# The Mounts Winter 2025

Community Newsletter of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine

## PART 2

## EDITORIAL

Only a few of the gardens and houses on Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine have had a written history of their own, and one made available to the public. The recently published history of Dennarque is a fine example. Such a history not only deepens ones understanding of the place but it is there for the future record. We are pleased to add the following recollections of Sefton Hall to this small but important local genre.

Please note that the images and their captions appear from page 15.

## THE RECENT HISTORY OF SEFTON HALL, MOUNT WILSON

We have decided that it is important that we set down the history of our time and work as joint owners of Sefton Hall, Mount Wilson, between February 2001 and December 2019.

First, some background. The house and garden had been held in the Clark family since it was completed in 1912 for Sydney department store founder Henry Marcus Clark, as a family summer residence. Clark was suffering from worsening health problems and had begun withdrawing from his taxing business responsibilities. He also loved the Blue Mountains, though a family tragedy at an earlier property at Mt York would have turned many people away from the mountains. He designed Sefton Hall himself, so that he could spend more time in his beloved mountains, and as a family retreat. His son supervised the building works which were completed in 1912. Sadly, Henry Marcus Clark had a very short time at Sefton Hall, dying in the house in 1913 after a cholecystectomy performed on the dining table, placed in the bay window to improve the light. A surgeon had been brought up from Sydney on a special train.

By the 1990s, the Clark family faced the difficult issues which come to many owners of similar historic properties. The possible sale of Sefton Hall led to a great deal of angst within the family. In the years leading up to the sale, which finally took place in 1995, Tony Clark had been living in relative isolation with fairly basic amenities. He had grown too old and too unwell to maintain the house and garden, large parts of which had become very neglected and overgrown. Family members had paid for a new roof to keep the house weather tight, and for the elevated tank stand and tank to provide a reliable water supply, so that Tony could continue living there. Sefton Cottage had been subdivided from Sefton Hall years earlier, cutting Sefton Hall off from its original spring fed water supply.

After the property was sold, there was a clearing sale of the furniture and contents. A photographic study of the house was done not long before its sale, when it was being considered for State Heritage listing, and the interiors seen in the pictures are in an important record of the state of the house and its early decoration. We have had copies of those pictures since 2001. After the subdivision of Sefton Cottage, there was no longer vehicle access from the original main gate in The Avenue to the upper garden and the main house, because the bulk

of the original driveway was on the Sefton Cottage side of the new boundary. With the resulting lack of access, the middle and lower parts of the remaining Sefton Hall garden were largely abandoned.

When Sefton Hall was purchased by Tony and Jan Liddle in 1995, they kept the house and garden much as it had been, with some limited interior painting and some modest planting. Then, from 1999, they set about renovating the principal rooms of the house, and painting the run-down exteriors of both the house and the detached billiards room, which had been part of the original Cox residence, Balangra, and which predated Sefton Hall. Barry Byrne, resident at nearby Bebeah, was responsible for the interior and exterior decoration. Barry's Country Life interiors and colour schemes were highlighted on the public record recently, totally unchanged after 26 years. Having had considerable experience ourselves in heritage restoration we did our own restoration work on the original kitchen and the rear rooms of the house, which Tony had not attempted. The original anaglypta wallpaper in the kitchen was damaged and under so many layers of paint that it could not be saved. We were able to match it and return the kitchen to its original appearance, removing the 1970s bench, sanding the floor, stripping and painting the pressed metal dado and ceiling, and installing a vintage wood-fired stove which we had brought from Adelaide. Some years later we removed the sixties cupboards and replaced them with sympathetic modern ones. The large room beyond the kitchen looked like what it was, a rather sad lean-to in a primitive state, with a permanently jammed side door. It was given a complete makeover, with a new floor, new cupboards, an elaborate pressed metal ceiling, which Robert had rescued from a similar vintage house while it was being demolished around him in the early 1980s. Robert had fully embraced his father's credo that you never knew when you might find a use for something, so you should never throw things away. He spent many hours completely stripping the old layers of paint in the courtyard out the back, sealing the panels, hanging them and giving them several coats of paint. The room was also given new bevelled-edge glass windows, matching those in the front of the house. On the outside, the rear walls were rebuilt, and pressed metal imitation stone coursing panels, matching the originals on the formal frontage, were installed.

To finish off their efforts on the house, the Liddles introduced wall to wall carpet to all the principal rooms, a new fire insert in the largest room, a Danish Morso wood fire in the entrance hall, and a gas central heating system. Two of the bedroom chimneys were sealed up to assist the central heating. The one room that escaped us all, was the remarkably small (for a house with pretensions of grandeur) bathroom, which remained much as it was when the house was built, with a large claw and ball bath and tesselated tiles, which we found under later vinyl flooring, and a basic 1970s vanity unit and an over-bath shower head. The Liddles had planned to knock through into the adjoining bedroom to create a large modern bathroom, but this work was never undertaken. In our time, our priority was the garden. The bathroom was functional and we made do.

We would not have made some of the changes to the house which Tony Liddle introduced, but none of them were a major issue and some would have been difficult to undo. Nonetheless, they should be recorded. The arch over the entrance door was squared off to make it more classical, sadly the “harbour bridge” fretwork at the entrance to the corner bay window was removed, along with the Miller hanging light. We were able to rescue that light and hand it on to the next custodian, and we did a swap with Tony Liddle. He kept a newly installed reproduction light in the entrance hall and gave us the original ruby glass lantern light, which we had reinstalled. Several of the interconnecting doors between the principal rooms were walled up, and the opening fan lights on the surviving doors were sealed. This did hinder the original design concept of light and air flow between the rooms, and disguised their original purpose, but, at the same time, made it easier to furnish them, giving greater wall space. The tiny butler's pantry, which connected the dining room with the kitchen, was walled up, and all the joinery in the house was painted white, the one change which disappointed us most. We did find one of the original heavily carved over mantles from the small front reception room out in the sheds. It had escaped the white paint. We reinstalled it in its original place, so that we could show people

what all the original joinery looked like. Over the years, Robert was dismayed to find that most visitors preferred the white. That, and the sheer weight of other priorities, forced him to shelve, but not abandon, his hope that he could one day restore the joinery to its original state. We saved the fitted cupboard in the butler's pantry and installed it in the small area outside the main pantry. In that main pantry there were still signs, partially sealed up by the Liddles, of what had been the access to deliver milk direct to the pantry. In the butler's pantry, there were large sections of the original dining room wallpaper, which we kept. The smallest bedroom still had its original elaborate wallpaper, but it had been given a new coat of white paint, though the wallpaper pattern was still clearly visible. To hide the fact that the interconnecting doors in the principal rooms, complete with their bevelled fan lights, had been removed, the elaborate timber dado in the entrance hall was removed and repurposed to fill the gaps created in the largest room. A simple flat panel dado with a rail was then installed in the entrance hall. All of the original timber picture rails were removed, but, within a year, we had had new lengths run, and Robert replaced most of them. In the billiards room, the fascinating large papier mache wall friezes had also fallen victim to the white paint, hiding their original verdigris appearance. In fact, they had been removed before Peter first arrived, and we had to go to some lengths to have them returned.

While the house remodelling was under way, the Liddles turned their attention to the run down and overgrown garden immediately around the house. Church Lane was not the original entrance point for Sefton Hall and was intended mostly for service access. With the main gate on the Avenue cut off from the house, Barry Byrne and Tony Liddle replaced the previous utilitarian entrance gates on Church Lane with more elaborate gates, which remain today. Tony then set out to rehabilitate the garden surrounding the house, mainly concentrating on the area between the house and Church Lane. The hedges in that part of the garden were tamed, feral trees were removed, and the area planted extensively with azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons and pieris. The Liddles obviously loved pieris, but underestimated how well they would do at Mount Wilson. The one they planted directly in front of the main bedroom window eventually blocked out the light and we reluctantly removed it. They had some valuable assistance from an advanced plant nursery and brought in several fine advanced camellias and maples which are still thriving. Their planting also included a magnificent weeping cherry in front of the new gate. It survived well into our time, but eventually succumbed to rot, one of the few failures we saw in the garden. This work gave the front of the garden a new lease of life. The remainder of the property was left largely untouched. In 2000, the Liddles decided to put Sefton Hall on the market.

When Sefton Hall came on to the market, in 2000, Peter was working at a busy NSW medical practice and flying back to Adelaide every weekend. Robert was working full time in a high profile position in South Australia. On a working visit to Sydney, Robert was persuaded to hire a car and drive up to Mount Wilson to inspect the property with the agent. Peter had already been through it and announced his long term dream of owning a cool climate garden. Robert was sceptical. The house was fine, needing no more work than he knew they could achieve, but the ruined garden with massive neglected trees and a jungle of feral vegetation beyond the boundary of the Liddle's work around the house, was bordering on terrifying. A lot of discussion and debate ensued. The clincher was probably the fact that Robert's father in Sydney had died unexpectedly and suddenly in August 2000, leaving his mother alone in the family house. Peter persuaded him that it was a perfect opportunity to strengthen long neglected connections with his Sydney family. He had also accepted a commission to write another history book, and, after some research, decided that it would be feasible to do the work from a base at Sefton Hall. He was always amazed at how much professional research he was able to complete with only basic dial up internet access in Mount Wilson.

We purchased the property in early 2001, and brought with us three container loads of antiques, furniture, musical instruments, clocks, heritage building materials, two vintage stoves (we later added a third), an extensive collection of books, a 32 light chandelier, which we installed in the billiards room (where the original billiard table light had already been removed, along with the

billiard table), and even some plants (coals to Newcastle comes to mind). Barry's interiors provided a perfect background to all this, and for the next 19 years the house was well presented and maintained. We should note that the Liddles did offer to sell us the magnificent billiard table. We were obviously tempted, but among Robert's musical instruments, there was a full size concert grand piano. There simply was not enough room for both, and the Liddles sold the table elsewhere.

