

# Newsletter

*For Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens Inc  
To Promote, Protect & Preserve*

*No 105, Spring 2016*

## **Past President's Report**

On Sunday I handed the Presidential baton on to Jeanette Christensen and she graciously allowed me to write this, my final report.

The AGM provided few changes, the most significant being the establishment of a new membership category – Life Members. This appropriately caps off our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, allowing us to honour some of the folk who have made extraordinary contributions to the work of the Friends over many years. The (old) Committee decided not to announce the four candidates we had in mind at the AGM but there will be a special occasion in the near future when all will be revealed and when we can appropriately recognize them.

While I stay on as Immediate Past President (a position now officially recognised in our rules at the AGM) it will be the start of a bowing-out process. As president you become very aware of the many members who work tirelessly for the Friends and ultimately for the benefit of our wonderful Gardens and for the visitors they attract. It also provides an insight in to the frustrations the staff experience working within the bureaucratic processes of the City Council and their own management structure.

I believe we are the threshold of some exciting developments in the Gardens. The Trust is set up ready to get on with fundraising and the Spatial Plan is about to be presented opening the door for detailed design of the aspirational projects included in the 2007 Management Plan. This will challenge the decision makers in the council - one Siamese twin bridge or two? Gondwana - what story to tell? Subjective design decisions are often the most difficult.

But help is at hand; consultants from Auckland and Wellington will help on the Spatial Plan, and collection advisors from Auckland and Dunedin to tell our Christchurch/Canterbury story. We just need to ensure the plans and documents produced don't end up in the capacious 'bottom drawers' with all the other past plans while nothing ends up on the ground.

Thank you, members of the 'Friends', for the many friendships and fun times. I wish Jeanette and the new Committee all the best for the next term. I look forward to still being part of the action.

Alan Morgan

## Garden News

### From Curator John Clemens

I thought it might help readers get a better feel for how the still relatively new Conservation & Sustainable Development team fits into the work we do in the Botanic Gardens and the wider parks network. Kristina Macdonald (ecologist), Trevor Partridge (botanist), and Sue Molloy (botanical resources coordinator), give you a personal insight into recent topics of interest below.

The Friends are closely involved in what we do as a team. Congratulations and thank you for allowing us to get the Botanic Gardens Herbarium up and running, and for supporting the University of Canterbury Summer Research Scholarships Scheme, made possible by steadfast propagation activities. You also support our Library financially, and you help bring the plant collections and their stories to life through guiding and other events. With your help we are fulfilling the Botanic Gardens Primary Goal “to promote understanding and appreciation of the world’s flora ...”.

#### *A passion for research and investigation*

Hello readers of the Friends Newsletter. This section comes from Kristina Macdonald. I’m the ecologist on the team and have been working with John, Sue and Trevor, just shy of a year now. John thought you might like to read about what our team does directly from us.

A main focus in our team and something I’m really passionate about, is research and investigation. This is an important function that will help the Council reach its conservation and biodiversity objectives. This work is done with the aim of promoting, protecting and enhancing biodiversity through improved management of our parks and waterways.

Investigation consists of both field work and literature reviews in order to pass on the best information we can to staff and inform on management. Examples of investigations carried out by our team in the past year include herbicide use in parks, monarch butterfly decline, and urban biodiversity.

In terms of research, our team has been involved with co-supervising research with the University of Canterbury. Recently, we have contributed to work on native mistletoes and aquatic plants. We are also conducting our own research on Council-owned land to help long term management and conservation. For example, we are monitoring vegetation in the semi-natural grassland areas of McLeans Island to improve grazing management for conservation values.



Green mistletoe, pirita (*Ileostylus micranthus*) studied during last summer’s research project co-sponsored by the Friends and the University of Canterbury

Being the central team for conservation research within the Parks Unit, the team is currently prioritising research needs from other teams and units with the aim of carrying out more research to be used in the future.

