

The Auckland Garden

Newsletter of the Auckland Botanic Gardens and Friends

March 2025



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**Contributions to the
newsletter are welcome**
Material for the June 2025 issue
should be submitted by
3 p.m. Friday 2 May 2025 to the
Editor
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plantandfood.co.nz

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Images Front cover: Graeme and Rosemary Platt
Opposite page, above, from left: Councillor Christine Fletcher, Rosemary Platt, Mayor Wayne Brown and Jack Hobbs. Below, from left: Graeme Platt, Joan Dingley, Brian Buchanan and Jack Hobbs, inspecting the New Zealand flax collection.

Platt Arboretum

Rosemary Platt's gift of her magnificent property in Greenhithe, the Platt Arboretum, is the greatest philanthropic gesture in my time at the Gardens. As requested by Rosemary, the Auckland Council agreed last December that the property be retained as open space in perpetuity and the trees be cared for and protected and recorded in our botanical records database. Management of the property, trees and buildings will be undertaken by the Botanic Gardens. In essence, the Platt Arboretum will become part of the Auckland Botanic Gardens. Council has also agreed that the land will be used for passive recreation, education, and conservation rather than for sports, active recreation or as a cemetery.

A botanic garden on the North Shore

The dream of a botanic garden on the North Shore goes back at least 30 years when Phil Jew led an attempt to secure land adjacent to Long Bay Regional Park as a satellite botanic garden. Sadly, this failed, and the land is now, of course, housing.

When Rosemary contacted me in February last year to tell me she wished to donate to the Gardens the property she and her late husband, Graeme, had developed since purchasing it in 1983 it seemed like a dream come true. The property would provide a wonderful opportunity for us to deliver the benefits of a botanic garden to communities in the northern and western parts of our region. Many people living north of the bridge seem to consider a drive to Manurewa as just too far. The

Platt Arboretum will make available to North Shore residents benefits similar to those currently enjoyed by our visitors from South Auckland.

The Platt Arboretum

The property at 5.63 ha (around 14 acres) is much smaller than the Gardens at Manurewa. This is not really important, however, as many of the finest and most effective botanic gardens I have visited around the world are significantly smaller. These include the Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum and the Chelsea Physic Garden, each only about 1.6 ha (4 acres). What is important is that any botanic garden has a clear sense of purpose that is based on delivering the best possible outcomes in education, conservation, research and, most importantly, to the community.

An unexpected but very important attribute of the Platt Arboretum is its tranquillity. Despite being very accessible and close to major roading networks it is a remarkably quiet and peaceful space that is perfect for respite amongst nature.

Many plant enthusiasts would have planted the whole property in trees, but Graeme clearly understood the benefits of open space to enable the trees to be appreciated and to enhance visitor experience. Rachel de Lambert and Yoko Tanaka of Boffa Miskell were brought in to undertake a landscape assessment. After her initial inspection of the property Rachel was so impressed with the layout she remarked "there is nothing for me to do here". This is not true of course but

the bones of a great garden are already in place with a connected series of open spaces that open up like outdoor rooms as one strolls amongst the trees.

The collection of more than 1,000 trees on the property is made up of mostly descendants of species that existed in the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana. They include species from the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea, Australia, South America and, of course, New Zealand. There are also some species from China where Graeme and Rosemary visited many times. I had the good fortune to spend time with them both in Guangxi Province in 1993 and observed firsthand the esteem in which Graeme was held by our Chinese hosts.

The collections have enormous conservation value. Thirteen of the exotic tree species are on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. There are another twelve threatened native species including five with "Threatened – Nationally Critical" status, the very highest threat level.

Additionally, there is a large stand of New Zealand kauri (*Agathis australis*) grown from seed collected from Tāne Mahuta, and a grafted tree from Tāne Mahuta. These are of great importance in the conservation response to kauri dieback as an ex-situ collection of this genetic material. The kauri seed was collected by Graeme while suspended from a helicopter as captured in a famous episode of Country Calendar that aired in 1992. Graeme believed that seed should always be collected from genetically superior parent material so its special qualities are passed on to the offspring, and no kauri is greater than Tāne Mahuta.