Once we had filled the house and done some minor renovations, and found a suitable overmantle to replace the missing one in the entrance hall, we set out to recapture the feel of the original garden, and to give it more structure, with distinct areas of formal, semi formal, woodland and rain forest gardens. In the midst of all the chaos, we could see important parts of the original structure. There were large eucalypts and blackwoods, many mature elms, chestnuts, walnut trees, beech, massive pines and cypress, dogwoods, a beautiful linden tree, bunya pines, Japanese maples and, the most spectacular of all, the monkey puzzle tree. When we first arrived, the monkey puzzle had many dead branches on the lower trunk, and we were worried; we didn't want to be the custodians who let it die. Some quick research established that this was its natural growth patten in its native Chile. The lower branches brown off, eventually drop off, and the tree progressively assumes a mushroom form. We breathed a sigh of relief, and left it to largely do its own thing, with only the occasional cleanup when its drooping dead branches became something of a prickly hazard. In the main garden, there were several old shaped and pruned cherry laurels, and many azaleas.
We recovered the shaping and cloud pruning to great effect in the spring, maintaining them until the day we left. There were also other remnant shrubs, climbers, bulbs and perennials. Wherever we could, we documented their locations, particularly the ones which had been engulfed by the feral cherry laurels, holly and ivy. There were also escapees from the Gow's extraordinary cold climate plant collection at Sefton Cottage next door.

Our introduction to Lis Gow came on Peter's very first day working in the garden. Robert was still working in Adelaide. Lis, our indefatigable new neighbour at Sefton Cottage, obtained Robert's Adelaide number from the real estate agent and rang to express alarm that there was a tall grey haired man in scruffy clothes wandering around Sefton Hall. Was he our gardener, she wanted to know. Of course it was Peter, grey since a young age, famously scruffy in the garden, and normally in shorts, even in the depths of a Mount Wilson winter. It was the first of many delightful encounters with Lis and her equally delightful plant collecting fanatic husband Paul. Over the first few years, the Gow's magnificent plant collection and garden, both intimidated us (how on earth could we ever get Sefton Hall to that level of beauty?), and inspired us as to what could be achieved. Robert's first in-person encounter with Lis was equally memorable. She phoned on the house landline (we had deliberately kept the old number), and said she had something for him. Could they meet at the fence that separated the two houses? It turned out to be an amazing bunch, picked from her garden, of different witch hazel flowers, which he had not seen before. The conversation turned to our plans for Sefton Hall. Robert still retells the story often. "Two men!", said Lis, "I suppose we'll have lots more horrible bright red camellias!" As we were to learn, Lis was always one to make clear exactly what she thought, and we came to love her for it.

Another wonderful new neighbour was Caterina (Cath) Collagiuri, across the road at Koonawarra. Always friendly and welcoming, she soon started sharing some of her own plants. The now naturalised rock cyclamen near the gates came from Cath. She lived on her own, with occasional visits from Sydney family members, and more regular ones from her brother Luigi Strano , a Mount Wilson local. We often thought she worked harder in her garden than we did in ours. She was always raking her gravel drive and it was always immaculate. Cath opened her garden to the public, and she would often sit by her gate with a small sign and some leaflets, ready to pounce on any passing prospective customers. We would see them disappear with her down the long Koonawarra drive, emerging a long time later with smiles of appreciation on their faces. Her brother had his own house on the other side of Mount Wilson and would drive, somewhat erratically, over to his sister's for lunch. An accomplished poet, he was fascinating to

talk to, though Robert's introductory conversation with him took an unexpected direction when discussion turned to Mussolini's good points. “He did get the Italian trains to run on time”, Luigi asserted forcefully. Cath liked our dogs, two giant schnauzers. She used to come out of her gate, walk up Church Lane until she was level with the bay window, and call out “anyone at home?” On one occasion she had a freshly roasted chicken. Her story was that she was expecting guests for lunch but they hadn't turned up. Would the dogs like some chicken, she wondered? Shocked that anyone would do that to her, Robert accepted. The dogs enjoyed every morsel. However, by the third time she came up with the same story, he realized that she was actually cooking the chickens for the dogs. In a mischievous moment, Lis Gow remarked that Robert should be thankful she had adopted the dogs, because, in his final years, her adoptee was Tony Clark. Many were the happy conversations we shared with Cath over the dry stone walls. She was a formidable character, despite her increasing frailty. You could tell that from her potted hydrangeas in half barrels lining her drive. Hydrangeas in Mount Wilson are naturally blue, but her potted ones were always kept pink. Cath even kept a horse. It was a sad day when her health deteriorated to the point where she had to be moved to Sydney. In gratitude for all her kindness and conversation, Robert gladly looked after the horse until Cath's family could make suitable arrangements.

Once reasonably settled, we embarked on an arduous, time consuming, and at times expensive restoration program in the garden. Unfortunately for us, the Millenium drought was well under way, not officially finishing until 2009/2010. Many of our early images of the garden show a parched landscape and dead lawns. New plantings had to be kept alive with constant bucketing of scarce water resources. It was years before we could achieve the lush green lawns so familiar in Mount Wilson gardens. An early forewarning of what was ahead of us came very quickly, when the massive pine tree close to the front corner of the house was struck by lightning. Over the next few months it progressively died, shedding material everywhere and becoming a serious danger to everything surrounding it. We found a skilled tree climber, Scott Mackinnon, who, with the help of his father on the ground, slowly took the tree down section by section, leaving us with the first of an ongoing series of huge tree maintenance bills, and enormous stacks of useless pine, which it took us years to dispose of. At the other end of our tenure, in 2019, one of our last big jobs was getting a similarly skilled tree climber to take down the massive ash tree at the back of the house. John Clark told us once that he could remember his father planting it as a very small tree, and he could not believe how large it had grown. By 2019 it had begun to physically push over the sheds at the back and to blot out the light from the back of the house. Sadly, it had to go.

For the first two years, we concentrated on carrying on Tony Liddle's good work in the main garden around the house. Our plant data base shows that in our first 12 months we added no fewer than 86 new named varieties: 11 magnolias, 29 acer palmatum, 4 acer Japonicum, the beautiful acer griseum, acer davidi, acer shirasawanum, 16 hydrangeas and 16 camellias, among others. It was clear what our direction was, and there were many, many more to follow in the years to come. By the time we left, many of these early plantings were maturing wonderfully. There were still some problem plants. A huge rhododendon ponticum near the secondary stairs to the verandah was getting much too close and we removed it ourselves. In a number of areas around the garden, rhododendron ponticum had gone wild. It was easy to see why it is rated as the most invasive non-native plant in Scotland. There were also wilderness areas quite close to the house that had to be dealt with. When we attacked the privet thicket adjacent to the tanks, much of which had been flattened when the massive barrel of the dead pine tree was dropped, it soon became obvious that it had once been a formal maze. We briefly toyed with the idea of restoring it but, thankfully, common sense won out. As a compromise, we kept the outer hedges and a narrow hedged pathway connecting one part of the garden to another. On the eastern side, Robert built his first dry stone wall, which turned out, unintentially, like a huge stone arrow head, but it served its purpose and soon looked like it had always been there. And it showed us that we could do much more with the natural stone that we found every time we dug. Like gardeners before us, we simply piled the rocks up, many of them very heavy, until we had enough to construct another feature. Within the newly restored privet walls, we set up a

successful kitchen garden, where Robert delighted in growing heritage vegetables: cardoons, rhubarb, various herbs, and asparagus. He even had successful years with some extraordinary heritage tomatoes. We also installed a cast iron sundial, only to discover that it must have been on the wrong container ship from China. It was designed for the northern hemisphere.

The rest of the extensive cherry laurel hedges were cut back savagely, brought under control and restored. Our first skirmishes in the decades long war with the ivy began. Then we started to spread our wings beyond the main hedge, developing new paths and garden beds in the area towards the Nooroo boundary. At that stage, most of the wilderness beyond the main lawn and the cherry laurel hedge was impassable. The bases of the monkey puzzle tree and the huge cypress tree were beyond reach and there were thickets of feral privet, wild cherry laurel and holly, spread by birds from seed from the main garden hedges and shrubs, many of which had gone untrimmed for decades. The feral plants had then spread their seed and suckers further and further down the steep slopes. There were no roads or pathways, only the original staircase which ran down through the centre of the garden from the main hedge to the much lower old drive at the bottom. It too had been engulfed by feral trees and was hardly visible, let alone usable. Many of the original timber risers were infested with rot or gone altogether. Stone edging, plinths and sections of dry-stone walling had been pushed aside by advancing roots, and through it all was the ivy! The ground ivy and the ivy thickets through everything were bad enough, but much of that had all come about because of the dreaded tree ivy. Who knew that tree ivy could literally strangle a mature elm or blackwood? But the biggest risk was to the many wonderful century old tree ferns we discovered , still struggling on amidst all the devastation. They became our talisman and our gauge of how well we were going. Every time we lost one in a storm, we remembered an early comment from Tim Gow, that it was like being present when an elephant died. It was always a sad day when it happened. Sefton Hall had been lucky with the tree ferns. Many of the early garden owners, determined to recreate English gardens, had looked on them as alien and had them cleared. The Clarks loved them, as did we, and so large numbers have survived at Sefton Hall. Unfortunately, the early garden owners also loved English ivy, and the Clarks were no exception. There is a photo of the house, taken shortly after it was completed, showing tall tree ferns in the front, with carefully manicured ivy all the way up their trunks. In images from the thirties or forties, ivy is being encouraged in the garden beds immediately in front of the house, overwhelming the sandstone bases of the huge marble urns.