The Christchurch Botanic Gardens is an important part of our parks system, and will no doubt feature in further investigation and research. Additionally, the Botanic Gardens provides us with a means of educating and sharing with the public, conservation and biodiversity work occurring within the city, including the management of those pest plants that threaten the biodiversity we love and enjoy. This work helps fulfil Botanic Gardens Goals 5 and 8: To study plants and environment (ecology) and contribute to a greater

understanding and use of plants through scientific research.

#### *Naming plants in the Botanic Gardens*

Trevor Partridge, Botanist for Christchurch City Council writes: The Botanic Gardens contain a large number of specimens of plants with a range of origins and information associated with them. They are referenced primarily through the accession records, which may or may not be updated through the life of the plants. Labels are sometimes produced for specimens, but these don't always have a degree of permanence.

These living collections are of considerable importance and hopefully will be augmented by significant additions in the future. In order that the plants receive appropriate botanical treatment, I have undertaken the role of ensuring the botanical integrity of names. So far, this has mostly involved checking names for labels, but it is intended that the Herbarium becomes an important long-term record of what is, and has been, in the Botanic Gardens. As the Herbarium comes on-line, the collection and preparation of specimens for lodging will be encouraged. That will give taxonomists the opportunity of working on specimens that have been planted, even if they fail to survive. This will allow for nomenclatural changes to be recorded better. There are specimens in the Herbarium that require such updating and identification, for example where taxa have been divided. The recent division of *Sophora* (kowhai) is one such situation that requires re-assessment of both living and herbarium specimens so that labels and records can be kept up to date.

The challenges involve improving the past and doing better in the future. The former involves trying to consolidate a rather confusing situation that has arisen through a haphazard recording system from the past. Take the specimen illustrated, it has a number but no other information, the record data has not been entered (the specimen is old) and we have no idea where the specimen came from. We suspect it is a New Zealand specimen of clubmoss (*Lycopodium*) but we don't know if it has come from the wild or cultivation. We can't tell if it is related to one of the collections grown in the Gardens (none of which appear to be alive now). The future involves ensuring that specimens are curated properly from

the moment they arrive in the Gardens. Only then can botanical lessons be learned and the collections reach their full value.



A clubmoss of (for the time being) unknown origin and identity, which will receive attention in the new Herbarium.

#### *Great botanical coordination*

Hi Friends, Sue Molloy here. Many of you know me already. I am also part of the fairly new Conservation & Sustainable Development Team. As Botanical Resources Coordinator I am lucky to be in a position where I can share information and help colleagues source information be it botanical or historical.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Friends again for your most generous annual grant to the Gardens library. It is much appreciated by all and certainly a privilege for me to select books on your behalf to enhance our collection. Your ideas and suggestions are always welcome.

We continue our long and proud relationship with the Council's Christchurch City Libraries, which since 1958 have covered, catalogued and repaired our book collection, and bound together sets of journals within the ever expanding journal collection. You can track just what we have through the Libraries catalogue – or simply give me a call. Remember, the library is there for your use too!



A peaceful reading corner in the Botanic Gardens Library, surrounded by books, including Bill Sykes' Flora of the Cook Islands, botanical paintings by Hugh Wilson (donated by the Canterbury Botanical Society), and Gordon Gee, and John Armstrong's portrait.

Moving on to the Gardens plant database. A sizeable amount of the past year has been taken up making considerable improvements to the plant database, which we have been eagerly awaiting for some time. Some of the fantastic changes include the ability to incorporate plant images, easier mapping, importing records from our accession ledgers, and the ability to link with the herbarium records. These improvements have been made possible by Warwick Inch who is a Technical Application Specialist with the Council's IT team. It is the first time that we have had a dedicated database "buddy" and I have so much to thank Warwick for.

In fact, 2016 marks the 60th year of continuous plant record accessioning, which began here thanks to Lawrie Metcalf. From personal experience that's a lot of information! Database management remains a continuing process of incorporating, checking, and using information. Previously, the way in which we could process labels, was rather laborious. We have just done a test run of over 120 *Veronica (Hebe)* labels for Dean Pendrigh, using our new system. Make sure you go and check them out!

