the point about the State Register is that it's got statutory privileges. If you're going to alter a registered place you have to go through quite a process – have a hearing, put forward a case, why it should be altered and changed or whatever, demolished although one hopes not. Then it's subject to appeal with the Heritage Council so that gives it a quite high level of protection.

That's more or less where we stand with the Gardens it think. As I said I remember a small amount of argument over what period it should be taken back to. It's always the case in multi-layered places about what you do about what's the most representative period. You've got all these layers – it's like a building.

It's like this place didn't have its verandas when they were built by Captain Matthews in 1858. They were like a British Channel country house – bare – you couldn't call them Georgian because they didn't have the central entry but they had elements of that in them. Captain Press added the verandas thirty years later – or whatever – twenty-five years later. So what you tend to say about the veranda is 'added in period'. No-body would remove the verandas. There are probably many other houses, pre 1870 houses, that would not have verandas in Williamstown – would not have had them when they were built and have had them added subsequently - you wouldn't take them off.

The same thing with the Gardens. I'm no expert, I'm just rattling on now a bit about it. There'd be things that probably weren't in the original Guilfoyle recommended plan but you wouldn't regard them as necessarily intrusive – you would keep them. Anyway gardens are dynamic anyway – trees die.

LW It's good that they got that main layout that's always been there.

CC The original layout's been there and I think that's good. The pond has been there for a long time

LW That was put in about 1906

CC Yes, it was there when I was a child – that's going back. I think I have reasonably accurate recollections from when I was probably about five or six – just thinking all sorts of things. That's going back – I'm eighty-six and a half so it would be around eighty years. That covers a reasonable period.

LW Do you remember the curators or the gardeners? Do you remember seeing them around?

CC No not really, things just happened. There was a period when we went through – this interested us intensely because we grew a few natives here – there was a very strong movement in the late sixties to grow natives and the curator then was largely responsible for

putting in – I can't remember his name. Was it David Churchill or – I'm just thinking of the name of the curator of the Botanic Gardens – David Churchill was later I think

LW Are you talking of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens?

CC Yes. His predecessor – I knew his daughter actually, she was the librarian at the Alfred when I was at the Baker. Anyway it was the curator of the Botanic Gardens came and gave a – several of us attended this talk. Admittedly my interest was the ocean Grove block which we rather madly went ahead and developed only two years after we got this place – this was still in the state of being renovated (laughs) and here we were building a new house down there – slightly crazy but anyhow. We had to something about the garden because the whole Ocean Grove scenario was that Betty was missing Sydney and gum trees – she had grown up in Gordon – she was missing the surf. We bought this block of land fairly cheaply at the back of the town – I think for about five hundred pounds or something – inflation happened a couple of years between when we bought this. Anyway the point was it was block that had lovely trees on it and we wanted things that would go with the trees so we became very enthusiastic – enthusiasts for native planting. Actually that melaleuca (pointing to a tree in the front garden), that came up from Ocean Grove. When we had the block we were unsealed, un-roaded and everything else and we had an easement at the back and we were rather unwisely thinking that nothing would happen for years put in a row of melaleucas and wattles down along the back of the block to hide our neighbours on the other side of the slope and it happened – the trees were still manageable – you could get them up onto a truck. So we uprooted two melaleucas – three of them, that's right – sand bagged their roots, brought them up and planted them one at a time. We'd lost a Lambert Cypress – we had a Lambert Cypress in that corner which was blown over in a terrible storm which took the footpath out and the fence and everything – so we replaced the Lambert Cypress with that melaleuca and another one at the back. The one at the back flourished and the other one at the back died. So at that stage we switched on to natives but it was all thanks to a meeting we had with the curator at that period. It's probably worth checking the name – I can't remember the name – his daughter was Ann – why can't I remember his name? David Churchill was the successor, it wasn't David Churchill. It was when the curator still lived in Gardens House. I can remember quite well that Ann would just walk across Faulkner Park – she was living at home then, she was unmarried – she would just walk across Faulkner Park be at the Alfred there in Commercial Road. If you imagine going Toorak Road and you're in the Gardens. I remember him but I can't remember the name. (Cyril later informed the interviewer that the name was Pescott).

The point was that he certainly pushed Williamstown towards putting in natives. Before then every tree in the town was deciduous, unless they were pines and there were very few – there were the Lambert Cypress across the road but they were popular in other places too. What are the things in the reserve at Queenscliff - are they Lambert Cypress or radiata – I ought to know – it's a similar idea – large shady trees on foreshore reserves. The interesting thing was you had a live-on the property curator. In fact the respite house, Bateman House, was originally the new house for the curator – that was before the merger. At that stage, as far as I know, the Gardens curator was the Parks and Gardens manager for the whole of the municipality. So as well as having the responsibility for the Gardens they had the responsibility for the management of everything that grew as it were on the public lands of the municipality. What happened after that, the focus was changed to somebody sitting in an office at Altona with much wider responsibilities. For example, the Truganina Explosives

Reserve, another major reserve which the only Altona person there has - Sue Murray knows, she represented the Trust branch on the Truganina committee, still does as far as I know. So that's been a huge change.