Many of the long running garden maintenance problems in the gardens at Mount Wilson have their origins in the early gardeners' lack of experience with the climate and soil conditions. Ivy was a case in point. At Sefton Hall, all the extensive cherry laurel hedges were deliberately underplanted with ivy, to prevent an unsightly gap opening up between the ground and the base of the hedge. The ivy was also used extensively under some of the larger trees as an effective ground cover. There were still clear signs of this under some of the massive pines, the monkey puzzle and the cypress, when we arrived in 2001. In an age when labour was cheap and garden labourers readily available, this was manageable. However, at the slightest slow-down in maintenance, the rich soil and high rainfall allowed the ivy to migrate everywhere into the garden beds and up the trees to produce the tree ivy which then seeded the entire garden. Of course, ivy was just one of the nuisance plants we inherited. Among the others there was the beautiful Leycesteria. It was easy to see why it had been planted originally, but after 100 years it was a serious pest which we spent many hours eliminating. Holly and cherry laurel seedlings would emerge as soon as another area of larger feral trees was cleared. The worst were the ones that came up under hedges or shrubs. By the time you realized they were there, they were already a couple of feet high, with their roots well entrenched. We fought long battles against the pink Japanese anemones and the forget me nots in the borders of the entrance pathways. Pretty to look at, but a devil when they rapidly spread. Even the Japanese maples could be a threat as their seedlings came up everywhere. Lis Gow gave us some early advice to wait until you could see if their leaves turned red in autumn. That advice led to us propagating many different maples, spread from our own and surrounding gardens.

There were some necessary infrastructure upgrades in our early years. Torrential rain often caused havoc with our work, new and old. Lightning strikes were a regular problem. Robert vividly remembers one when the large elm adjacent to the bay window took a direct hit, leaving a scar that could still be seen years later. The dogs went crazy, and Robert always swore that his feet actually left the floor. Another nearby strike travelled along the ground, up the telephone cable and blew up the computer. That one prompted us to get a local electrician in. He fitted an extra strength safety switch., with a spare fuse, but swore that if the first one had blown it would mean the house had been reduced to ashes. The new fuse and spare were still intact when we left many years later. Our new electrician then moved on to some recommended upgrades. First up, he moved the internal power board to the outside on the back wall. That meant cutting off the power from the power pole in the street. This in turn required the attendance of a power company employee on site, and for that there was a substantial fee. We were soon to see the old Australia of our parents' generation in action. The appointed time came, but no inspector. Our anxious electrician (remember, by now we had no electricity to the house) started making calls. Eventually, he was told he was experienced enough and that he didn't really need someone looking over his shoulder, and that he could go ahead on his own. There was no refund of the inspector's fee. Power down to the billiards room was via a remarkably low slung cable from the outside toilet, crossing the old drive to an iron loop knocked into a long dead tree trunk, and then on to the billiards room. Our electrician put in a much taller pole to bypass the tree trunk, and then went to disconnect the line at the trunk, which was engulfed by a very old and wide rambling Banksia rose.. We weren't sure who got the bigger surprise, the electrician, or the previously unseen possum, who went into full attack mode. Thankfully, both survived. The massive Banksia rose reminds us that there were originally two. The other had engulfed the eastern side of the billiards room. For a long time, we tried to keep them both, but they were hopelessly placed and eventually were removed to open up more light and planting space, and to protect the building

Any work done on the middle and lower gardens involved carrying things up and down the steep slopes, or using the trailer via the long route from The Avenue and up Church Lane. This we did for several years. Even the staircase was all but impassable in those early years. Then, with the help of a talented landscaper and earth mover, we created a new driveway which was sympathetic to the original contours of the garden and which reconnected the top of the garden to the gate on The Avenue. Over time, we used basalt rocks, exposed by the earth moving and various planting, to create a border to the driveway similar to the stones used to edge the paths everywhere else in the garden. Several sections of dry-stone walling were added on the middle level of the new drive, up the still steep slope and under the giant cypress tree, matching those built by Tony Clark along the Church Lane frontage. The cypress had been badly damaged in a massive 1950s snow storm, but nothing had been done to it since. We employed a tree specialist to undertake remedial work and it again became a beautiful feature of the middle garden, along with its near neighbour the magnificent monkey puzzle tree, which could finally breath again. We moved the coarse quartz gravel which had been laid around the house by Tony Liddle, down to the newly created driveway. Within a few years, the appearance had naturalised beautifully.  Neither of us have ever been boastful about our work at Sefton Hall, but it is still surprising that some people have assumed that it is all original. The middle and lower gardens are entirely our creation centred on a series of surviving mature trees and much additional planting by us. Around the house we laid a much finer gravel sourced from a local quarry, which matched the original gravel laid for Henry Marcus Clark.

With access to the lower part of the property restored, we set about removing hundreds of feral cherry laurels and hollies, many 4-6 metres high. This was a task of massive proportions. It included cutting back to ground level the remains of the original cherry laurel hedge along the lower boundary with Nooroo, which had become a jungle 6 metres high and stretching many metres into the beautiful Nooroo garden.  It looked more like a mangrove swamp than the remnants of a formal hedge. Our neighbours at Nooroo, Lorraine and Tony Barrett were delighted. It opened up a whole new area of their garden, as well as ours, to the light. I think we were all amazed at just how quickly the stumps regenerated and the original formal cherry laurel

hedge was recovered. From then on, this original formal hedge was, like all the other extensive hedges in the garden, carefully maintained. In the lower garden we started on another planned phase, working to make that section into an area similar to the Cathedral of Ferns. All this work necessitated an exhausting annual program of winter pile burning as the only practical way of dealing with the consequences of removing all the feral vegetation. Robert, in particular, spent thousands of hours chainsawing wood and carting it up or down the steep slopes to various pile burn sites. Our last serious burn was in 2018. We also made extensive use of the Blue Mountains Council chipping program while it lasted, dragging by hand large quantities of vegetation from all over the property to the Church Lane frontage, ready for chipping.

None of this work was straight forward progress; more three steps forward, then two steps (or worse) back. Opening up areas beyond the main garden also added to the long list of regular maintenance required. Maintaining the new main gate hedge added significantly to the ongoing hedging schedule required. Armed with an array of power tools, and specialist hand tools Robert carried on the work relentlessly, following at least a semblance of the French gardening philosophy of introducing a degree of order to what was at best a semi formal, but mostly informal garden. With many mature trees dating from the late nineteenth century, and frequent storms, our work was often overtaken by the need to repair storm or age damage. In the great wind storm of 2011, Mount Wilson was left without power for six days, and massive damage was done to many of the gardens, ours included. A huge ponderosa pine in the middle garden snapped two thirds of the way up the trunk and its huge canopy crashed to the ground, obliterating much of the hillside, including most of our recent work on new roads and paths. We particularly remember the year we had a heavy snow storm in October. Most of the deciduous trees were well under way with their new spring growth and simply could not cope. We spent an anxious night listening to large branches all over the garden crashing to the ground under the sheer weight of snow. Then there was the extraordinary hail storm, which stripped every leaf off many of the mature deciduous trees. We were both working in the garden when the storm struck, and we looked on from the verandah and watched the hail destroy years of our work. There was so much debris in Church Lane, and throughout Mount Wilson, that the Council sent in street sweeper trucks to make the roads safe again.

The elms along the Church Lane frontage, whilst beautiful, were a persistent problem, dropping large branches, often after heavy rain. The elms absorbed a lot of water, making their limbs increasingly heavy. Lis Gow regularly catered for weddings at Sefton Cottage and the street would be lined with cars. It was during one such storm that a large elm branch broke off and was left hanging above several cars parked in the street behind behind Sefton Hall. We had to quickly take down the registration numbers, invade the marquee next door, where the wedding was in full swing, and urge the relevant car owners to act swiftly. With the light of day, we faced yet another major clean up, but at least no cars had been damaged or people injured. It was during two very similar storms that the original garage was almost crushed under the weight of several fallen elm branches. We had always planned to restore it as a significant part of the heritage of the property – a rare surviving purpose-built garage from the early years of motoring. Henry Marcus Clark was a very proud early vehicle owner, and auto enthusiast. Among his professional and social contemporaries, he was also a relatively rare owner-driver. We have a fine photograph of him in his car in front of the garage. In it you can also see, on the side wall, elements of the acetylene gas system which provided gas light to the house and billiards room. One of the Clarks once explained to us how the acetylene system worked. We were immediately grateful that it was long gone. The garage also retained its original colour scheme which matched the exterior of the main house. Robert always maintained a secret ambition to restore the colours to the main house. Barry Byrne and Tony Liddle had used a two-tone heritage olive colour scheme, which was perfectly acceptable and sympathetic to the building and the climate. Everyone is probably pleased that Robert did not achieve his secret ambition, as the original colours featured the extensive use of purple and Brunswick green. It came close to being achieved, at least in Robert's mind, as the olive scheme was coming to its end after more than 20 years in the harsh Mount Wilson climate. We propped the sagging garage up and still had plans to save it. But back to the elms – we were determined to keep them going, as

they were a significant, though problematic, part of the historic landscape. They lined the Church Lane frontage beautifully. Over time, we spent thousands of dollars on their maintenance and still had tree surgeons working on them a few months before we left Sefton Hall at the end of 2019.