## Events in the Gardens

From Sarah Mankelow  
Interpretation and exhibition designer  
Customer and Community Services

### Flower Power Discover Trail

The Botanic Gardens just wouldn't BEE the same without flowers! This spring, the Christchurch Botanic Gardens Discovery Trail explores pollination with Bella the Bee. Self-guided walk - pick up your booklet at the Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre.

Daily Sat 24 Sep – Sun 9 Oct. Ages 5-10.

### Curators' Edible Garden Sessions

*From seed to table – making the most of spring gardening.*

Saturday 17 September, 10am-12.30pm or 1pm-3.30pm

Curator Louise Young and sustainability expert Rhys Taylor will share with you the joys and the jobs of spring-time in the vegetable garden. This workshop will include a practical demonstration on seed sowing, plus planning tips for getting the best out of your garden throughout the growing season, with successional planting and crop rotation. Finish with a taste of spring-themed Spanish tapas by renowned restaurateur Javier Garcia. \$39 per person, numbers limited.

Book Online: [www.eventfinda.co.nz](http://www.eventfinda.co.nz)

For enquiries contact: [christchurchbotanicgardens@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:christchurchbotanicgardens@ccc.govt.nz)

**Breeze Walking Festival walks in the Botanic Gardens.** All walks meet at the Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre.

*A mindful meander.* Join a peaceful meander through the tranquil Botanic Gardens. Learn about mindfulness and explore the joy of being present in such beautiful surroundings. Limited numbers so bookings required. Go to [gardensevents@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:gardensevents@ccc.govt.nz) Monday 26 Sept, 10 am – 11 am, 1 km.

*Journey to the Gardens.* Walk with our curators as they share the fascinating tales of the world's daring plant explorers and their extraordinary efforts to bring us the plants we display in the Botanic Gardens today. Tuesday 27 Sept, 1.30 – 3 pm, 1 km.

*All Right? Amble.* Part treasure hunt, part orienteering, this is a fun family walk with a difference. Pick up your map from the visitor centre by 1.30 pm and scout out hidden delights. Collect a stamp at each point and return your map for a prize! Sunday 02 Oct, 10 am – 2 pm, 2 km.

## Articles

### The Armstrong Collection

*This article on the Armstrong Collection has been contributed by Ines Schoenberger, Manager Allan Herbarium, LandCare Research, Lincoln*

John Francis Armstrong (1820-1902), was one of the first Government Gardeners in Christchurch, who, with his son Joseph Beattie Armstrong (1850-1926), pioneered the discovery, cultivation and study of the rapidly disappearing New Zealand flora during the late 1800s. Although indigenous plants were not popular at that time, the Armstrongs indulged their fascination with the local flora while attending to official public demand for exotic parkland trees and bedding plant displays in the Botanic Gardens. When in 1889 these demands became too strong, John and Joseph resigned their positions (after disagreeing with the direction the Domain Board wanted to take with the Gardens) and took their precious herbarium specimens with them. The number of specimens continued to grow until Joseph's death in 1926. The collection was almost lost to science until a friend of the family rescued "quite a lorry load" of material from Joseph's house and deposited it in a corner of an office at the Botanic Gardens. There the specimens languished until being rescued again in 1933 by Professor Arnold Wall who realised their significance and catalogued over 2500 specimens. Over the next 80 years the various custodians who gave the Armstrong Herbarium

shelter were not able to properly curate the specimens or to make them available for study as they were only ever 'on loan' from the Botanic Gardens. All that has changed.



Armstrong Collection specimen *Microlepis novaezealandiae*

On 4 April 2014 the Christchurch City Council unanimously passed a resolution to approve gifting the 2607 Armstrong Collection specimens to the Allan Herbarium, Landcare Research, Lincoln, where the Collection had been kept for the last 30 years. With the gifting process completed we could finally maintain and utilise one of New Zealand's first native plant

collections, which also contains important weedy and cultivated records. The collection has now been imaged by the Friends of the Allan Herbarium (in particular Charles Graham). The ALA Volunteer Portal (<https://volunteer.ala.org.au>) has been used to get the label information of these images digitised through (free-of-charge) crowd sourcing. The digitised label data has been checked by Allan Herbarium staff and is now available with the images through the Systematics Collection Data website (<https://scd.landcareresearch.co.nz>).

