

INTERVIEW WITH MR BILL GREVILLE
GARDENER
THE BALLARAT BOTANICAL GARDENS
BY DR JOHN GARNER
20 March 2007

This is an interview with Bill Greville who has had a significant role in the history of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens, having been a Gardener there from 1938 to 1962.

JOHN GARNER I am John Garner, and will interview Bill on behalf of the Friends of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens Oral History Project. Bill I would like to thank you on behalf of the Friends to agreeing to this interview which takes place at your home at 509 York Street, Ballarat on 20 March 2007. Bill, can I commence by asking you how you came to take up employment at the Gardens in 1938?

BILL GREVILLE That's correct yes. Started as a boy, I was sixteen.

JOHN GARNER And how did it come about that you went up to the Gardens?

BILL GREVILLE I had an Uncle Bill that worked there and he got a better job as a superintendent at the Ararat Gardens and when he went the policy of the Council was to be a boy on. Being sixteen I was naturally recommended by my Uncle and I met Toop personally.

JOHN GARNER And Tom Toop was the curator then is that correct?

BILL GREVILLE Yes Tom Toop and he paid a compliment to my Uncles, because he said yes he said I'll give him a job. If he is anywhere as good as his Uncles. I had two, my Uncle Bill and my Uncle Roy before me. Roy, I don't know if you've ever met him, but that's the compliment he paid them, he said, if you are anywhere as good as those two, he said. Well they both finished up superintendents in their jobs.

JOHN GARNER And had you had an interest in gardening before then?

BILL GREVILLE No, no. I was only a lad on a farm and I just got a bit sick of that. A poultry farm as a matter of fact. And we worked every second Sunday and no overtime. That was a better opportunity when my Uncle Bill, as I said left, and said they're going to put a boy on and he recommended me and so I got on.

JOHN GARNER And were you born in Ballarat?

BILL GREVILLE Born and lived here all my life, over Golden Point.

JOHN GARNER And did you go to the Golden Point school?

BILL GREVILLE Yes. Eighth grade, left. Got me Merit and was allowed to leave and I couldn't get out quick enough.

JOHN GARNER And what sort of work did you do when you first started?

BILL GREVILLE When I first started work, I worked on a farm out at Mount Bute. I always loved cows and horses and I worked for a soldier settler, Roberts was his name. I worked hard out there. I saved him a lot of time. He was a Light Horseman in the first war and he taught me how to ride a horse and handle a horse to make things much easier for himself because I could ride around his sheep. If there were any sheep down he showed me how to pick them up and walk them around, lambing and all that. It was that far out and I got another offer of the poultry farm, out here at Anstis' Poultry Farm and I went there at fifteen before the Gardens.

JOHN GARNER And you went to the Gardens as a junior, what were your duties as a junior gardener?

BILL GREVILLE Duties under Tom Toop. I had to do every damn thing, I had to mix soils, crock pots (that's before you pot your pot plants), generally clean up and everything else. Mostly he put me under Bill Lindsay the foreman and I had to learn pruning and all that sort of thing, so apart from cleaning up I had to be taught that sort of thing. I started to get interested in it because you get a bit sick of cleaning up, pruning was something skilful and they showed me how to do it.

JOHN GARNER It was sort of an apprenticeship at the time would you say?

BILL GREVILLE That word was never mentioned but I was an apprentice. If you didn't measure up you'd never last, Toop was a hard man and if I could go on, sixteen I was there and at nineteen my mate and my future brother-in-law he enlisted in the AIF and I said if you go in I'll go in and I went and I saw Toop and I told him, well he said I'll make sure the job will be here when you come back. There was a law passed during the war that if you had a job they had to take you back but anyhow I was very pleased to get back, really came back medically unfit.

JOHN GARNER How did they manage at the Gardens without you young fellows during the war?

BILL GREVILLE They had a real battle and that's where credit must go, Toop retired, Tom Toop retired. Bill Lindsay he was a foreman, he was made boss and I came back one day on leave and I was out at Heidelberg Hospital getting treated and he said, oh, he said, we could do with you back here. The government had release laws if you were still unfit for active service but you could still do a job, so the Council put the claim in for me and I went back to the Gardens.

JOHN GARNER And was there much trouble in getting you discharged?