The layout, structure and planting of our garden at Sefton Hall remain largely unchanged in 2025. Tony Liddle had cleaned up the small original garden beds attached to the house itself and in the area between the house and the gates on Church Lane as well as along the two gravel paths that ran to the house. In one of them, he planted out a small alpine garden, which we maintained and added to. We also widened the main path to the house, to allow better vehicle access. We laid out most of the other extant garden beds and paths, including the large garden bed adjacent to the billiards room, as well as the large beds on the Nooroo side of the main hedge, copying the original basalt edging from the Clark garden beds. We have many photographs of all our work carting the heavy basalt rocks and setting out new beds with them. We dug the pond ourselves with picks and shovels and established the garden bed around it. We purchased and installed the two bronze fountains, and the cast iron bird bath outside the bay window in the principal reception room of the house. The central pond in front of the house, minus fountain, had originally been installed to mark Peter's fiftieth birthday. We remade the arbored pathway and reinstalled the arbors, though one has subsequently been removed. We introduced all the cast iron urns, in part to replace marble ones which had been removed before our time, including those at either end of the arbors and at the entrance to the billiards room, as well as the small marble urn and pedestal outside the large bay window. We replanted extensively, including thousands of bulbs, with hundreds of uncommon varieties of daffodils, tulips and hyacinths. Robert was particularly keen on his miniature and dwarf daffodils, and all the varieties of white daffodil. In fact, it was our extensive daffodil planting which probably gave us our first sense of getting ahead, at least with the house gardens. From spring 2002 onwards, the annual spectacle of our carpet of daffodils between the house and the billiards room gave us a sense of achievement. They were there even before we had constructed the new basalt edged garden beds around them. For a while, we were addicted to the rare plant and bulb catalogues. Plants we remember with particular pleasure include the vivid orange oriental poppies (they had to be orange, because the Rare Plant Fair, held at Bilpin not long after we took up residence; had sold out of red ones), Robert's staghorns from Adelaide, the red hot pokers, the peonies, the many liliums, dicentra, bulbinella, the Solomon's seal, the aquilegia (particularly the extraordinary almost black ones), hundreds of bluebells, the various clematis, fuchsias, the newer varieties of hellebores, the many crocus which gradually naturalised, the colchicum Byzantinum, the wonderful hostas, particularly the variegated variety, Robert's extensive collection of iris varieties, some obtained at annual iris fairs at Blackheath, as well as the beautiful white nerines (with the occasional pink interlopers) and magnificent standard and weeping maples, especially the one given to us by Lis Gow before she left Sefton Cottage in 2014, dogwoods, and two pin oaks which came from Peter's mother. We planted many more camellias, varietal maples, rhododendrons, magnolias and azaleas, including the glorious Nightrider camellia, and the spectacular old camellia Dona Herzilla de Freitas Magalhaes. Near the new pond, we planted a fascinating slow growing horizontal elm, after seeing a mature example at another cold climate garden.

There were a handful of roses from the Clark's time and some iceberg roses, planted by the Liddles, which had survived, but only just. The iceberg roses eventually settled and started to bloom well, but always tended to be straggly. We tried to give surviving plants a chance to live on. A case in point were the struggling prunus in front of the billiards room and the red flowering tea tree up near the house. Neither were fine plant specimens, but each year they both put on a splendid floral display, and so we maintained them as part of the old surviving garden. Peter's mother had always grown fabulous roses in Adelaide, and for a time he tried to carry on the tradition, but they simply would not thrive in the climate. He turned to rugosa roses with considerable success and planted all the beautiful examples in the garden which continue to thrive. He also had some success with floribunda bush roses, among them a red and white flecked rose, a striking yellow and orange Meilland rose from France, and a particularly beautiful

deep red variety. Other features we introduced included flowering cherries, laburnum, waratahs, clematis, dahlias, and mollis azaleas as well as interesting fruit trees like medlar, persimmon, beurre bosce and nashi pear. Peter's much loved yuletide camellia hedge along the Church Lane frontage beyond the secondary gate was remarkably slow growing, but ultimately a success. It was probably the first new hedge we planted, but there were many more to come. We even had success with a small citrus orchard, particularly with the grapefruit variety “Teeny Wheeny” which was originally developed near Bilpin and did very well in the mountain climate. The possums were particularly fond of it and the other citrus, hollowing the fruit out without plucking them from the tree. Robert's pride and joy were his raspberries. Aware that they could become a problem, he surrounded them with lawn, making it relatively easy to prevent their spread with the ride-on mower. They were slow to get going, but over our last ten years, the weeks before Christmas produced bucket loads of fruit. There were also some real oddities for Mount Wilson, like the two clumps of Senegal date palms (phoenix reclinata) which the palm loving Robert had bought for his heritage garden in Adelaide, but had not yet planted, and so insisted that they come with us. They have been extremely slow growing, but ultimately acclimatised remarkably well, withstanding the severe snow storms. The only other palm we had success with was the Australian cabbage palm. Among other oddities were Robert's topiary sheep and swan, inspired by Kim Gow's topiary peacock at Sefton Cottage. They took many hours of patient training and trimming. There was also his espaliered Cox's orange pippin apple, along the wall of the billiards room., put in as a tribute to the Cox family, who had first owned the property when it was Balangra and the billiards room was the first single room cottage. Of course, the only link was the Cox name, but it made Robert smile. Careful research and developing experience of the Mount Wilson climate and soil, meant we had only a few failures.

Other happy memories centre around the wildlife. We loved the birds, particularly the tiny red browed finches that fed in front of the kitchen window, along with king parrots, rosellas and spinebills. For many years we had a male king parrot who would sit in a potted fuchsia quite close to the kitchen window and look miserable and dance about until we came out with some food for him. Sometimes he brought his partner, and occasionally junior came along. His parents were obviously teaching him that this was a good way to get food. Our sense that we had been specially adopted was shattered one day when we went next door to talk to Lis and Paul, only to find Lis
feeding “our” parrot. He obviously had a circuit of the humans he had trained. Among the other delightful birds were the seasonal yellow tailed black cockatoos with their loud shrieks and their fierce beaks which would savage the heavy green pine cones long before they were ripe. Their beaks were strong, but they had trouble gripping the branch with one claw, and the heavy pine cone with the other, creating a hard hat area below. We always had to warn visitors not to go too close to the pine trees in cockatoo season. Then there were the incredibly shy lyre birds. In the early years, sightings were few and far between, but as our restoration work proceeded down the slope, they became more active and, finally, resident. At their bravest, they would jump on to the dry-stone walls near the house and sing and dance until some extraneous noise would send them hurtling off in a panic. They could be hard on new plantings, but their mere presence was reward enough.

Beyond the birds, our main interaction was with the wombats, occasional wallabies and the possums. Some of the local gardeners decried the presence of the wombats, but the worst damage was usually scratching up a bit of the lawn. They had a nocturnal circuit, rambling along marking their territory. Come daylight, the dogs would follow their route marking the territory as theirs. Luckily, their schedules never clashed. We were fortunate that our neigbours on both sides were reasonably content with cohabiting with the wombats. In fact we shared ours with the Barretts at Nooroo. They had the entrance to a warren on their side of the boundary, clearly visible, because their garden was an open showcase. As our clearing work continued on our side, we found another entrance near a massive long fallen tree trunk. As we planted yet more camellias along the boundary, we tried to avoid disturbing too much around the trunk, and the wombats' nightly rituals continued. The only times we might have taken issue with the wombats was when, occasionally, they would refuse to accept that the new wire mesh we had

just patched the fence with was necessary, or on another occasion when a young wombat decided to make a new home in the space under the main house. No amount of vermin wire would deter him, but victory was finally achieved when Lis Gow suggested a good dusting with blood and bone. The local antechinus also rate a mention. We would often see them in the garden, especially around breeding time. Occasionally they would venture into the kitchen, leaving a trail of telltale droppings. But they never acted like mice and attacked stored food, so we were very careful not to injure them. We found that their weakness was apple peel, so each year, when they returned to the kitchen, we would leave a very tall spaghetti jar with peel at the bottom, under the mantle. They could not resist and would pile in one after another, and not be able to climb back up the slippery glass. With plenty of food, they would settle in for the night and we would release them the next morning. One morning we found we had a family of five. They could be easily relocated to what we knew to be their territory, and after a short time, they would stop their nocturnal visits, at least until next season. Of course, not all creatures were so welcome. Early on, we had some annoying damage done by bush rats to a rare nineteenth century ornamental leather frame. It was so delicate that we had had our removalists make it a bespoke crate, with a floor and sides, but no top. Sadly, on arrival, it was left on the floor in the billiards room, and during one of our first nights at Sefton Hall, the bush rats hopped in and had a party. Ever after, we were alert to the damage they could do. We also had the occasional wandering dingo and at least one fox, trying to escape a nearby bushfire. A special mention should also go to another problem resident - the leeches. There were certain areas in the wild areas beyond the main hedges that you could guarantee you would come in contact with them. Over the years, Robert only had to deal with them occasionally, but Peter was always something of a leech magnet, bringing them into all parts of the house, including the bedrooms.

We did have a brief brush with celebrity in 2011, when a location scout for the new film version of The Great Gatsby contacted us. Some time thereafter, we had Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin, plus entourage, at the front door. They had climbed up the rustic staircase from the Avenue, looking for suitable sites to film in. We were relieved when they decided that the garden was perfect, but that we simply had too many large tree ferns. They could be edited out with CGI, but, apparently, it was an expensive process, and they had to keep a close hold on the budget. Robert remembers a particularly pleasant conversation with Catherine Martin, standing by the central fountain. Then, the famous couple swept on, their entourage in close pursuit. As it happened, the actual filming coincided with some of the heaviest rain we had experienced. Mount Wilsonites looked on as the production crew's charabancs sank into the mud at the Silva Plana Sports Field. Filming had to be postponed to a later date, and some costly repairs had to be made to Silva Plana.