**Background and history of the collection** (from Godley, E. J. (1999) Biographical Notes (33): John Francis Armstrong (1820-1902) and Joseph Beattie Armstrong (1850-1926). New Zealand Botanical Society Newsletter 55(March): 23-29).

John Armstrong, a farmer's son, was born at Longtown in Cumberland in the far north-west of England. He commenced his first apprenticeship when twelve years old, and served three years with a market gardener and seedsman. Aged 24, John married Ann Bowman at Egremont, Cumberland and their son Joseph was born at Whitehaven. After working for several years as gardener he served two years under the forester on the Netherby Estate. John emigrated to the Victorian goldfields, leaving his wife and son in England for 3 years before returning home in 1857 and finding work as a gardener. After seeing Australia, John felt dissatisfied with England and moved with his family permanently to the Southern Hemisphere. On 26 September 1862, John arrived at Lyttelton with his wife and two children on the 'Mersey'. He became gardener to George Gould (1823-89) who had a property on the corner of Springfield Road and the North Belt (Bealey Avenue). In Gould's glasshouses Armstrong grew collections of ferns which became a feature at the Horticultural Show.

Armstrong studied the local flora in his spare time, helped by his son. In 1868 Haast wrote: "I may be here allowed to state, that for more than four years Mr Armstrong, and his son Mr J.B. Armstrong, have assisted me in collecting our indigenous vegetation, for the herbarium of our Museum, and for making exchange; and both have also given me great help in arranging the botanical collections belonging to the province. In fact, whilst I was collecting and investigating the alpine and subalpine Flora of New Zealand, my two botanical assistants did the same work in the

neighbourhood of Christchurch, and contributed several complete sets of plants to the Museum, which, however, like the great bulk of our botanical collections, have hitherto been inaccessible to the public, for want of space to exhibit them in." (Armstrong 1870: 118).



Armstrong Collection specimen *Olearia oleaefolia*

Young Joseph Armstrong's considerable talents as a botanist had become obvious at an early age. He was 18 years old when Haast reported as above; and in that same year, when describing their joint work, John Armstrong could acknowledge that "my son, who for several years has almost exclusively occupied himself with botany, has rendered me most effectual help, in naming the mosses, ferns, fungi, etc." (Armstrong 1870: 119). Indeed, the year before, in 1867, Joseph had discovered a new filmy fern, the tiny *Trichomanes armstrongii*, when accompanying Haast to the headwaters of the Waimakariri. And Joseph's herbarium shows that he was collecting when only 13 or 14 years old. This talented young man was encouraged by both Haast and the benevolent Gould.

In 1867 John Armstrong was appointed Government Gardener, Canterbury, succeeding Enoch Barker, who had asked to be relieved of his duties. John acted as curator till 1889 and during the greater part of his 22 years' service he was assisted by his son, Joseph, who had charge of the nursery work. In 1868 John was elected a member of the Philosophical Institute of

Canterbury; and on 2 December, with encouragement from Haast and a request to his fellow members to “kindly grant me your indulgence for this my first Essay,” Armstrong spoke “on the vegetation of the neighbourhood of Christchurch, including Riccarton, Dry Bush, etc.”. This valuable paper was prefaced by Haast's classification of the vegetation of the Province of Canterbury (which then included Westland) and included Armstrong's notes on the local vegetation, and his species lists for Riccarton Bush, Dry Bush, Mount Pleasant Bush, Port Hills and Sumner, swamps, and sandhills. It marks the beginnings of plant ecology in Canterbury. The main species list is subdivided as follows: forest trees (22), shrubs and small trees (57), parasites (3), creepers (15), herbaceous plants (149), with the addition, by Joseph Armstrong, of ferns (36), mosses (12), lichens (4), *Chara* (1), and fungi (9).



