

Presentation to EcoNetwork AGM

by

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Historic gardens and climate change: where do we start?



AUSTRALIAN
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SOCIETY

The Australian Garden History Society was established in 1980. Its founding members wanted to see the best conservation practices applied to gardens and landscapes as an equal ‘type’ of heritage to buildings and other artefacts. They and newer members come from across the political spectrum united in their love of gardens. Many are professional heritage practitioners, landscape architects, botanists; others are very well-informed amateurs.

AGHS defines gardens very broadly. It is concerned with grand old private and public gardens but not exclusively. Indeed, as we see the suburban backyard disappear, it too deserves the attention of historians and heritage professionals.

The patron of the Society is Professor Tim Entwisle, until last year Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Victoria, which is part of the Botanic Gardens Climate Change Alliance. In 2022 Tim undertook to chair a working group to help AGHS articulate its position on climate change. The task we had was to frame our work within the global and national context, but also to make it specific to our audience: the AGHS organisation and owners of historic gardens, private and public.

That working group came up with a [framework for action](#) accompanied by a ‘living’ document, namely ongoing posts on the AGHS website’s [climate adaptation](#) pages. Overall, the framework is a cautious document because when we are talking about conserving a living thing like a garden, we have to take change as continuous given. Moreover, when it comes to heritage, it is important to understand how our relationship with the past has changed. That is why, for example, the framework urges people to take account of First Nations knowledge about sites and to strive to consult with local people about what should be conserved and how. It’s also important to be considered in choosing plant species to replace ones that have come to the end of their life or haven’t coped well with changing conditions. The framework also encourages partnerships and alliances as important in advocating for action on climate change and finding the best solutions.



In December 2019, the Melbourne Botanic Gardens lost a 150-year-old white oak (*Quercus alba*). It has been replaced by three new species; *Quercus lobata*, *Quercus nigra* and *Quercus rysophylla*, which the Gardens' modelling suggests will cope better with Melbourne's climate over the next century. Photo courtesy Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

A more recent project has been a series of articles about [Antipodean historic gardens and climate change](#). This presents case studies and stories about how garden owners and managers are getting down to the everyday business of tackling global warming. For gardeners this can seem little different from their previous responses to the vagaries of the weather. The issue they now confront is the frequency of the extremes and the necessity to be not only reactive but also to start future proofing their gardens in ways that can preserve their character even if they require different plantings and maintenance regimes. The collection offers grass roots observations about the effects of climate change and shows that we can all contribute to facing this momentous challenge.