As part of our gardening, we undertook extensive propagation work. Our greatest success was in propagating the monkey puzzle tree, something that had, according to John Clark, eluded even their then neighbour at Nooroo, renowned plantsman Peter Valder. More useful products came from hundreds of successful cuttings of several types of box, which allowed us to plant extensive dwarf hedges along our new drive from The Avenue and in various other areas, including by the Church Lane gates and around the central fountain. In fact, the box hedge and the accompanying bluebells around the main fountain were one of the last things we introduced, so it is good to see them maturing well. We also had much success grafting flowering cherries, growing on various red or unusual Japanese maple seedlings, and with aerial layering of camellias. The products of all these efforts could be seen all over the garden when we left. We also take pride in our preservation of the Clark's extensive hydrangea collection. We were alerted to their significance in an early welcoming visit by Richard Prentice. Thereafter, we managed them carefully and propagated all of them so that they could be planted throughout the garden, and added many new varieties to the collection ourselves.

Not everything worked out well. The success of the small pond encouraged us to think big, so we chose a site over beyond the massive cypress, cleared it and excavated quite a large area where we planned to instal a huge rubber pond liner. It wasn't a high priority, so we started planting around the site. That is when the silver birches, and some more rugosas were planted

nearby, and yet more bulbs. However, the pond plan was ultimately abandoned. With the small pond we were told we could have fish or frogs, but not both. We swear that frogs had arrived within 24 hours of first filling the pond, so we chose frogs – squatters' rights perhaps. We hadn't really had any trouble with snakes. In our naivety we had assumed that it was just too cold for them. There was a resident red bellied black snake but we knew where he was, and he was more scared of us than we were of him. He was still a danger to the dogs, so we set out a safe area for them in the courtyard we had created at the back of the house, where they could play unsupervised. On Robert's birthday, two days before Christmas, a tiger snake came under the gate and went straight for both dogs. Oscar, our beautiful Irish terrier killed it with a look of triumph on his face, but, within seconds, full paralysis struck. Purdey, our much smaller Lakeland terrier, rushed to his aid and received a secondary bite. We had a mad dash to our Lithgow vet, frantically phoning ahead. Despite three vials of anti venom, poor Oscar succumbed to a heart attack 48 hours later. Purdey survived, and was still with us until July 2019, when she died very peacefully at the advanced age of fifteen and a half. What has this to do with our grand pond scheme? We soon had an influx of tiger snakes, one even getting into the house. As soon as we learned that their favourite food was frogs, we understood the problem. We left the small pond, but we weren't going to provide the snakes with a smorgasbord. The large pond site became at first a huge compost pit, and then, as we did more and more chipping after storm damage, a very large wood chip site. The sad event also highlighted the quiet community spirit so often evident in Mount Wilson. On hearing our sad news, the lovely Wai Davidson, over at Windyridge, sent her gardener over with a load of plants “to cheer us up”.

It is hard to believe that when we first started, the old staircase (originally a rustic staircase rather than a grand staircase) was completely impassable, largely hidden under decades of fallen branches and leaf litter. It took much hard work over many years for us to expose it, by removing the giant cherry laurels, holly, and tree ivy which had overwhelmed it in the decades before. Replacing the rotting timber risers was always on our to do list, especially once we had properly exposed them, but never got to the top of the list. Tim Gow has done a beautiful job reinstating the middle garden staircase down the centre of the garden. By 2019 we had done all of the necessary clearing on either side and built the dry stone walls where it meets our newly created gravel drive. Our work on this middle garden has prospered particularly well after years of good rain. We planted many more daffodils, irises, red hot pokers and nerines to naturalise under the surviving mature trees, creating a beautiful woodland garden effect, along with occasional hydrangeas and some more Japanese maples. Our dwarf and medium box hedges along the new drive we created were already well established before we left, but it is good to see them adding the structure we intended. Robert grew every one of those box bushes from cuttings.

Of course Robert's infamous to do list never shrank, but only ever expanded. Periodic repairs on the house and billiards room were usually a priority. Over time, the harsh winter climate and the humidity took a toll on both. It is important to remember that Sefton Hall had been built in extraordinarily difficult circumstances and was nowhere near the quality of build of Henry Marcus Clark's Sydney residence, Mount Wilga at Hornsby. Robert occasionally laughed about the misaligned tiles in the bathroom, or, his particular favourite, the offcuts of architrave fitted at the bottom because the original carpenter had run out of full lengths. However, he couldn't just nip down to Bunnings, and we respected his obvious make do and mend attitude. After heavy rain or yet another storm, we often found ourselves rebuilding sections of Tony Clark's dry-stone walls along the Church Lane frontage, which had replaced an earlier post and rail fence. Until we rebuilt it, the back of the house was little more than a very basic lean to and the sheds more like a shanty town. The Liddles had given them a quick coat of paint and they were always useful. “You can never have too many sheds”, Robert declared on first seeing them, and, once we had established a courtyard and cleaned up their interiors, they gave us sterling service. They even lead to our first introduction to the redoubtable Mary Reynolds, the acknowledged historian of Mount Wilson. Out for her regular walk up Church Lane, she saw us working in the garden, came straight up, introduced herself and launched into an exposition on how significant

the sheds were, from a heritage perspective, and why they should be preserved. Apparently, in the Liddle's time, there had been some talk of replacing them with a modern shed and garage. She really wasn't even happy with the coat of heritage paint they had been given. We instinctively agreed with her, and we think she left happy, knowing that while we were there, the sheds would be safe. They gave a certain rambling charm to that area of the garden.

All the longer term residents of Mount Wilson have probably heard about our ongoing war with the ivy. It was the single biggest problem we faced. Every time she saw we were deflated, Mount Wilson's ultimate garden champion, Libby Raines, would give us a few words of encouragement, assuring us that we were doing a wonderful job and getting ahead of it. We also benefitted from the advice of Tim and Kim Gow, who were always the best ivy clearers on the Mount. The Gows had faced similar problems with the ivy when Paul and Lis first took on Sefton Cottage. The ivy has always been a massive problem at Sefton Hall and all over Mount Wilson. One of the reasons remnant ivy survives is that it takes root under valuable and historic plants, preventing the use of poisons. Hard yakka is then the only option, and we did plenty of that in our time. Over 19 years, we gave the war on ivy our best shot. From our experience, we were never convinced that it would ever completely succeed, especially as there were so many historic and beautiful plants that needed to be saved and nurtured. Perhaps ultimate success will come only after another thirty years of battle at the level we undertook, relentlessly line trimming and, clad in full protective suits, carefully spraying.

The end of our time at Sefton Hall came unexpectedly. Robert was still recovering from some recent surgery, and so his to do list was a little behind schedule. A series of storms had returned us to the era of major storm damage, and we had entered the driest period we had known since our earliest years at Mount Wilson. The garden was under stress; with many plants struggling. That was ironic, because we had arrived in Mount Wilson during the Millenium drought, and found ourselves having to bucket water to large numbers of stressed plants. Used to water scarcity in Adelaide, Robert had wondered aloud why we had made the move. Indeed, it was several years before we could revive the lush green lawns with which we became more familiar and Robert spent many years spreading the hardy buffalo runners that could withstand periodic dry periods. As 2019 continued to deteriorate, Robert was beginning to revue his street coordinator duties and make sure everything was in readiness. However, Sefton Hall was not on the market in 2019 and had not been prepared for sale. We had no thought of selling at the time. Indeed we had been undertaking some major infrastructure repairs on the assumption that we could carry on for some years to come. Among them, we upgraded the water supply, with a new rubber liner and roof for the inground tank and a new very large gravity feed tank with a food grade polymer lining. Then we had had an unsolicited approach from Martin Schoeddert, from Iris Property, asking if we were interested in selling. He said he had a prospective purchaser for Sefton Hall interested in making an off market purchase. We are both realists and understood that we would not be able to maintain Sefton Hall to our standards forever. Perhaps, we thought, the timing was right, not in five or ten more years. We were also influenced by the prospect of an off market sale and the simplicity that it appeared to offer, given that it would minimise the stresses of open inspections, decluttering, house styling, and all the associated rigmarole, and the sale costs would be less. The house was sold on 16 September 2019, with settlement on 9 December 2019. By that settlement day Mount Wilson was engulfed in the thick smoke which became the ominous trademark of the Black Summer fires. During the three month settlement period, we endeavoured to keep the garden well maintained despite water shortages, the lack of rain and the approaching Gosper Mountain fire, at the same time as we were packing up our extensive collections. Several large trees came down in storms in the last quarter of 2019 and we had professionals deal with them. Despite recent setbacks and the developing fire emergency, we were in full control of the garden and managing it well, and to a high standard.

In retrospect we would not have sold the house off market. A conventional sale would have left a photographic record of the house and garden at the time of sale. It is one of the features of changed real estate marketing techniques over the last 20 years that will be a boon to historians

and restorers in the future. Given how exceptional Sefton Hall is, we regretted that we had not given it an opportunity to have its time in the sun. Of course, the downside is a certain loss of privacy, which both of us value. Fortunately, we have kept our own extensive archive and we have the beautiful images of the Sefton Hall garden taken by Ian Brown, a professional photographer, for Alison Halliday and Joanne Hambrett's 2010 book A Passion for Place: Gardens of the Blue Mountains.
Our restoration work continued apace for another decade after those images were taken and the delightful description was written.