The arboretum includes 33 selected forms of pōhutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*), most of which are not available commercially and could be of significance in the search for individual forms of pōhutukawa that are resistant to myrtle rust.

The property is also habitat for threatened fauna, with Graeme recording three native endangered reptiles (copper skink, forest gecko and Auckland green gecko). The property is currently grazed by a flock of Chatham Island sheep, another of Graeme's conservation projects.

The buildings

The house (1994) and shed (1995) have their own intriguing stories. The bricks in both were salvaged by Graeme after His Majesty's Theatre was demolished. The house contains timbers from 19 different exotic woodlots, and the shed has 17 different timbers. Native trees were still being felled for timber in early 1990s and Graeme wanted to showcase high quality exotic timbers available from sustainably grown exotic woodlots as suitable alternatives. Rosemary's preference is to have one of our staff living in the house.

The shed was designed by Graeme as a lecture venue and remains ideal for that purpose. Both buildings could be repurposed to optimise their educational and other benefits, and the shed will be an ideal volunteer base.

Due diligence

Rosemary's offer of the land was very generous. However, councils cannot accept all such offers as there is always an ongoing operating cost. We had to build a case to demonstrate that the benefits justified the expense. To undertake the

necessary due diligence, we enlisted the help of several experts to evaluate and report on various aspects.

Rachel de Lambert and Yoko Tanaka of Boffa Miskell were brought in to undertake a landscape assessment.

To verify the value of the trees I went straight to the top, enlisting the services of Dr Mike Wilcox (author of *Auckland's Remarkable Urban Forest*), Ewen Cameron (curator of Botany at Auckland War Memorial Museum for 32 years), and David Stejskal (Regional Arboriculture and Ecology Manager). All were greatly impressed with the tree collection and their written feedback strongly supported acquisition of the property.

Emma Simpkins, Bec Stanley and Alicia Wong undertook an ecological and conservation assessment that reinforced the increasingly compelling case for the properties acquisition.

Ella Rawcliffe, our Conservation and Botanical Records Specialist, compiled the conservation benefits.

The Gardens team applied our own evaluation of the collective benefits that included education, conservation, research opportunities, and social opportunities such as the establishment of a volunteer programme and potentially a Friends group. We all concluded the property offers significant benefits through connecting people with plants and most importantly by supporting community wellbeing. Fortunately, the Council was eventually convinced.

Where to from here?

Public access will not be possible until

a carpark and toilets are constructed. However, a volunteer programme can commence immediately to care for the land and trees, as well as conservation collections of threatened native plants as part of the Auckland Biodiversity Strategy programme currently being coordinated by Emma Simpkins to prevent any more native species in Auckland from becoming extinct. Around 450 native plant species have been identified as "threatened or at risk" in the Auckland region, and 64 of these are at such extreme risk they require protection in ex-situ collections. The Platt Arboretum could play a key role in contributing to this outcome which would closely align with Graeme's values.

If you are interested in supporting a volunteer programme please email botanic.gardens@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz, or call our visitor centre on 267 1457.

Once basic facilities are available the Platt Arboretum will be a great public asset without any further development. The trees are magnificent and captivating stories abound. It is such a beautiful calming space that will enhance the spirits and wellbeing of all who visit. Ultimately, I hope it is developed as a satellite botanic garden, as there is adequate space to develop plant collections that can provide benefits in conservation and education to complement those delivered at the Manurewa Gardens. It would be ideal for events, and I can already envisage a sculpture exhibition set amongst the magnificent stands of trees. I imagine it will be popular too for weddings and other paid functions, providing an invaluable revenue stream to support the ongoing development and maintenance of this taonga.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support for this project from the Friends and staff at the Gardens, and also other Council staff. Right from the start the Friends offered their strong support and made the remarkable offer of \$20,000 towards establishing a volunteer programme and potentially a Friends group dedicated to the Platt Arboretum.

Mich Newton has as usual been my “right hand”, assisting with reports and presentations and supporting me at Council committee meetings. Renton Campbell and Mere Brewer worked with various contractors and Council officers to ascertain such things as maintenance and tree management costings for the reports. Greg Meylan enhanced important visual presentations and Barbara Wheeler proofread documents. As always many at the Gardens put up their hands to help in many small ways and offer moral support, and I feel truly blessed to work with such a wonderful group of supportive people.