BILL GREVILLE Well I had to go and see Colonel Morton and he was the Town Clerk. He had to make application and of course they went into it and at that time, 1944 when I was discharged, things were turning our way, it was coming good like overseas and it was easy to get your discharge then. That's why Bill Lindsay was who he was, that's why he went to Colonel Morton the Town Clerk and he put application in to get me back because the Gardens were short-handed. They were relying on sustenance work I remember that. The saddest part I ever had – I won't mention his name – but he took my place when I was away. A big difference in the sustenance wage and the wage of the Gardens and I said to Bill Lindsay the boss, I said I'll go and tell him myself I don't want you to turn him down later on because he was the boss, and I went to him and I won't mention his name and oh it was sad because he had to go back on the sustenance.

JOHN GARNER When you came back was Tom Toop still curator at first?

BILL GREVILLE He was still there, I still respected the man, a lot didn't like him. He was English and he told me himself one day he come from the Kew

Gardens in London to come to Ballarat to get the job. I got on well with him because I understood him and things like that, and perhaps I didn't do him credit because when I was in the Middle East I had leave in Jerusalem I saw the Garden of Gethsemane and Toop was a great one for little dwarf conifers. I don't know what it's like now but when I got leave then I went to see it and I wrote him a letter and I told him and I knew he'd like that. There were little dwarf conifers of all different colours and I got a letter back from him thanking me for the letter, that was Tom Toop.

JOHN GARNER That's good, yes. Did he tell you anything more about his life?

BILL GREVILLE Oh, well, yes. You had to understand the man because the most I can say in honesty, he wasn't too popular and things like that because you never knew where he was going to turn up and I can remember I was put with Bill Lindsay the foreman to break me in like, and time and again he would see Tom Toop coming. He had a good idea, big tall, and he could disguise himself as a tree and you'd be doing a job and you wouldn't see him, and suddenly oh there he is. But Bill Lindsay was awake up to all those tricks, he used to call him the 'Old Potcher', 'there's the Old Potcher coming'; but I couldn't see him but sure enough you'd see him, but that's the way it was.

JOHN GARNER And he used to live at the Gardens in the cottage?

BILL GREVILLE Yes, he used to live there and when I first started I had to go and get the mail. Mrs, oh Mrs, she had a tough time, you know, well respected, but she had to clean his boots and there they were the old English at the doorstep. I'd knock on the door and hand the mail in like when I went around to get the mail. But still that was the English, the way they do it. I really got on well with him and others didn't like him too much. Here's Old Potcher coming heheh. I must say, a sight you had to see. We all had our bikes in those days, you couldn't get by without them, and he'd grab the first bike instead of walking right up the Gardens to see who was working. We had sustenance there at the time, but he'd ride this bike up and you had to see it. I can see him now, I recollect, six foot six! But we got used to that.

JOHN GARNER Very good. Now after a couple of years he retired is that correct?

BILL GREVILLE Yes. I'd come back, I'd had a couple of years overseas in active service and I came back and Toop had just retired and Bill Lindsay who was the foreman, had taken over. Yes he retired, he had just retired when I got back.

JOHN GARNER Shortly afterwards Tom Beaumont came back from the war.

BILL GREVILLE Yes. I can remember that clearly. It was an unknown thing because Tom Beaumont did come up under Toop. I was a boy in the nursery and all that but Tom Beaumont was more or less his understudy with Harry Coulter and we all managed the nursery but that's when I was put out in the garden with Bill Lindsay. But no, Tom Toop he still lived there and he still kept an eye on things oh yes he had his heart in the place.

JOHN GARNER And when Tom took over was there much change happened?

BILL GREVILLE Yes, because Tom Beaumont, if I could say it now in all respect, but he'd done a bit in the army and he knew little things in the army you know that he could handle men in a better way than Toop in a sense. He'd talk to you but Toop wouldn't. Toop was aloof I think is the word, he'd say g'day to you and as a kid I'd always say g'day Mr Toop. Some days he ignored you but Tom Beaumont was different, you got on well him.

JOHN GARNER And were there a few changes in the management of the Gardens when Tom took over?

BILL GREVILLE Well there wouldn't have been much. When Tom Beaumont come back, he was called up I understand during the war and we lost all trace of him, but he did come back and we knew he was coming. Well he never changed much he just come back and took over. Bill Lindsay was curator and he took over from Toop as I said before, but everybody knew it was only a matter of time when Tom Beaumont, because Bill Lindsay was...they were all nearly seventy. ??? during the war you know, short handed, it was just a matter of time before Tom Beaumont took over and that's just what happened.