Over our 19 years at Sefton Hall we had many compliments on the work we were doing. Our long term neighbours at Sefton Cottage, Lis and Paul Gow, gave us endless advice, support and encouragement. Many was the time that their son Tim and his wife Kim, boosted our flagging spirits when we faced another day line trimming and poisoning ivy, removing feral plants or cleaning up the debris left by yet another storm. Our other neighbours at Nooroo, Lorraine and Tony Barrett were always supportive. Associate Professor Ian Jack, Robert's university mentor and long term colleague and friend, was full of praise when he visited in 2003 as part of his updating of Blue Mountains heritage surveys. In his inimitable dry style, he recorded in the updated heritage survey: “After the property finally passed from the Clarks in 1995 substantial changes were made to the interior of the house and to the garden, but the advent of the present owners in 2001 has brought a reprieve for the 1911-12 detailing both in the billiards room and in Sefton Hall“. In later years Ian brought a National Trust group to the house and was astonished at just how much we had achieved in the middle and lower gardens. As a Mount Wilson enthusiast over many decades, he knew just how far those areas had been allowed to deteriorate. Members of the Clark family visited from time to time and offered their support and appreciation. In 2013, the extended Clark clan held a commemoration function at the community hall to mark the centenary of Henry Marcus Clark's death at Sefton Hall. Many of them visited the house and garden and were full of praise for the restoration work we had undertaken. John Clark, on another visit, told us stories of his time growing up in the house. One that sticks in the memory is how, as a teenager, it was his job to occasionally dig out the septic tanks.  On another occasion, Jeremy Clarke, over from Italy with his partner to celebrate his brother's birthday, was particularly moved by how well we had recreated the spirit of the gardens of his childhood. We have also had numerous family visits from our extended families in Sydney and Adelaide. Many hundreds of photographs have been the result. Indeed, a member of Peter's family came over from Adelaide shortly after we had signed the contract for sale but before we had started to pack everything up, and made a photographic record of both the house and garden. Throughout the entire period of our ownership of Sefton Hall, we took hundreds of photographs and maintained records of almost everything we did on the house or in the garden. We can probably account for everything, right down to the detail of how many times, and when, the lawns were mowed. Who would believe that Robert can be just a little obsessive?

We are pleased that future generations will be able to enjoy all the many beautiful plants we introduced, and benefit from our years of hard work.  We were working for the long term future of Sefton Hall. Heritage properties like Sefton Hall are a cumulative effort. The work of all the contributors should be respected and acknowledged. Some elements of the original Cox garden survive, particularly the many surviving mature trees and the important role of the hedges, as do many elements of the long period of Clark family custodianship. By the end of that period, both house and garden were in serious decline. Tony Liddle and his wife Jan should be credited with saving the formal sections of the house and beginning the revival of the garden near the house. We are very proud that we were able to maintain and upgrade their work and to rescue the garden from the ruin that the bulk of it was in when we took over. At the risk of seeming immodest, we claim credit for saving the historic Sefton Hall garden from oblivion. Our friends and family members agree. We spent nearly 19 very active years working ourselves relentlessly. At no time in those years was the garden ever dormant. We were still pruning, chipping and clearing right up until 9 December 2019. We remain very proud that, over those 19

years of our tenure, apart from the specialist tree work and the occasional heavy machinery work, we did the vast majority of the work outlined above ourselves.

This article is our way of setting down clearly our work over our years at Sefton Hall. It sets out the historical record and has also allowed us to reflect on our lives in Mount Wilson. Neither of us have ever been inclined to publicity or vainglory. Thankfully, social media was not a thing for the early years of our time in Mount Wilson. In any event, self serving self promotion was of no interest to us. We both valued our privacy. Peter loved our house and garden as a sanctuary from his extremely stressful professional life, and Robert, always task oriented and with decades of heritage experience, saw it as a war to be won, requiring strategies, patience and determination. Looking back on our records for this article has given us both great pride in our achievement in saving such a beautiful and historic garden. It has also reminded us of just how hard that work was. Perhaps ours is a cautionary tale for the many gardeners of Mount Wilson. Document your hard work so that it becomes an integral part of the history of your properties.

We handed on a heritage house and garden in good order, requiring little more than ongoing maintenance and continued hard work. We had transformed the garden, since 2001, into something that Henry Marcus Clark and his family would have easily recognised, with its beautiful formal and semi formal areas, the firm basis for a fine woodland garden, and a magical rainforest garden along The Avenue, and we are both very proud of that work.