A few words about Rosemary

Graeme Platt is already well known as one of the great contributors to our industry. Personally, I consider him to be the single greatest influence on the transformation of public perceptions of native plants. When Graeme and Rosemary opened their Albany nursery 1974 the native plants they specialised in were considered inferior to the more colourful exotics. For the next twenty years Graeme promoted the value of our flora tirelessly and passionately, and in doing so inspired numerous others to spread the message about our unique and special flora to the point today where they are as widely appreciated as plants from anywhere in the world.

While Graeme was doing his great work, Rosemary was quietly in the background supporting him and the business and raising their two girls Sherryl-Lee and Julianne. I have always found Rosemary to be great company, but I did not know her as well as Graeme with whom I had previously spent most time. That has changed a lot over the past year since Rosemary approached me about gifting the land, and I now regard Rosemary as one of the most remarkable people I have met. Her generosity of spirit in offering this valuable piece of land to the people of Auckland for no return speaks for itself. She is great company and a captivating storyteller, and also courageous and resilient. The ten months that elapsed from making the offer until Council accepted the gift in December must have been extremely frustrating for her. There were some tough times, such as when I had to tell her the initial Council response was to decline the offer as it did not meet their open space policy. We both knew the property had huge value beyond simply open space provision, and we exchanged hundreds (possibly thousands) of communications as we fought to build the case that was ultimately presented to elected members. Rosemary remained resolute throughout what must have been a bewildering process for someone not used to working with a council. Somehow, she remained positive throughout, and on many occasions, when we were both feeling a bit daunted, she lifted my spirits with her oft repeated expression “this will happen”.

Rosemary had to make numerous journeys to unlock gates and buildings for the many experts and contractors we had arranged to visit. Usually, she would also

have something for them to eat and drink. When we finally had a group of councillors visit the property she absolutely charmed everyone with her personality and good humour. I cannot speak highly enough of Rosemary and hold her in the highest esteem. Although she tells me it is Graeme's legacy she wants to preserve, I think Rosemary has now stepped out of

Rosemary Platt

his shadow and the Platt Arboretum is a monumental legacy of them both.

Jack Hobbs

"This is an overwhelmingly remarkable gift to the city."

Wayne Brown, Mayor.
New Zealand Herald 8 March 2025



Jack's update

After much thought, and with some sadness, I am retiring from the role of Manager Auckland Botanic Gardens and Auckland Domain. My last day will be 24 April when for the final time I will depart through the same nursery gateway I entered on my first day of employment more than 48 years ago.

I have been contemplating retirement for some time, but deferred such thoughts as opportunities have come along that I wanted to see through. Both related to the acquisition of land, the first being the Nathan property that was purchased by Council in late 2023, and more recently the gifting by Rosemary Platt of her Greenhithe property.

It has been a huge privilege to manage the Gardens, a place that I love so much. It is not easy to leave but the timing feels right, and I am reassured that the wonderful teams at the Gardens and Domain will carry on delivering great experiences for visitors while continuing to deliver important outcomes in education, conservation and research.

Whilst contemplating my retirement I have realised that it is the people I will miss most. The Gardens staff are simply wonderful, supportive of our objectives and each other, highly skilled and always a pleasure to be with. Since we merged with the Domain some three years ago I have become very attached to their passionate team who also deliver such wonderful displays and experiences for Aucklanders. I will miss seeing you all so often and from the bottom of my heart I

thank you all for what you do and being such a big part of my life.

It is also reassuring to know there is such strong community support for the Gardens. This is evidenced by increasing visitor numbers and their overwhelmingly positive feedback, but more tangibly by our wonderful Friends who support us in so many ways. The Gardens would not be the success it is without you, and I am particularly grateful for your support for staff development which I consider the best investment.

I will write in more detail about some of the highlights of my career in the next issue.

The donation by Rosemary Platt of her wonderful property in Greenhithe with its magnificent tree collection is probably the single most important project I have been involved with during my tenure as manager. It will be known as the Platt Arboretum and managed by the Gardens which ensures this important collection of trees planted by the late Graeme Platt is properly cared for and documented. Ultimately it is my hope that it will become a satellite botanic garden for the North Shore. More about Rosemary Platt's incredible gift is earlier in this newsletter.