JOHN GARNER Bill Lindsay, was he a good gardener?

BILL GREVILLE Bill, oh yes. As I said before as a lad I was put under him to be broken in and things like that and one of his proudest – and the council would have a record to prove this - he worked there for sixty years well over retirement age and he never lost a day through sickness that was one of his proud boasts. Whether that's true could be checked, but that was one thing, he had no sympathy for anybody. The sustenance blokes that were under Bill, he had to find work for them. He was a hard man he had no, he had never lost a days sickness in the sixty years he was there.

JOHN GARNER Was he a good teacher?

BILL GREVILLE Well I was the best cleaner-upper on the job, as a boy like. There'd be pruning as he'd teach me but then I always had to clean up and there is nothing worse than clearing up rows and rows of cuttings from rose bushes, but that was part of the training, same with the pruning. What we called the Back Walk, it's still there. All those shrubberies along the back walk, they'd be pruned and he showed me how to prune them but I always had to do the cleaning up. I learnt. And I did learn a lot out of respect for the man. He played it hard my word he did.

JOHN GARNER As far as pruning and so forth goes, did you learn very much. I gather that at one stage you were using surgeon's scalpels in order to propagate?

BILL GREVILLE I was taught right from the start more or less. I was a boy and as I said before was under Bill Lindsay but I'd be called in. There was Tom Toop, there was Tom Beaumont under him, then there was Harry Coulter, then I'd be called in to learn what we called pricking off seedlings and taking cuttings to put them in. I was taken away from Bill Lindsay to do those little jobs and that sort of thing and that's where I learned. And by hell you do it properly, Toop would come around and look at you, you know. No it did me good because what you did, you had to do it right and you knew what to expect if you didn't you know.

JOHN GARNER There were three glass houses there when you were there?

BILL GREVILLE There were two glasses that are still there, it breaks your heart to see them now. There were two glasses down near the hatchery, they're still there fenced off. When I was there...insurance come into it, and Harry Coulter, Bill Lindsay, Harry Beaton, they were in their seventies when the law came that the council had to put them off, superannuation come in. I took over Harry Coulter's two glass houses up the top end. I'd been in the nursery and I'd look after them but I knew I was checked off and things like that but I emphasise that Harry Coulter and Harry Beaton, they did a wonderful job.

JOHN GARNER They are celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Gardens this year. You were there during the Centenary took place.

BILL GREVILLE Well I can't recall that, no I can't recall that. Tilly Thompson used to come around there a lot... I can't remember that, but I was there all through and things like that until when was it oh, Veteran's Affairs were having a job with my hearing, and hot house work I mean, in the winter time you are in and out of hot houses, and the veteran's affairs or the doctors said that type of work that's not doing you any good. Well you don't go against them so I got down the School of Mines.

JOHN GARNER Did you have a lot to do with Tilly Thompson?

BILL GREVILLE Tilly Thompson, yes.

JOHN GARNER What sort of a lady was she?

BILL GREVILLE Rich. Reg Middleton was the horse and lorry driver and Toop, we went around and we laid out with Tilly Thompson, all those little, I dunno, haven't seen them for a long time, but Toop loved the little conifers and when I was in the Garden of Gethsemane, as I said earlier, I can recall straight away the first thing that struck me was oh, how nice they were too I'd love to see that rock garden with little dwarves. And that's what he'd laid out exactly with Tilly Thompson. I don't know what it is like now. Dwarf conifers, all different types in amongst the rocks, and I'd helped for that. Reg Middleton, he knew all I knew what handling the rocks, but Tom Toop laid out Tilly Thompson's garden.

JOHN GARNER What sort of a lady was Tilly Thompson?

BILL GREVILLE A lovely lady. I've got to say it because when I come back Tom Toop's wife died, and Tilly Thompson used to think the world of him. She'd always go and get a bunch of flowers you know. A couple of months or so Tilly wanted us (you and I) this is before kids were born to go and live in Toop's house but we couldn't look after Toop so I discreetly just didn't take it on. She had to clean his boots and put them out the door and um...

JOHN GARNER It doesn't mean to say that your wife had to do the same?