Peter Anderson and Robert Nicol

## IMAGES

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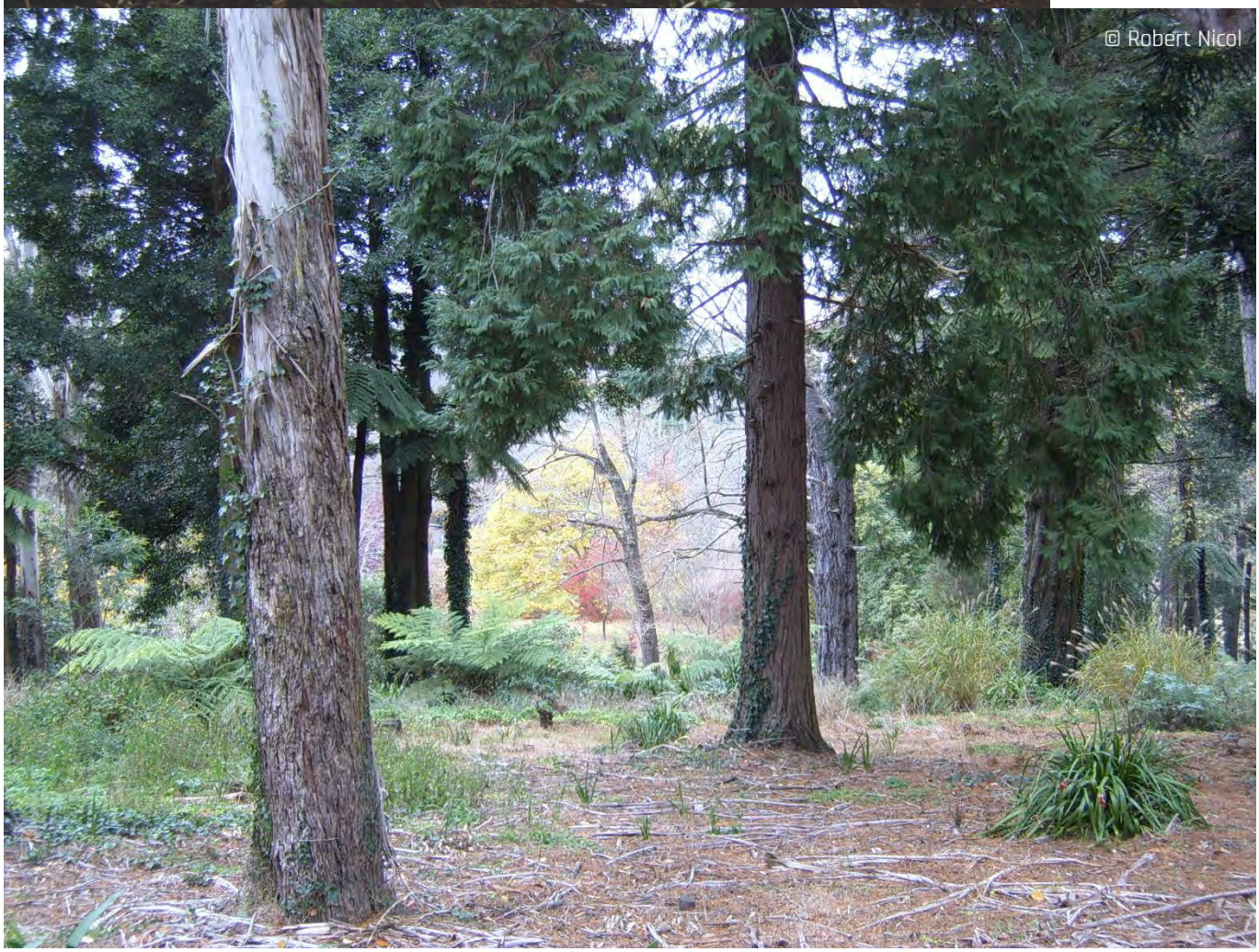
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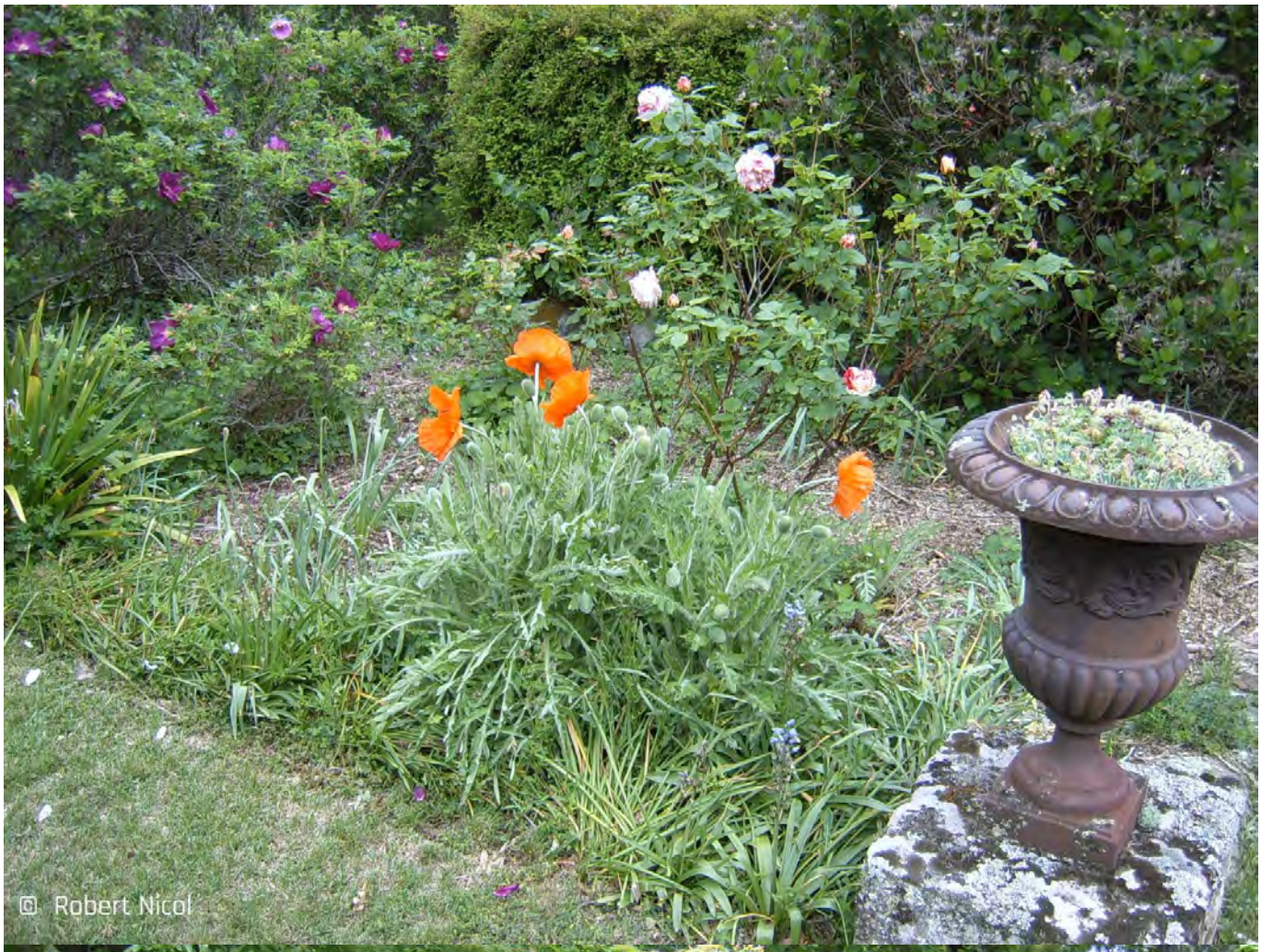
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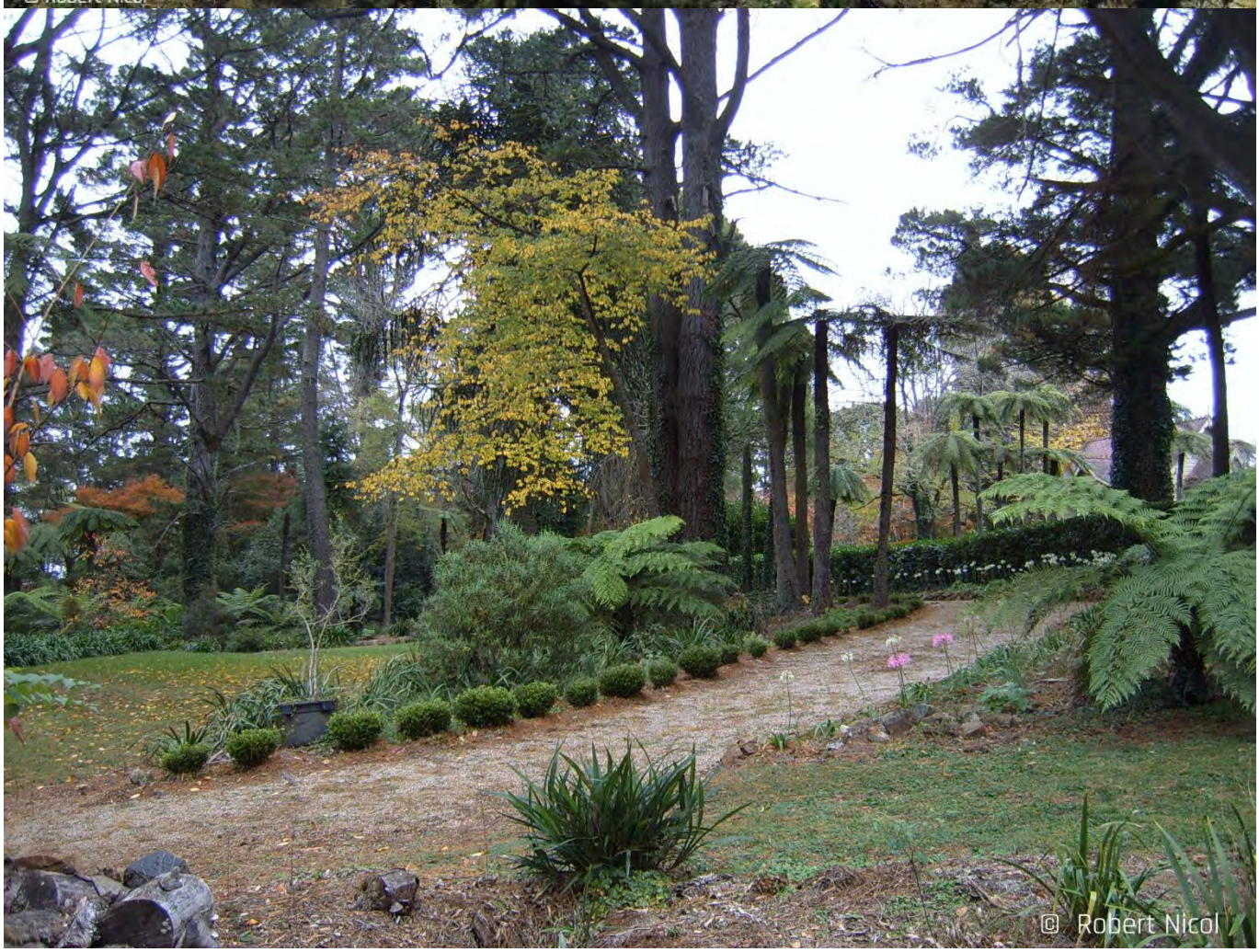
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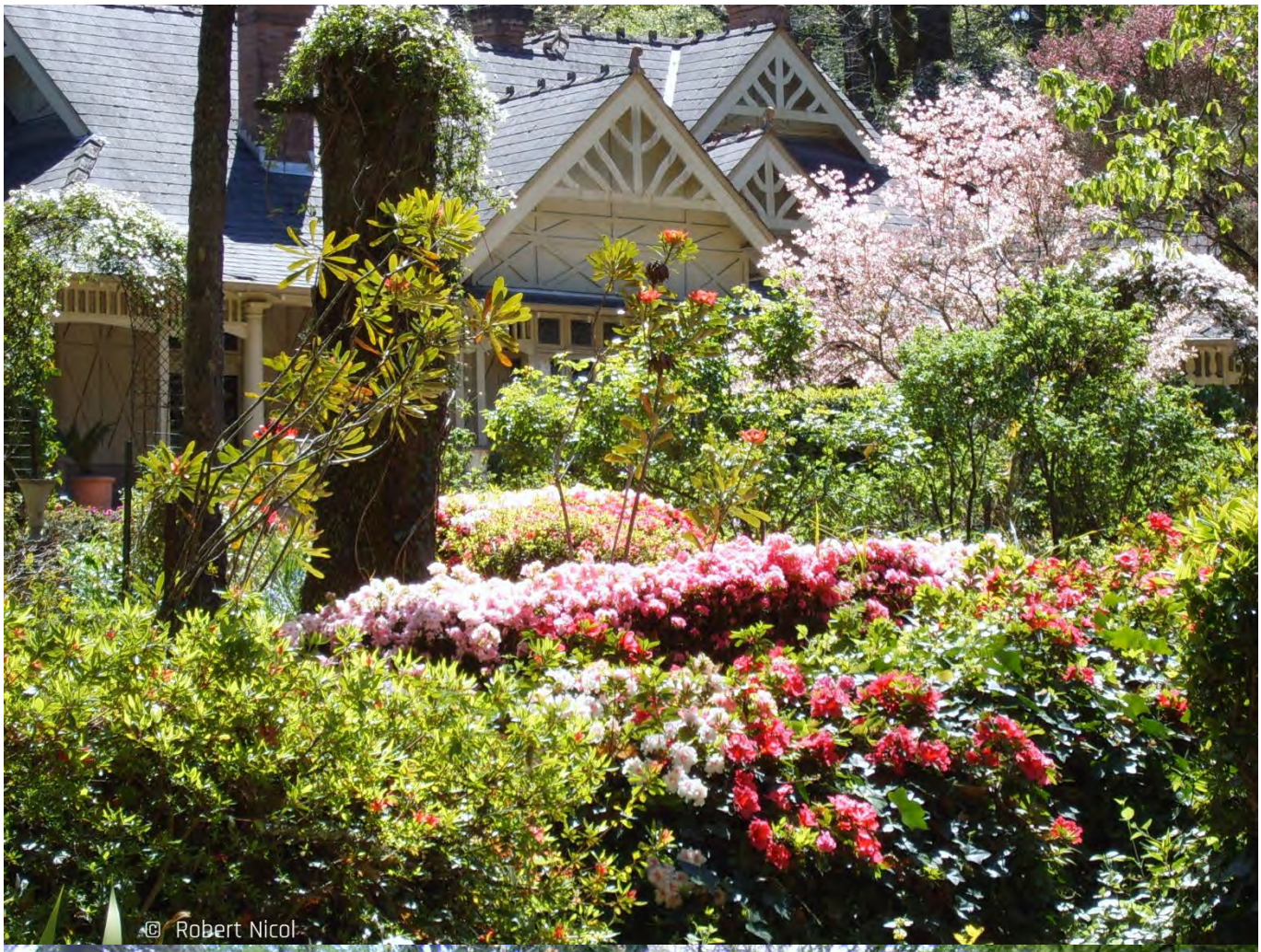
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Fig.1: The old drive from The Avenue where it crossed the boundary into Sefton Cottage. It was originally lined with elms, most of which have survived, from the days when it led to Balangra,

Fig. 2: The original entrance from The Avenue, looking down to the elaborate stone entrance pillars built for James Dalrymple Cox. The old drive was largely impassable to pedestrians let alone vehicles when we first started on the restoration of the Sefton Hall gardens. On the left you can see what happens when a formal cherry laurel hedge is no longer maintained. Hundreds of seedlings spread throughout the lower and middle gardens.