I was delighted when Fred Graham was appointed Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) in the New Year Honours. Fred is one of our greatest artists, his significant works including *Manu Torino* which greets visitors as they arrive at our visitor centre Huakawaka.



Jack Hobbs and Fred Graham CNZM

He also created *The Web* that welcomes visitors to the Harakeke Collection, and at 96 years of age his creative output is not slowing down. When I visited Fred to congratulate him on his royal honour he told me he had received a phone call asking if he would accept a knighthood but declined as he does not believe in calling people "sir". I must admit I was a tad disappointed as if ever anyone deserves the ultimate accolade it is this immensely talented and generous man who has enriched so many lives with his art. However, such is his modesty I am not surprised.

If you are in the Rose Garden look out for the new artwork in the New Zealand section. This intriguing ponga work was donated by the ever-generous Graeme and Deborah Hauer and sits nicely in its new home.

Sculpture in the Gardens was once again a great success as evidenced by record visitor numbers and resoundingly positive visitor feedback. At the official opening on 16 November 2024, I had the honour of announcing that the Friends acquisition for permanent display is *Hand Down*. Hewn from a large argillite rock



by Josh and Amelia Olley, this thought-provoking work symbolises the passing down through generations of love and wisdom. It is already much loved by our visitors and will continue to be cherished for centuries to come.

It is such a pleasure to work with the remarkable team who make this exhibition happen such as longtime stalwarts Mich Newton, Kim Stretton, Richard Mathieson and the indefatigable Liz Powell. Bill Burrill and Dianne Glenn provided staunch political support right from the start, and in recent times Councillor Christine Fletcher has lent her considerable political clout to ensuring it continues to deliver great experiences for the hundreds of thousands who visit each exhibition. The ever-generous Bill and Maggie Burrill have kindly sponsored the

Above: Graeme and Deborah Hauer with their ponga sculpture

Below: Liz Powell and Jack Hobbs



Burrill People's Choice Award. It is great to see the Friends remaining resolutely behind it under President Viv Canham and her wonderfully supportive executive committee.

This will be my final update for *The Auckland Garden* which I hope you enjoy as much as I do. It is consistently a good read combining interesting news with relevant information, and it also importantly documents for posterity historically significant milestones. Dr Ross Ferguson has been the astute and dedicated editor

since taking over the reins from the late Dr Rod Bielecki in November 2017, and we are fortunate indeed to have someone who is so professional and talented at the helm. I also want to thank Kim Stretton for formatting each issue in her usual precise and professional manner.

Although I am leaving, the Gardens will always have a special place in my heart. To all the wonderful people I have worked with and encountered along the way, thank you for your friendship and support. See you in the garden sometime.

Jack Hobbs

New staff

Kaia Parallag

Kaia has joined the team as a casual Visitor Service representative to help support busy event days and programme delivery. Kaia has had several customer-facing roles whilst studying and has volunteered with multiple organisations including the local Sustainable Papakura programme. She is a keen bird watcher and brings an energy and enthusiasm which will be greatly appreciated in her position.



Amy Pollard

We welcome Amy Pollard as the new Business Development & Events Manager. Amy brings a wealth of experience in event management, having worked across Aotearoa and Australia in almost every aspect of the industry — from managing major festivals to curation of programming, stage and site management, ticketing, and health and safety.

Most recently, Amy spent four years running events at Silo Park on Auckland's waterfront downtown. There, she helped create and organise community favourites such as outdoor movie nights projected onto the silos, music festivals, Matariki celebrations, and even festivals dedicated to ice cream and dogs.

Amy describes her move to Auckland Botanic Gardens as a perfect blend of her professional expertise and her passion for gardens and community.

"I got into gardening about seven years ago when I realised that homegrown veggies are far more nutritious. My veggie garden started small, but I never really do things by half — so before long, it had taken over my backyard."

During the Covid lockdowns, when event work came to a standstill, Amy found solace in her garden, describing it as a place where she could "go to work" each day. It became a source of calm and purpose, and even produced an



impressive 3 kg candy-striped beetroot. While her home garden is mainly filled with raised vegetable beds, it also helped grow the flowers for her wedding. She says her favourite flower to grow is sweet pea, for its beautiful scent.