BILL GREVILLE Well I knew that she wouldn't hit it with Toop, but he was an Englishman. Apart from his boots having to be cleaned he had those bloody gaiters, he had those little short gaiters and they had to be cleaned and you see them later at the back door, oh good heavens, as a boy I used to have to go and get the mail and knock on the door and she'd come out and there's his boots, heheh, Tom Toop.

JOHN GARNER Tell me, was the zoo still going when you were there, the zoo, with the animals?

BILL GREVILLE The zoo? Oh yes, I used to like getting up there. We planted something on two or three occasions but I used to take the people walking around, I used to like getting up the zoo. Yes, I remember the zoo.

JOHN GARNER What sort of animals did they have there?

BILL GREVILLE Everything really, but no lions and tigers. Kangaroos, monkeys. No giraffes, mostly natives. But I used to like going and I'd have a walk around but there was no tigers, nothing like that, no the zoo was like, and I can speak for it because I really used to like a walk around. Planted a bit of stuff they wanted there and I used to prick off the seedlings and have a good look around. Ah the zoo yes.

JOHN GARNER Was it kept in good condition?

BILL GREVILLE Yes, I can't remember ever anybody complaining. We used to get the visitors down from the zoo and things like that. They would have said

something if it had been....oh no, it was in good nick...I just forget his name who had it at the time but what we saw of it was quite good. Oh yes the old zoo.

JOHN GARNER What about the Maze?

BILL GREVILLE Oh the Maze. We had to cut that. Three, we was told, three miles of bloody hedging. I put that mile, but before the sustenance they, oh it was a shame, they used to a half a dozen, oh three or four anyhow, sustenance they were cutting them. They were taking that much time so we had to go and give a hand. We were told three miles of hedging and some were prickly and some were supposed to have been privet, privet. Oh the boxthorn had grown through it and you had to be careful. Yet we had to do it to help the sustenance, we'd go out and, but you can't blame them the wage they were on you couldn't expect them to be cutting hedges all day you know.

JOHN GARNER What happened to it eventually?

BILL GREVILLE I understand it was pulled out, bulldozed. Not in my time. Another thing that took a lot of time, Reg Middleton, he used to drive the lorry, where he got it I don't know, but they used to take short cuts, they'd go through the privet where it wasn't prickly and they'd get lost. They'd get out the quickest way and we had to go out in the winter time and with boxthorn and Reg Middleton was there on the lorry wherever he got it I don't know but we got boxthorn and we'd round with boxthorn in the holes they'd made and that did prevent too much damage. Oh the Maze, bloody hell.

JOHN GARNER Did it ever catch fire, the Maze?

BILL GREVILLE No. It did once, right up the back oh good heavens yes. In the nursery they had a bell, like a fire bell, oh a big bell up on a, but you only rung that, in all the years I was there it rung only once. Some kids or someone set fire to a patch of it right over the back. Of course the thing clanged, we come from all up and put it out. But there was a fire I can show you, it was right on the outside, right out the back. Yes. It was on fire once. But had we not got there quick, cause the draughts, current of air, oh yes.

JOHN GARNER Tell me about the Fernery, was the Fernery going well?

BILL GREVILLE That was my pet job and I didn't mind doing it. With the Fernery you sort of loved what you did. The dead fronds. I used to get that, every year even when Tom Beaumont had it nearly every year. Generally glasshouses were warm and coming on Christmas. Nothing worse than tree ferns with two or three dead ones hanging down but they were easy, didn't have to get a ladder to get up them and I rather enjoyed it. You saw a lot for what you did because you just saw them out on the path you know, and took your time later on. Oh I was there a couple of days before, I can speak for the Fernery because I really enjoyed working in there.

JOHN GARNER What about the actual structure of the Fernery, was that good in your day?

BILL GREVILLE Yes, they did alter it once. The Fernery had been altered while I was there because it was closed. The Fernery was altered to what the original was. Made higher or something, but I couldn't tell you the exact year but it was since the war I'd say because it wasn't before the war. I'd say since the war the Fernery was altered.

JOHN GARNER You had a lot to do with the begonias.