Armstrong Collection specimen *Sophora tetraptera*

In 1872 John Armstrong published the first list of the naturalised plants of Canterbury. The 171 species are annotated for habitat and abundance and several general points are made, including a reminder to “the botanists in the Middle Island that now is the time to determine the date of introduction of foreign plants into the country.”

Joseph Armstrong started independent publication in 1879 with the first of several papers

in the 'New Zealand Country Journal'. It described 10 new species of *Veronica* and one each of *Senecio* and *Aciphylla*. Then in 1880 he published an ambitious paper entitled “A Short Sketch of the Flora of the Province of Canterbury, with Catalogue of Species”, which includes a classification of Canterbury vegetation. This paper gives an extensive list of indigenous seed plants (580) and ferns (107), as well as a list of 76 naturalised plants introduced since 1871. But it also includes 214 mosses, 106 liverworts, 4 Characeae, 95 lichens, 91 fungi, and 107 algae. These latter lists are puzzling because it is hard to credit the Armstrongs with such a wide and authoritative knowledge of such groups. Joseph wrote “The catalogue attached to this paper I have made as complete as possible. The whole of the species enumerated have been collected by my father and myself and the identification may be relied upon as correct.” However, only the seed plants and ferns have locality notes.

Among the 14 papers that Joseph published from 1879 to 1884 the most important is surely his “bold and excellent paper”, as Cockayne described it (Cockayne 1911), on the New Zealand species of *Veronica*. Wall (1934a) commented later: “it is a great pity that this herbarium [of J.B. Armstrong] was not open to T.F. Cheeseman when he wrote his Manual, or to Drs Cockayne and Allan when they published their revision of *Veronica* (or *Hebe*) a few years ago. Many doubts and misconceptions would have been cleared away, for these authorities, by the inspection of the Armstrong collections.”

In a surprise move in 1889 the Armstrongs resigned from the Gardens, in protest at stipulations imposed by the Domain Board greatly limiting the role of the Government Gardener, and dictating the nature of the plantings (bedding plants were to take precedence over hardy plants, in response to public tastes).

As John Armstrong was then almost 69 years old he retired and with his wife went to live in Springfield Road, presumably with Joseph Armstrong and his family, where they remained until their deaths. John Francis Armstrong, died on 16 September 1903, aged 82 years and predeceased by his wife. Both are buried in the Barbadoes Street Cemetery.

Joseph at this time was still only 39. In the Electoral Rolls he continued to describe himself

as “Gardener” but it is not known what work he undertook. A major puzzle is that after 1884 (when he was only 34 years old) Joseph wrote nothing more to speak of, despite having referred to a work in progress on *Coprosma* in his *Veronica* synopsis of 1881, and also “a work which I have in preparation, entitled a ‘Manual of New Zealand Botany’.” He would have been understandably disappointed when Cheeseman's monograph on *Coprosma* appeared in 1887; and again in 1906, with the publication of Cheeseman's “Manual of the New Zealand Flora”.

Joseph died in Christchurch on 26 January 1926, aged 63 years, predeceased by his wife, and is buried in the Linwood Cemetery. In his will Joseph Armstrong bequeathed three items to the Christchurch Domains Board: a portrait of his father, his library of some 100 volumes, and his herbarium. For want of suitable accommodation at the time, the herbarium was housed in the Canterbury Museum (Barnett 1963) and here the 2607 sheets were curated and studied by Professor Arnold Wall. In May 1975 the entire herbarium of the Canterbury Museum was transferred to the Botany Division, DSIR at Lincoln. Wall's main paper on the herbarium (Wall 1934a) is more concerned with technicalities, but he also wrote two more popular articles in 'The Press' in March 1934 (Wall 1934a, b): “J.B.A. visited Dunedin in 1869, Wellington and Nelson more than once, and Auckland in 1868-69, and in all these places he did some collecting. He also travelled to Greymouth, Hokitika, and Westport, collecting everywhere. The collection was enriched by the gifts of many correspondents, the most important being Messrs T. Kirk, T.F. Cheeseman, F. Reader, Canon Stack, who sent many of the plants of Stewart Island, Mr F.A.D. Cox, who supplied Chatham Island material, and Mr H.H. Travers, who also presented Chatham Island plants. Of late years Mr James Mitchell worked with Mr Armstrong in the neighbourhood of Christchurch and at Arthur's Pass. The collection is thus more or less representative of the New Zealand flora as a whole.”