At the Gardens, Amy says she will take some time to observe, learn, meet the team and understand what's needed before implementing new events and initiatives. We're thrilled to have Amy on board and look forward to the creativity, expertise, and passion she will bring to Auckland Botanic Gardens and Domain Winter Gardens.

Micheline Newton

Andro Santos

We were delighted to welcome Andro to the Auckland Domain in September 2024 and he is already having a positive impact on the Domain's culture and future.

Andro joined us with an inspiring story and a love for plants that began later in life. Originally from Quezon City Manila, Philippines, he moved to New Zealand at the age of 12. After a career as a full-time musician, he changed to horticulture following the COVID pandemic and completed a Level 4 Horticultural qualification. Previously Andro worked at Zealandia Nursery in Clevedon as a supervisor for tomato and cucumber propagation. During his studies he worked extensively with native plants which sparked a deep appreciation of New Zealand's unique native plants.

Auckland Domain holds personal significance for Andro as he used to visit regularly and created many happy family memories. Now, he looks forward to giving back to the community by helping the Domain evolve into a more sophisticated botanic garden. Andro is excited about projects such as increasing plant collections, improving garden standards, and introducing plant labels and interpretation signage to enhance visitor experience. He is passionate about sharing his love for native plants, particularly in the Museum Garden under his care that takes visitors on a natural journey through our native flora.



Andro sees the Domain as a place of growth, not only for plants but for people. He hopes the gardens will inspire visitors, provide a space for mental health and wellbeing, and educate visitors and locals about New Zealand's ecosystem. Through collaboration with his team, Andro wishes to bring modern techniques and a little science and technology to the gardens while learning from his colleagues' expertise. With his dedication, Andro aims to make the Auckland Domain an even more vibrant and welcoming space for all to enjoy.

Jonathan Corvisy

President's report

I hope that you all enjoyed the holiday season, when you weren't spending time watering the garden owing to the shortage of rain.

A Christmas present which I'm really enjoying is Lynda Hallinan's *The Joy of Gardening*. Lynda's clever observations of people and life, reminiscences of her childhood and in-depth information on a myriad of subjects has been the perfect summer book. Did you know that Queen Victoria struck a cutting of myrtle from a nosegay given to her by Prince Albert's grandmother in 1845? Her daughters included foliage from it in their bridal bouquets and, a century later, cuttings were taken from the same plant for Queen Elizabeth, Princess Diana, Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle to all tuck into their bouquets. Well, you probably did know that.

The Gardens is about to undergo a seismic shift with Jack deciding to take a well-earned retirement. This news led me to think about all the thousands of people who have contributed to the Gardens over the past 40 years, passing the baton on to the next generation. Each person has left their mark, whether great or small.

It was a very moving experience sitting on the lawn at the recent Opera in the Gardens, observing the appreciative crowd and listening to the haunting, beautiful music. My friends from the North Shore who were the usual "we'll stop at the Gardens one day" sort of people, raved about the place as I showed them around.

I was particularly struck that people of all ages, ethnicities and walks of life were there having a good time. Well done to Auckland Council's Music in Parks team, NZ Opera, and Gardens staff.

The Friends committee has been continuing with all of the housekeeping required by an organisation such as ours. Planning is continuing for the new plot at 120 Hill Rd with hui being held with local iwi to get their input on developing a Maori garden there. Will it be traditional or contemporary? Where, on the plot, should it be sited? Should it work in with a Pacifica garden?

The committee has been anticipating the acquisition of the Platt land on the North Shore with enthusiasm. For this treasure to have been lost would have been unthinkable. What a generous family to have donated this legacy property. The land will come under the wing of Auckland Botanic Gardens and therefore our Friends group. We now need to plan to get a satellite North Shore Friends group up and running to care for this wonderful asset, in conjunction with Auckland Council.

So, many changes are to come, particularly with Jack leaving us in April. You can certainly look back with pride, Jack, in what you and your teams have achieved over the past 48 years.