Fig. 3: The recovered cherry laurel hedge behind the main gate on The Avenue. The change in the light was extraordinary and, after much work, the old drive was fully accessible and connected once more to the main house. The gate is actually a replica of the original [now replaced once again Ed.]. We had hoped to save it, but after years of being in a very dark and damp environment, rot had set in and it was in need of major work.

Fig. 4: The rustic staircase which runs down the center of the gardens from the main hedge around the lawn, to the original drive leading from The Avenue. This is after we have exposed the stairs by removing all the feral vegetation which made them unusable, but before we attacked the feral vegetation on either side. While long popular for formal hedges, cherry laurels actually grow in to large trees, as can be seen from these examples all the way up the slope. They have benefitted from decades of neglect, creating a dark, damp environment, perfect for their own spread, and for the ivy. Early on, there was some debate about whether we should preserve this "magical" garden as part of the history of Sefton Hall. But, in fact, their survival would simply have allowed feral infestations to continue their spread. By the time we left, we had cleared the slopes, opened up the middle garden to light, created new access points, introduced more suitable plants and had the staircase ready for the timber risers to be renewed. Magical though it might have seemed, we were glad to see the end of all semblance of a Jurassic park garden.

Figs. 5 and 6: Early clearing work at the top of the middle garden. The ferals were bad enough, but the ivy was simply relentless.

Fig. 7: The same area as Fig. 5 after all the feral plants had been removed, revealing a vista over Nooroo in the background. There is still some clearing to be done, and we then undertook extensive underplanting with daffodils, with irises along the borders where our new road crossed through, and the occasional red hot poker and other plants, producing a beautiful woodland garden, particularly in the Spring.

Fig. 8: To paraphrase Crocodile Dundee – that's not a neglected garden, this is a neglected garden. The scene that originally confronted us in the middle and lower gardens.

Fig.9 : Robert, before Sefton Hall turned his hair grey, with one of his many pile burns, on the slope adjacent to Nooroo. The thicket of feral cherry laurels, holly, ivy and tree ivy, as well as dead tree ferns, ran all the way down the slope to The Avenue, getting worse as it went.

Fig. 10: The massive barrel of the dead pine tree near the house, which was one of our first big, and expensive, jobs. It crushed the wild privet thicket below and set us on the path of establishing the kitchen garden. The trunk was complete with a run of large iron spikes up its height. Alan Gunn told us that when he was a child, along with his mates, they would climb to the top, from where they could see the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We warned our tree lopper, but despite all his precautions, and to his dismay, his first cut struck a deeply embedded spike and ruined a brand new chain on his mammoth chain saw.

Figs. 11 and 12: The garden still under the strain of the Millenium drought, we began massive bulb planting and creating new garden beds where there was previously only parched lawn struggling to survive. Over time, the daffodils proved far hardier than the tulips. We later altered the new garden bed alongside the billiard room to accommodate a pathway to assist with maintaining the hydrangeas which became a beautiful feature of this area, and to develop the arbored walkway between our new bronze fountain and the Clark's sundial.

Fig. 13: Another new garden bed which we established early on around a cement garden feature installed by the Liddles. We spent countless hours carting the heavy basalt rocks – and planting bulbs. Ordering bulbs by the hundreds was exhilarating, but the excitement could quickly wear off when you realized that each one had to be individually planted by hand.

Fig. 14: The area under the monkey puzzle tree after it had been cleared of the wild thickets and a new garden bed created. Ivy still clings on everywhere. Adjacent to the blackwood is one of the first of the waratahs we planted.

Fig. 15: Peter rescuing one of the sandstone plinths from the wilderness beyond the main hedge, long before we had created our new road connections, or Robert had built his first dry stone wall in the background. Almost everything had to be taken up or down by hand. A beautiful pink camellia from the Clarks' time survives, but is in need of care, and the beginnings of one of our new garden beds can be seen on the left. The Millenium drought is still in full swing, obvious from the crisp dry grass.

Fig. 16: Very early spring signs of our developing new garden beds. By 2019, they looked as though they had always been there.

Fig. 17: The first of two major attacks on the original garage by the elms along the Church Lane frontage. This is after we had cleared all the canopy debris from the gravel in order to gain better access.

Fig. 18: One of Tony Liddle's rhododendron plantings, with Robert's first dry stone wall in the background.

Fig. 19: Oriental poppies, floribunda and rugosa roses, fading bluebells and daffodils, a new garden bed and new urn, all introduced by us.

Fig. 20: Our magnificent oriental poppies, purchased early on in our work., at a rare plant fair held in Bilpin.

Fig. 21: The secondary path from Church Lane to the house after our clean up and bulb planting mania. In the background are the Liddles' pieris, now well advanced, and in the foregound, some of our new shrubs. On the left is the end section of the serpentine dwarf hebe hedge which we planted between this path and the main path from the gates to the house. In the background, the path pictured leads down to an entirely new path we created which runs parallel to Church Lane and which we lined with yet more camellias.

Fig.22: The magnificent dogwood which puts on a fabulous show in spring and again in autumn. The tapestry azalea hedge dates from the Clark era, but had been adversely affected by the huge rhododendron ponticum which we removed. We then set about restoring it, creating a new point and connecting path, growing new cuttings from the original azaleas and extending the tapestry hedge. Periodically, we had to replace diseased original azaleas, but always with cuttings from the healthy originals. In the background is the revived privet hedge around the kitchen garden. Once it had thickened up, we began more careful shaping and lowering so that it could be safely hedged from ground level.

Fig. 23: Our newly created drive connecting the house to the middle and lower gardens and to The Avenue. This is where it crosses the original rustic staircase. We have removed all the large feral cherry laurels and hollies and opened the middle garden up under the surviving mature trees as a beautiful woodland garden. Robert built the dry-stone retaining walls using the heavy basalt rocks exposed by the excavation work, or carried from his piles of rocks from all over the garden.

Fig. 24: The new drive where it connected with the main garden. There are new garden beds under the mature trees, a new dwarf box hedge, dwarf dry-stone walling, many more bulbs, and naturalizing nerines. We created the new level lawn area as a marquee site for a family wedding, after removing all the feral privet which had made it impassable. Like most of our pictures, there are still obvious signs that it is all a work in progress. The basalt edging was subsequently extended all the way around the bed on the right. On the left edge is an example of our successful grafting program. This is a beautiful double pink flowering cherry taken from a cutting from the small group which were on The Avenue.

Fig. 25: Aerial view of Sefton Hall 2014. Our restoration work is showing obvious dividends. The Millenium drought is well and truly over and the rains have returned. The formal and semi formal gardens are looking better than they had for decades, and the new kitchen garden behind the privet is well established. Beyond the main cherry laurel hedge, our new paths and roads, together with the clearing of feral vegetation, are opening up our woodland garden.

Fig. 26: Restored arbors with beautiful clematis, flower filled perennial borders and a picture perfect fountain.

Fig. 27: The view through the restored arbors in the opposite direction, with an original Clark period sundial in the distance. Robert's miniature daffodils along the edges have finished, but the bluenbells, which we planted everywhere, are still putting on a show, as they continue to do to this day. By now, our newly created perennial gardens are developing just as we had planned.

Fig.28: The newly created kitchen garden behind the clipped privet walls, with our northern hemisphere sundial in the background.

Fig. 29: The new pond, which we dug out ourselves, fitted with a rubber liner, installed the bronze fountain, and then created a new garden bed around it. In the right background is the

magnificent mature linden tree and a mature chestnut. In the mid ground is yet another of our new basalt edged garden beds. The ‘bookleaf’ stone on the right was only discovered when we cleared a thicket of ground ivy and lamium.

Fig 30: The Clark's magnificent hydrangeas in full bloom and well looked after once again. They have been a feature of the Sefton Hall frontage for decades, and we are very pleased by our early decision to conserve and propagate them. The day lily by the urns was one of our additions, with its contrasting colour and hardiness in a difficult spot.

Fig. 31: A wall of vivid azaleas, with some of our early rhododendron and hydrangea plantings in the background.

Fig. 32: Some of our new garden beds in their spring glory after years of development and some good rain years.

Fig. 33: The English country garden that so many of the early residents aspired to. Beautiful, but it was always hard work for us to keep up the standard.

Fig. 34: We have hundreds of images of autumn leaves and spring flowers, but some of our most beautiful pictures are of Sefton Hall in the snow, showing off the structure of our garden to great advantage.

Fig. 35: The tourist view from the Church Lane gates, with Robert's topiary swan standing guard in the middle ground.

Fig. 36: Our last wet summer in Mount Wilson 2018/2019. Also one of Robert's last projects – establishing a new garden bed around the fountain and planting yet another dwarf box hedge. The two cockatoos had other ideas, keen for a drink, they made it clear they would stay as long as they liked.

Fig. 37: The day we left on 9 December 2019, the whole of Mount Wilson was engulfed in smoke from the Gosper Mountain fire, and the lawns were parched. This a more familiar summer scene, and exactly what returned once the fire danger had passed and the rains returned in 2020.