BILL GREVILLE Oh yes, that's a sad story, a very sad story. When they retired the elderly ones and Harry Coulter he did a wonderful job during the war, in the nursery as I say and I was put in with him. Two glasshouses he used to look after

up the top end we used to say, I had to take those over. They were the single begonias. Now this is the thing I've got to say I was never happy, the begonias got a mildew disease. Tom Beaumont had it up at his glasshouse and I had it down with my singles, crested and frilled and there were just as many people I don't care who did, must be people alive now visited more so, that thought just as much of those as the big double ones. You got to know their faces, as I was opening the door, because your closing time was five o'clock. I'd let them in and take a photo. But, that mildew was the biggest worry and that's when George Seddon, if you interview George...

JOHN GARNER

I know George.

BILL GREVILLE

If he's here, and tell him I have said this, he can't deny it, I bloody near cried and I was going to go down the City Hall, because I wouldn't have had a hope against Tom Beaumont. I can swear on the bible what I tell you is true. The mildew started off like a little spot then the next day a bit bigger but then Beaumont used to mix up the spray for his and I'd for mine. But I was certainly taking the time to do mine, but I could have been doing other work. So I'm working there one morning, and if George was here now I'd say it in front of him, he come down and he knocked on the door and I opened the door to let him in. Oh he says, I'd better take them to the tip. There's all my single begonias that people had raved over and would still do if they saw them, and I was stunned. I was going to go up... what hope had I... that was his orders and he had the truck that we'd got, the old horse drawn they was done away with, he had a truck now. And he took the entire glasshouse of the southern end, single and frilled and plain begonias to the tip. I was stunned. I don't care if George was here now I would say it, because I knew I had no hope in the world going against Tom Toop, I'd be classified as a stirrer or something, yet it had to be said. He had the same mildew and even Bill Greville, my uncle at Ararat, he had begonias up there and they had it. He was on the mixture too, he got on top. I don't know, we were here the other day and the first thing I looked for was to see if any little tiny white spots and after a day see they'd get bigger, but I couldn't see any so it's done away with.

JOHN GARNER

Yours were done away with and his were kept? Tom's were kept is that right? When they took away your begonias in your glasshouses, they left the others.

BILL GREVILLE

Oh yes. The work I put in. I was going up every Friday was my day to water in the morning. He mixed up the spray for me, mustard and water, and that gave me more time to do work elsewhere. Oh no. George Seddon is the only man alive now that knows that. Bobby Plier was a lad to come up under me, did I get there in the morning, well, he was there, he'd come from the orphanage. I'm in the nursery when I come back, this is before George Seddon's day and Bob Plier. He come from the orphanage and Tom Beaumont was the boss and he said I should show him how to take cuttings and pricking off and so on, and then for some reason when George Seddon come, Bobby, and I'll say this anywhere, the moment George Seddon come Bobby Plier was put out on the mower, very rarely did we see him in the nursery. He helped Tom Beaumont but George Seddon took that over and if George was here I'd say he can't deny it. Bobby Plier was put on the mower, then other happened and then he's gone now.

JOHN GARNER

Did you have anything to do with the statues or the Prime Ministers' heads?

BILL GREVILLE

We cleaned those bloody things – *Colasil*. About once every two years and to get in the crevices you had to get one of those meat skewers and *Colasil*. And you wouldn't believe it, *Mercury*, she's still there and Mattingrow. Oh all those years ago I forget who was, it wasn't Beaumont it must have been Bill Lindsay. Anyhow some vandals pushed it over, and there's rocks all round, still there,

and there's rocks around and all that he smashed was a finger! And we, it might have been Bill Lindsay, could've been Bill Lindsay, he sent two or three of us down to lift it up back on the pedestal and we couldn't move the bloody thing. You wouldn't believe the weight and now I see them inside here and I...you wouldn't believe the weight that was in them. Two or three you reckon could do it easy, not on your life. And he's still I think got the finger missing.

JOHN GARNER So what did you use, what was the stuff you used on the Prime Minister's head?

BILL GREVILLE Yes, we used to do it, I have done it, but mostly it was the boy's job. My brother Paul had to do it, my brother was here. But usually that was the junior, that was his job. Oh yes the Prime Ministers. Depending on the bloody magpies, they just loved to perch on them and you can imagine the mess. White. Yes, they had to be done every now and then oh yes, the people complained. I have done it I'm certain about that but mostly it was the junior, they had a junior there Bobby Plier.

JOHN GARNER Did they clean the other statues, the marble statues as well?