Wall's more general conclusion was this: “Let us be grateful to the Messrs Armstrong, and particularly to Mr J.B. Armstrong, not so much for collecting the plants of old Christchurch, as for the gift of his collections to a public body. We all make mistakes, and the New Zealand flora is so

very difficult that the best of us are bound to err sometimes in our determinations of specific identities. All identifications which are unsupported by specimens are open to doubt, and in the case of these two botanists, Mr T.F. Cheeseman and others have maintained a rather critical attitude. Now that the Herbarium is, in a sense, open to all, such doubts can be set at rest very quickly. It is no discredit to the Armstrongs that some of their decisions and records have been questioned; the motto of the Royal Society itself is “Nullius in verba” “relying upon the mere word of no man,” and every sensible botanist is only too grateful when his error is pointed out to him.”

“J.B. Armstrong's wide botanical knowledge, his philosophical turn of mind, his acute powers of observation, his energy, and the felicity and quiet authority with which he writes of the plants he loved, place him amongst our foremost botanists of the nineteenth century.” (Godley 1967)

#### References:

*Editor's note.* Space restrictions did not allow the list of references to be included. If you would like a copy contact me at [billpauline@ihug.co.nz](mailto:billpauline@ihug.co.nz)

#### Flora of the Cook Islands

Published: 4 July 2016 – a “milestone” for the Cook Islands.



Flora of the Cook Islands author, Bill Sykes, holds the book for the first time with his wife Peggy.

A book outlining, for the first time ever, the complete flora of the Cook Islands has come to fruition. The publication, *Flora of the Cook Islands*, was written by Christchurch botanist Bill Sykes, a research associate at Landcare Research. The book - which covers the whole range of vascular plants found in the Cook Islands, including common cultivated species, as



well as their uses - was launched earlier this month at Landcare Research's Lincoln site.

Sykes, 88, said it was a "relief" when he got to finally hold the book in his hands. At the launch, Sykes said he could "now rest in peace". Sykes said he was inspired to write the book by his good friend Anthony (Tony) Utanga, a former secretary of the Cook Islands Ministry of Internal Affairs. "He persuaded me that we really needed a complete flora of the Cook Islands because there wasn't one in existence, so I thought I'll go for it," Sykes said. "I am very sad that Tony died before holding the Flora of the Cook Islands in his hands," Sykes wrote in the book's dedication.

His son, Alan Utanga, attended the launch to accept the book on behalf of his father. Utanga said the publication was another "milestone" for the Cook Islands. He compared it to the country achieving self-governance, and the translation of the holy bible and dictionary into Cook Islands Māori. "To say thank you Bill, I think, would not be enough to recognise your commitment," he said.

Cook Islands High Commission CEO Teremoana Yala echoed Utanga's sentiments about the importance of the book. "For a small island developing state such as the Cook Islands knowing what plants exist in our country is the first step in the effective management of our precious and unique floral biodiversity. This publication, I hope, will strengthen our resolve in the Cook Islands, to enhance our working knowledge of the Flora that make up our lush island landscapes and upon which we are so dependent. May your legacy Bill, as encapsulated in this publication, live long for the benefit of all of us today and generations to follow."

Cook Island royalty - Marie Pa Ariki, a queen of the Cook Islands – also attended the launch to mark the achievement.