Viv Canham
President

Friends Art Group - latest news

As I write this, we've just wrapped up our first meeting of the year, and it was wonderful to reconnect with members and hear about what they'd been doing over the break. Despite the long weekend, we had a great turnout, with a few new faces joining us to see what we're all about! We also have a confirmed date for our annual exhibition, "Spring into Summer", so it's the perfect time to explore the Gardens and enjoy what's blooming. We encourage everyone to participate so that this can be a true showcase of all our members' work.

The final submissions for the Botanical Art Worldwide exhibition, "Our Plants: Past, Present and Future - O Tātou Tipu o Mua - o Ināiane me te Āpōpō", are in and entry is now closed. We're very thrilled with the high numbers of entries and quality of artworks submitted. Although we had a very slow start, which necessitated extending the submission deadline, we received 61 artworks from 41 artists - 13 of whom are from our own group!

By the time you read this, the selection committee will have chosen 40 pieces for the exhibition. The selection committee, comprising of Sri Benham, Ross Ferguson and Barbara Wheeler, has a challenging task ahead of them. They'll be judging the pieces based on a digital image of each artwork, the plant name, size of artwork and know the mediums used but won't know who painted what. We have every confidence that, as last time in 2018, their chosen artworks will make for a very beautiful exhibition.

The best part is letting the successful artists know their work has been chosen but of course this means that there will be some very disappointed artists.

If you would like to know more about the exhibition google "botanical art worldwide New Zealand" for information about this and the 2018 exhibition, as well as links to the other 30+ countries that are taking part.

At our February meeting, Jennifer Duval-Smith guided us in nature journalling, encouraged us to get outside and create some pages. It was a perfect way to unwind after spending so much time on our Botanical Art Worldwide entries!

Here are some dates for your diary:

Art Group meetings:

- Saturday 29 March – Chat, paint, draw, drink coffee – untutored
- Saturday 29 April – Enhancing your work with calligraphy with Linda Weight
- Saturday 31 May - Chat, paint, draw, drink coffee – untutored

Exhibitions and associated events:

- "Our Plants: Past, Present and Future" – Saturday 29 March – Sunday 29 June
- World Day of Botanical Art – Sunday 18 May
- Saturday 17 – Sunday 18 May – two days of talks, artist demonstrations, workshops etc.
- "Spring into Summer" – Friends

Art Group exhibition – Saturday 11
October – Sunday 2 November
If you would like to know more about our
group, either phone me, Lesley Alexander

on 021 161 7070 or email me at lesley.
alexander.smith@gmail.com

Lesley Alexander

Growing Friends report

The Growing Friends had an ambitious start to the New Year. Members opened the plant sale on Thursday 2 January, a public holiday. It is one of the busiest days of the year at the Auckland Botanic Gardens when visitors come from outside Auckland. Consequently, we had large numbers of people at the plant sale. One Growing Friend called it “manic”. The plant sale was good for our public relations because several visitors were unaware that there is a plant sale at ABG. Customers commented positively on our relaxed approach to gardening. The Growing Friends rose to the challenge,

and the morning went quickly on a beautiful holiday.

Now is the time to prepare the garden for autumn planting. The Growing Friends recommend *Iris unguicularis* or the Algerian iris, a violet flower with a yellow band, approx. 30 cm high. It grows from a rhizome, an underground stem from which roots emerge. This iris flowers in winter, the time of the year when it rains in the Mediterranean. *Iris unguicularis* is a good cottage or rock garden plant and found in several locations around the Botanic Gardens.

Hiltrud Gruger

Opera in the Park - ABG Feb 2025

There were thousands of us, all nicely dressed, sun-hatted, carrying our chairs, rugs and picnic packs. We strolled in from every direction along the walkways through the trees up onto the front lawn. We positioned ourselves at will under the trees and out on the lawn all oriented downhill towards the stage. Settling in we sipped our drinks and relaxed and chatted.

Folks' dogs settled in; the children strolled about a bit then settled in too.

We had a sunshiny late afternoon with a balmy breeze stirring the trees and keeping clouds scudding along. We were all comfy, enfolded together there upon the grassy slope. And the music soared up. A well-chosen variety of favourites

thrilling us. On and on and ever another superb aria.

We listened, we applauded, we nibbled and sipped and we wanted more. We were in paradise. We lost awareness of all the troubles of our broken world for those two golden hours.