BILL GREVILLE Yes. We copped that. Bill Graham and I. The worst of the lot was bloody Wallace. Yes we had to clean them, perhaps every two or three years.

JOHN GARNER What did you use to clean them?

BILL GREVILLE *Colasil*, if I remember. It was a white sort of builders stuff. Bill Lindsay got it, I can't remember if it was under Beaumont but whoever done it. The sustenance would do it but then they were taken off it because their wages or if anything went wrong. Oh clean up those statues yes. The magpies they loved getting on it and making a bloody mess.

JOHN GARNER What about the Claxton Monument, did you have anything to do with the Claxton Monument because that was always...?

BILL GREVILLE That's got the water around it, is that Claxton? That'd have to be cleaned out.

JOHN GARNER Can you remember the head of Claxton whether it was...?

BILL GREVILLE No, I remember reading of it, that's recent years I suppose. Claxton, oh yes, but the worst job of the lot was cleaning out the bloody lily pond. You wouldn't believe it, lift the lilies out. I make for it every time we go up, the lilies there have been divided, twenty years. We used to, had to divide them, drain the pond, then lift the lilies out and then divide them and the boxes were there to put them in, but I don't think they've been cleaned. You couldn't see a thing the other day that's how filthy they are.

JOHN GARNER The actual manuring and fertilising of the garden, did that change while you were there in the Gardens?

BILL GREVILLE Yeah, well under Toop, that's were I started; all those beds were trenched with leaf mould. All the leaves were swept up and kept in a spot behind the hatchery and probably still is I don't know, and that was the leaf mould and every bed in the winter time, it was part of my job, trench them with Bill Lindsay, with leaf mould. Then Tom Beaumont to save a bit of time I would say, and probably did just as good, used sheep manure and we'd get that from the cattle yards and we didn't trench it. Just dug the sheep manure in and all that sort of thing. Oh those days.

JOHN GARNER And the soil? The soil you used to get from Wendouree Common?

BILL GREVILLE No. No. Oh that was a hard job. All the potting soil was from sods and Green's Lane, out here at Dunnstown. The lane is still there. We used to ride our bikes out, you wouldn't believe it, no trucks council trucks to take us out. We had to ride our bikes out, we had to tie our spades to the bar, get away early and we'd cut those sods and we'd stack them up and Bill Ford, he used to go and pick them up of a night and we'd load them all and things like that. But oh it was a hard job because you could only cut them a couple of inches thick and the Lane is still there and there is probably still, but the sods had the roots, pottings were stood alone. One day there we thought we was gone and we was having a great yarn and a bloke pulled up on a horse and he talked to us, we thought he was the Buninyong Shire Ranger or something. We always had a permit, but he never asked for a permit, but he a good look and we though oh he's gone back to report us, but he never, he must have woke up.

JOHN GARNER Are there any other characters around that you'd like to mention?

BILL GREVILLE Oh we've known some characters. I won't mention his name but there was, the sustenance they had it hard, real hard. I won't mention his name but he worked on the sustenance thing and then twice a week, or at least once a week, he used to get up and do a bit of bookmaking as an SP clerk. He was a clerk for an SP bookmaker and he used to – we'd be raking up leaves and things like that, and his mates would cover him and he'd sneak around and do his SP bookmaking. Mrs Lindsay, over at the old Lindsay house it's all pulled down now. It must have been the summertime, she used to sit there and she saw him and doxed him in. I don't know whether he lost his job. Yes, doxed him in, oh but they had it hard.

JOHN GARNER What was the Lindsay house?

BILL GREVILLE Bill Lindsay, as I said early, he was the foreman like, and I was put under him. He could tell when I come back from pruning he could tell what I'd pruned. He had the great excuse was to go across and check on the sustenance workers who were raking leaves or in other cases a bit of top dressing and things like that, oh he was a hard man.

JOHN GARNER Did they have a house nearby?

Yes. Bill Lindsay lived (it's been pulled down now), up the South end just near the iron gates, a lovely old place. As a matter of fact Bill Graham and I painted the rotten thing once to save money. They got estimates and apparently it was coming up for the Gardens, so we painted it over a period with the weather, just pick a day here and there.

JOHN GARNER Was that one of the Gatekeepers' cottages?

BILL GREVILLE No it was a house, a big house. Big rooms. Bill Lindsay lived there, Boyd Lindsay and his father, that's Bill Lindsay, they'd show horses in the shows. Prizes. Oh he had a big room all done up with saddles and bloody bridles and things like that for we were cleaning the house and painting it inside to save money.