The point was that whoever the curator was at that time – it would have been about sixty-seven, sixty-six, sixty-seven, sixty-five – trying to think – we finished the house at Ocean Grove in sixty-two – bought the land in sixty. We were worried about the garden by then. We even inserted the house with great inconvenience between all the trees, the builder thought we were mad. We had a fight with – it was the shire of Bellarine then – for two reasons – one is they didn't like the idea of a house with the bathroom and laundry being the front entrance, which we regarded entirely rational if you're going to have people coming up from the beach all sandy and so on – plus the fact the view, such as it was, was at the back and we had this big glass window – there was no view looking up towards the road. The other thing they didn't like was the fact we'd skewed the block – you can imagine the block's like that and we had the house like that – it meant it's corners were just about the legal distance. We argued that of course it didn't matter because the whole house was in fact going to be like that. Some of the trees are still there, some have gone. That's the problem to adapting to what's growing.

LW At that stage then, did they plant many natives in the Gardens?

55:23

CC I think it certainly started in the reserves. It's very noticeable with the street trees. For example the Desert Ash became very popular, Blue gums, which are a bit of a menace, their root systems aren't good for buildings and footpaths, they became another popular standby. Melaleuca Armillaris, the Bracelet Honey Myrtle, they are a good substitute for the Lambert Cypress because they have that same straggly untidy wind-blown look and they do quite well. You can see the influence across the road as the Lambert Cypresses blew down – there's a magnificent survivor along there which is almost a keynote tree for the street – that was there when we came. A lot of the others were lost.

They've been replacing trees in what I call the Pinetum, although that may not be the right term.

LW They do call it the Pinetum now

CC They do now – which is Italian – Latin – it's very old actually. I assume they are going to replace those with pines.

LW Yes, they're replacing them with the same trees as far as I know

CC There are things like that. There is the statue, the Clark statue, that's a focal point.

LW They've just had that restored, have you seen it?

CC Yes I know they restore it. I've a quite good photograph of that, it was taken quite some years ago.

We did a roundup of public art in Williamstown. There's quite a lot more now actually but there was a surprising amount at the time. The Public Art Committee of the National Trust, I fed stuff to.

So with this, I've kept the Victorian/Edwardian layout of that front garden. You were supposed to keep your garden in period. When the drought started to really hit deciduous gardens the whole thing was relaxed. Next door for example has a drought free garden which is fed entirely from their roof run-off. That was done by the previous owner. But you look at it, it's not an Edwardian garden, it's changed. What we've done here in fact is to put in a drought proof landscaping at the back, which includes a big melaleuca and a number of other things but our entire water/storm water goes round to the front. It's pumped from holding tanks at the back. At the moment the weather's been such that we haven't needed it. In fact when the verandah rebuild was done two years ago the line was disconnected and it's still not connected. The tanks just overflow, we haven't needed it. But at the same time we've kept that garden with the lawn and these formal beds and so on, including things that were here – that hydrangea was here when we came, the rose bush down in the corner was here when we came. The Pittosporum is over fifty years old, it was here when we came. There was a Cecile Brunner which we lost, which was on that corner. Enid Phillip painted it I know. I like that because my mother had a Cecile Brunner. Again they seem to last forever but we lost ours.

LW We've been chatting for an hour

CC I don't know whether you really got much out of it – not much about the Gardens

LW I hadn't heard about the cable tram seats before

CC Yes, they were there. Of course people took photographs much less. Everybody had a Box Brownie or something like that but film was relatively expensive so family photograph albums are not of scenes, they are of people. If there's a scene of significance then it's by accident because people are in a scene. The result of that is family photographs are of interest to the genealogists or perhaps the costume historian and so on but not landscape wise. I had a Baby Brownie Special but again mostly used it for photography of friends and events. When the war ended I got my first German 35mm camera and I started to do scenic photography. My archive of Williamstown dates from then – black and white mostly, processed myself and colour film when it came along.

LW I was given a photograph the other day of some teenagers playing on cannons and as you say the photo was taken of the teenagers but, there's evidence of the cannon being there in the Gardens.

CC That's something else of course, they were there. They were distributed from the Fort when. What happened to them, that's something I don't know about, what happened to the Gardens cannons

LW There's two on the Strand and I think the other two went back to the Fort.

CC The Fort in fact – there's been a lot of discussions about making the fort accessible. Perhaps not on an open slather because it could be vandalised. The problem is having a proper organisation so you can have open an open day once – that's been done anyway, we've had open days like that.

You've given me a thought – the Trust Heritage Festival next year is War and Compassion – it might be worth having an opening of the fort again.

LW Can I just thank you Cyril on behalf of the Friends of the Gardens for giving us your valuable time and your information. I'll track down that map, that'd be great.