Landcare Research's Characterising Land Biota portfolio leader Dr Ilse Breitwieser said writing a Flora wasn't like writing just another book. "The information in the Flora is based on thousands, or actually millions of data. The data in a Flora is gained from mostly herbarium material. For his work on the Flora, Bill has actually collected in the Cook Islands more than 4500 plant specimens. He brought these specimens to the Allan

Herbarium. In the Allan Herbarium we have altogether 40 000 specimens that were collected in the Cook Islands and Bill studied the characters of many of these carefully. He then summarised the character analyses, in the form of descriptions, which were published in the Flora. So, writing a Flora means actually hours and hours and hours of research in the herbarium." As a result, it was common for them to take decades to write, she said.

Sykes made eight trips to the islands - the first in 1974 - to collect plant samples and information to compile the book. However, he wrote the book entirely in his retirement over the last 25 years. Breitwieser, and fellow Landcare Research colleagues, joke that he never actually retired.

The publication was edited by Landcare Research scientist Dr David Glenny, who is also an experienced Flora author, Breitwieser said. "Without David we would not have the Flora," she said.

Breitwieser said the information in the Flora would be useful to a range of people from biosecurity managers, biochemists and horticulturalists, "basically to everybody who uses plant names, reads about plants or even thinks about plants".

Sykes' dedication to Cook Islands' plants has not gone unnoticed. He has had three plants named after him in the country, the most recent, just last year, a nettle. Sykes said some of his favourite things about producing the book were the opportunities it provided including seeing new places and discovering new plants.

The Flora is Sykes' third. He also published Floras of Niue and the Kermadec Islands, as well as co-authoring and contributing to several other New Zealand Floras.

Sykes wife Peggy said the *Flora of the Cook Islands* "would be a "lovely legacy"

*This article was produced by LandCare Research*

## Art in the Gardens:

### Lady Rhodes' Bronze Crane

A handsome large bronze crane, two metres tall, is currently on display in the Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre.

This sculpture, is one of a pair crafted during the Meiji period (September 1868-July 1912). They were purchased in Japan in 1891 by Lady Jessie Rhodes while she honeymooned with her husband Sir Heaton Rhodes, a prominent Christchurch landowner, lawyer and politician.



Lady Rhodes' bronze crane now on display in the Visitor Centre.

The cranes became a feature of the conservatory of the Rhodes town house, 'Elmwood'.

The cranes were left to the Rhodes' niece Miss C. O'Rorke of Cashmere. In 1968 Miss O'Rorke gifted them to the Christchurch Botanic Gardens to be displayed in Cuningham House, in a similar conservatory setting as at 'Elmwood'.

The cranes were accordingly displayed in Cuningham House until the late 1980s. The bronze sculptures were already suffering from active corrosion in the stiffening rods of the legs and neck when gifted. Corrosion worsened and without corrective treatment the cranes had to be removed from Cuningham House sometime in the late 1980s.

After a considerable time in storage for it was discovered that the head and neck of one crane had been taken. The remaining parts of that crane have stayed in storage.

The cranes have a degree of significance by virtue of their association with Rhodes family. They reflect the public's regard for the Gardens and their efforts to ornament the Gardens with statuary and other objects which would otherwise not have been affordable. They also illustrate the changing face and fashions of both public and private garden ornamentation and in particular the taste for Japonaiserie in the late nineteenth century and Edwardian period. Imported Japanese bronze cranes were apparently a particularly popular element in conservatories and lakelets. When on display in Cuningham House the cranes contributed to the special character and sense of exotica in that tropical house. They remain part of the Botanic Gardens and the city's sculpture collection.

Bill Whitmore

## Friends News

### The Botanic Garden Guides

Within the Friends there is a very active group of volunteers who raise money for the Friends by enjoying the company of visitors to our Botanic Gardens. They number 20 at present with a few who have retired from guiding but still attend their

development sessions because of the social contact and the stimulation of increasing their knowledge of plants and people. Two groups were involved in 45-hours of training and recently three new members, Laura, Graeme and Vicki have been trained on-the-job by experienced guides.