JOHN GARNER Well, that's been quite a story.

BILL GREVILLE Well what I've told you is truthful.

JOHN GARNER I know.

BILL GREVILLE But I had to tell you, that poor bugger they all knew he was doing it. SP-ing. He had red hair and he's sneaking around the Lake wherever

they're raking and Mrs Lindsay was there. Even though they're all dead and gone, oh it was sad, but he was in trouble.

JOHN GARNER Bill, are there any other incidents or things you'd like to tell me about the Gardens or your time there?

BILL GREVILLE One thing I must tell you. We had a, it was a big bell, like a church bell in the back of the nursery up the tree anyhow. But it was only to be rung in an emergency and the only time, I'll swear before God, the only time that was rung in an emergency. So anyhow peace was declared, and me brother Bob was there, he was the junior and he was poking around there, probably washing pots or cleaning. Word come across on the loud speaker "peace declared" and the city fire brigade their sirens sounded and I said to Bob, y'know he was kid about fifteen, go and ring that bloody bell. He's clang clang. I'll take an oath on the bible, Bill Lindsay was the boss and he says, cut that out, stop it. And I don't care how that goes on the air. I thought we were bloody heroes. That's what he said, stop it. Bob, I'll ask him about that. Mind you, you'd hear it across the other side of the Lake I suppose, but still the sirens on the fire brigades were going, everything was clanging so we joined in.

JOHN GARNER And you left the Gardens in 1962 was it?

BILL GREVILLE Oh, must have been I reckon. I was in and out of hothouses all the time, in the gardens, pricking off seeds. I was always getting chests and that sort of thing so I had to go along to my Veteran's Affairs doctor. You know, you do as you're told. He said that sort of work, well apart from the glasshouses I did work outside too I didn't mind that so much, but I was always getting, you could tell by my chest, he says you should give that work away. So I got on the School of Mines. I was the caretaker, er, cleaner/storeman at the mechanics and the wool classing. Then I looked after Caldwell Hall, that was part of the job that saw me out the last sixteen years.

JOHN GARNER Bill, that has all been very interesting. I think it is about time we stopped and had a cup of tea or something because you must be getting a bit dry in the throat.

BILL GREVILLE The squirrels. I'm glad you asked me that. You don't see them there now. That was one of the first jobs I was told. I dunno who did it before me but my job was to feed the squirrels. Maize. There was a big billy and he showed me. Squirrels are cunning and clever buggers they knew what trees and they'd be waiting in them. Just one here, one there, there was nothing left when they got through. I didn't mind that because it would save me digging with Bill Lindsay, so I fed the squirrels and people to this day, they don't do it now because there's none, but they used to go up and they'd be sitting waiting there for a squirrel to come down, then his mate would come down, it was a pretty sight. They were the happiest, but the cats got them all. They used to dump cats up there.

JOHN GARNER They were grey squirrels weren't they?

BILL GREVILLE Yes, grey English squirrels, yes. They got to know us, us gardeners. You could work out there in the gardens and they'd be close, they wouldn't let you get too close but visitors they got out of the way. A lot of people went there to see them, and sat there watching and enjoying the squirrels. There was possums, ahh. Possums in the nursery, in the hot weather you'd have to leave the ventilators open, the possums would get in and nip all the seedlings that had just come on nicely so we had to poison them and ohhh, possums.

JOHN GARNER I won't ask you how you poisoned them.

BILL GREVILLE I could tell you now. I'm not allowed to tell you, no I'm not allowed. All I can say – aniseed. Possums were a aniseed but I won't tell you what

else went in, and Tom Beaumont used to keep it on the shelf, still be there up on top, talk about sacred, we knew... but oh the big grey ones make a mess they would in the glasshouses. Aniseed, and the poison.

JOHN GARNER Well there you are. Bill that's been very interesting and so I'd like to thank you for spending your time with us in this way.