Now came the quirky finales. Fun prevailed.

Finally, we got to our feet and sauntered off into the sunset.

The Artists are all offering to come again next year.

Barbara Harvey

Visiting *Moo* by Jamie Pickernell, from Sculpture in the Gardens 2024-2025, now located at the Platt Arboretum are (left to right) Liz Powell, Jack Hobbs, Rosemary Platt and Ross Ferguson



New book for the Library

Claudia Chambers has generously presented to the Library a copy of *Becoming a botanist: reflections by Carrick Chambers*.

Claudia is daughter of the late Professor Carrick Chambers. He was one of our most distinguished botanists, although most of his professional life was in Australia where he eventually became Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, 1986–1996.

The account of his early life and training in New Zealand is particularly interesting. He was born in 1930 during the Depression. He was educated at Otahuhu College and was already showing an interest in plants by working during the holidays for a nurseryman (from the age of 10!). He later attended Auckland University College, paying his way by working during vacations in freezing works, on the wharves and as a plumber's assistant. His Master's thesis was on the fern genus *Blechnum*, a lifelong interest.

He left New Zealand for Sydney in 1956 for doctoral studies. He was a professor of botany at Melbourne University before being appointed to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney. His time in Sydney saw the development of the gardens at Mount Tomah and Mount Anan.

His most spectacular achievement, botanically, was his recognition of a specimen of an unknown conifer as a plant previously known only as a fossil from at least 40 million years ago and thought to have been long extinct. This was the Wollemi pine, *Wollemia nobilis*, a spectacular tree belonging to one of three genera in the Araucariaceae. Its discovery was "the botanical equivalent of finding a small dinosaur still alive on Earth." Chambers was much involved in the successful propagation and distribution of the critically endangered plant.

Ross Ferguson

Carrick Chambers (centre) with two of his contemporaries at Auckland University College, Val and Rod Bielecki. (Photograph: Claudia Chambers)



NZPCN Conference

New Zealand Plant Conservation Network Conference 2024

Held this year in Whangārei, the theme of the conference was Ka Mua Ka Muri: Walking Backwards into the Future. This whakataukī (proverb) encourages us to look to the past for guidance on how to move forward and this was emphasised in many of the talks.

Thanks to funding from the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens, four staff were able to attend. We went to plant identification workshops on the Sunday focused on bryophytes and lichens, wetland weeds and orchids. This was followed by two days of lectures and a choice of field trips. There were some interesting themes throughout the talks and some opportunities and learnings for us as we continue to develop our plant conservation programmes.

One common thread was the importance of naturally uncommon ecosystems, which are small areas that punch above their weight in biodiversity. We heard about gumlands, kettle holes and dune lakes – all unique and vulnerable habitats with fascinating flora assemblages. You can visit Auckland's best example of gumland in the southwest corner of Waikumete Cemetery, at its best from late October to mid-November. All of these areas face pressures of introduced species and human activities changing their nutrient profiles and ecosystem dynamics.

The Gardens had a particular mention in

a talk by Taoho Patuawa, Science Advisor for Te Iwi o Te Roroa, on the *Pimelea eremetica* found only on Maunganui Bluff. We hold a collection of fifteen different genotypes which were brought to the Gardens as a backup collection in 2021. Unitec and Te Roroa jointly presented a preliminary analysis showing that when the population decreased following this collection the remaining wild plants were more highly inbred. This highlights the importance of collecting wild plant material before populations drop too low to preserve as much genetic diversity as possible. The collection held by us and Te Roroa, with the analysis by Unitec, ensures a solid basis for restoring the wild population.

A question put to the conference was about data sharing and availability of information, which is often kept by individuals or within institutions. Many of the talks highlighted effective relationship building with iwi and community to achieve conservation outcomes. This not only ensures positive results beyond what an organisation can achieve on its own, but also promotes reconnection with nature and reconnection with each other as individuals and organisations.

Eco-sourcing for revegetation was also a hot topic. Bruce Clarkson emphasised the importance of local seed sourcing to capture the adaptations that enable plants to succeed in a particular place, like the Waikato peat bog manuka, *Leptospermum repo*, performing very differently to other mānuka, whether or not it is recognised as a separate species.