The guides gather each month on a Tuesday to develop new skills and knowledge and to update old ones. They are not meetings, because the focus and the time is spent on those tasks rather than minutes, reports and motions. A wide range of speakers is brought to their sessions and they visit various nurseries and gardens elsewhere to broaden their approaches. They also teach each other because they have individual and specialised knowledge that can help add to their colleagues' stories.

In the last three months (February- April) of this season the group guided 109 visitors who provide very positive views on their experience. Not surprisingly, most of their paying customers are from overseas or from outside Canterbury. Visitors are charged a fee of \$10 for their 90-minute informative walks. It seems that Christchurch residents assume that they know their Gardens and do not need to pay money to learn more about them. The Guides have tried different formats - beginning their walks at the café, and starting walks in the morning and doing shorter walks but the afternoon walks starting at the Museum entrance seem to meet most demand.

Some guides make themselves available for larger groups of visitors to be guided on their Gardens' walk: conference attendees, service groups (U3A, Probus, Rotary), horticultural and garden societies and tourists travelling as a group can be hosted.

One might expect that the guides need a vast knowledge of plants but they are often asked a much wider range of questions - How often does the tram go past? Where can I post a letter? Can I catch a cab to the airport from here? How many staff do these gardens have and who pays for the upkeep of these Gardens? Guiding is often more about people and places with visitors interested in the history of the gardens, weather, organics, ecology, the sculptures in the gardens and the wildlife in the gardens. English visitors are surprised at the frequent appearance of the English thrush and blackbird which are now rarer sights in the English countryside. Tasmanians are surprised that stock from their trout hatcheries were used in the 1860s to begin the trout

population in Canterbury rivers and North American tourists are amazed that hydrangeas grow so luxuriously in our Gardens and that their much-loved sequoiadendrons are also here in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Curators Garden of vegetables and fruits is always a popular place for the guides although they begin their walks at 1.30p.m each day from the Museum entrance to the Gardens, from mid-April to mid-September. In that seven-month volunteer effort the only day they miss is Christmas Day. Each guide usually volunteers for two days on duty each month and most will have some "customers" in their time on duty. They are identified by their green uniform and their name badges. The "caterpillar service" is not really a competitor as the guides are sought by visitors who want an in-depth and informed talks and discussions about the Gardens on a personal one-to-one basis. The guides are also flexible in their walks. They are not standardised. Each guide has their own specialties that they can address, or they will go to the sections of the Gardens that the visitors request. The size of the Gardens mean that some sections seldom get visited - the pinetum across the river and the native section of the Gardens are sometimes too far for visitors although the iconic native section should be seen by all.

The guides have a warm relationship with the Section curators in the gardens and seek them out for updated planting and new exhibits. Each year, Jeremy Hawker, Operations Manager Garden and Heritage Parks, or one of his staff, will take the guides for a walk to update them on any changes to the Gardens. Health and safety concerns are also addressed in the training by the guides so that visitors can feel that they are in good hands.

The future looks bright with numbers of tourists increasing and plans are afoot to improve the guides operations by using more technology.

The daily guided walks will resume on Saturday 17 September 2016.

Faye and Neil Fleming

## Contact Numbers

### *Committee*

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Immediate Past President	Alan Morgan	384 9976
Treasurer	Tracy Shui	021 172 8515
Secretary	Charles Etherington	355 7981
Membership	Penny Martin	332 6866
Plant Propagation	Don Bell	343 6699
Other Committee Members	Mary Carnegie	355 8614
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### *Other Contacts*

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*Gardens enquiries                      Information Centre 941-6840 x 7590*

### **Friends' website**

Have you visited the Friends' website? The address is <http://www.friendschchbotanicgardens.org.nz/>

### **Distribution of Newsletter**

We distribute the Newsletter by email to those members who have given us their email addresses and who have not requested otherwise. If you would prefer to receive the Newsletter by mail, rather than electronically, please contact Penny Martin – phone 332 6866 or email [graememartin1@xtra.co.nz](mailto:graememartin1@xtra.co.nz)

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**Website - <http://www.friendschchbotanicgardens.org.nz/>**