BILL GREVILLE I'm glad I've been able to say it, it was truthful, but the sad part to wind it all up, can I repeat that it was Bobby Plier, and I had the honour and he wasn't there..., and I had the honour of teaching him when he come as a kid of sixteen from the orphanage and he was a keen student and I've said it before and I won't repeat it again but he got off the track and things like that but it was sad the knowledge he learned from Tom Beaumont of a Friday afternoon, he spent the whole time in the glasshouse with him, taking cuttings and Tom Beaumont would take the cuttings and bring them in, put them on the bench and I tell you I'd be pricking up stuff or doing something and he'd put them, he was trained... There was no more fully trained lad in this city than Bob Plier, and George Seddon come, and well that's circumstances but Bob Plier was ever the same. The duties he was doing. He's dead and gone now, ahh. Probably goes on everywhere and everything.

JOHN GARNER Well the world keeps going round and around.

BILL GREVILLE But I'm taking nothing away from George Seddon he was a qualified man, he was in the Air Force and he could save Beaumont a lot of money fixing things. Even I had a little rotary hoe, if anything went wrong with the rotary hoe he could pull it to pieces otherwise it would be down. They would come off the estimates for Beaumont. Even the motor mowers at times played up, he could do little things, but that's history.

JOHN GARNER Very good, well thank you very much Bill. I'll make sure you get a copy of the interview and then you can record it all. I don't know whether you have got any bits and pieces that I could photograph of his past but anyway the main thing is, thanks for that.

BILL GREVILLE (Prompt from his wife re frost) The time that Queen and Phillip come where oh everything was raked outside the statuary, all the best of everything. We used to call them 'urgers'. Blokes that used to come up on Sunday morning and they'd be hanging around Beaumont helping with this and that and always going home with a pot plant of something. We used to call them urgers. They'd come in handy, they'd come in handy because I wasn't on the phone, others weren't on the phone, there was no way of notifying us but the urgers there, they must have had phones so they all come up and helped you to sort of cart them in and bring them out, to the Queen. That's the job I had, I had the job of standing to attention with a broom, my orders was if anyone threw a cigarette, I was to – dignified – go out and sweep it up. Not allowed to pick it up, make sure I swept it out of the way of the Queen. But I'll never forget the lovely teeth she had. She come, and she always had that smile, the Queen Mother, she always had that smile but she had a bloody good dentist because you could see where the fillings had been or were just... and I could... because I was standing at the door as she came out, and the Queen Mother, I'm talking about the Queen Mother she had that lovely smile but then you could see where... Others that saw it, what a great dentist she had, lovely teeth.

JOHN GARNER What did she have to say to you?

BILL GREVILLE She gave us a smile that was all, but the pick of the lot was, yes, almost yelled like this, was Prince Phillip and the Queen. Prince Phillip and the Queen, they all come to the Gardens and of course they naturally go, I don't know what was out in the Gardens, but they looked at the statuary and they went across and Beaumont had to open the door quick to let them in to the main

glasshouse. The Queen and the Governor General with his red stripes I can see him now, Prince Phillip it must have been, and then they couldn't knock her back. She said, oh lovely, have you got anymore garden bedding or glasshouses. Beaumont couldn't say no, then there was a panic, I had to run up, open the door and things like that and stand well back, and they looked through my glasshouses. That wasn't on the itinerary. She asked the question, and she couldn't say I haven't got anymore so there was two more, but I always had them presentable so I rushed up and opened the door and stood well back and he took them in. I forgot that.

JOHN GARNER Very good.

End of Interview _____

- A reference Tom Toop gave to Bill Greville, it's signed by him at the bottom and it says:

To whom it may concern, I can with every confidence recommend Mr W G Greville to any public body or private person requiring the services of a capable gardener. Starting here as a junior in 1937 he showed aptitude of interest in his work up to the period of his voluntary enlistment in 1940.

Following active service in the Middle East he was demobilised and resumed his vocation in the Gardens here in 1944. He is above all a diligent and active workman with a good general knowledge of horticulture as applied to public gardens, in the preparation and keeping of lawns, floral displays and care of trees and shrubs. His general character is above reproach and he has a pleasing personality.

Signed by Thomas B Toop, Retired Curator

- The other document is a copy of the letter from S M Ford, Minister of the Army to the Hon. R T Pollard MP, Federal Members Room, Melbourne C1. It says:

Dear Mr Pollard,

With reference to your representations of 19 October 1943 on behalf of the Town Clerk, the City of Ballarat, I desire to inform you approval has been given for the discharge from the Army of VX22198 Lance Corporal W B Greville, in order that he may resume his civil occupation with the Ballarat City Council.