Revegetation techniques were also up for discussion, with talks on using model ecosystems, tree ferns as a tool to enhance biodiversity in early succession, and Zara Skuse (who was a summer gardener here in 2019) presenting her Master's research on nurse logs and seedling recruitment.

At the conference dinner, Terry, Pam and Lindsey Hatch were honoured with the "Plant Nursery Involved in Plant

Conservation" award for their over 50-year contribution to threatened plant conservation. It was fantastic to see their contribution to conservation recognised.

The field trips on the final day were all rich experiences – stay tuned in to future newsletters for more details!

Ella Rawcliffe, Mere Brewer, Jeff Jones,
Jodie McDonnell

Taranaki gardens revisited

In late October/ early November of last year I joined a Pukekohe Travel trip to the Taranaki Garden Festival. There were 20 of us in the group led by Jack Hobbs together with Sandra, Jack's wife. Over the four days and two half days we visited 17 parks and gardens. I describe the gardens that impressed me most, but all were worth visiting. Some gardens are likely to be better at other times. For example, we were too late for most of the magnolias at Vance Hooper's Magnolia Grove – although I was very tempted by his giant-leaved magnolias and by his plants of *Calycanthus x raulstonii* 'Hartlage Wine' which I gather does well in Auckland. Similarly, at Pukeiti, we were too late for most of the rhododendrons – the candelabras of new shoots indicated the abundant flowering – but too early for the *Cardiocrinum giganteum* as these were tantalisingly less than a metre tall.

Saxton Sanctuary was definitely my favourite garden, possibly because it seemed a garden for plants, not people. There were beautifully composed vistas

around a central gully, and an abundance of taller trees and shrubs, especially maples, rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias. We were lucky in being just at the right time for the candelabra primulas (*Primula prolifera* (syn. *P. helodoxa*) with their whorls of vibrant yellow flowers on firm stems nearly a metre tall. They lined the stream and series of ponds in the gully. The garden had been laid out by Les Taylor, a nephew of the well-known architect James Chapman-Taylor, and is now in the devoted care of Owen Howell and Kim Robson. The garden was described in the August 2023 issue of *NZ House & Garden*.

Hurworth Country Garden owned by Graeme and Jan Worthington was clearly a garden for people with wide, expansive lawns surrounding an Edwardian villa. Surprisingly, the Worthingtons have been at Hurworth for only about 12 years but the garden is very "settled" and immaculate. Jan is a keen quilter, and her artistic flair is obvious in the garden with mass plantings of hostas, trilliums and

ligularias and some very successful colour combinations. Lining the front path was the particularly striking plant combination of the lime-green *Euphorbia serrata* with occasional white globes of thrift (*Armeria*) poking through.

Te Henui Cemetery. Many older cemeteries are rather sad or forlorn with graves neglected or overgrown. Te Henui is a remarkable exception with a small group of volunteers planting and maintaining the graves. I was particularly struck by the beautiful blue irises and alstroemerias and the many birds and butterflies. Unlike Waikumete, where the bulbs have naturalised, the plantings at Te Henui are planted and remain discrete and do not appear to have spread.

Pukekura Park. This is, of course, New Plymouth's premier park. The dense mature plantings add greatly to its appeal. Sadly, the mountain remained hidden and did not oblige by providing the focus to the famous view across the lake to the red bridge. Our time was spent in the fernery and display garden, a series of caverns largely underground. They provide a very intimate, magical space where you are surrounded by the plants. I was impressed by the imaginative combination of plants – a temperate rhododendron with enormous white flowers and a small snowball viburnum looked very much at home surrounded by more tropical plants. Pots were seldom obvious.

Waiangana Gardens. John Wilmschurst and Diana Montgomery. This is a large garden (4 ha) with generous tree-lined vistas, including one including the mountain. It was a very suitable garden to end our visit. I liked the mixed

borders and the more formal plantings leading towards the café. We were most impressed by the deep rose-coloured opium poppies alive with happy bees. The sales table proved irresistible for many of our party, despite the problems of carrying plants on our plane.

Overall, I was impressed by the sheer lushness of plant growth. Much of Taranaki has rich volcanic soil and an abundance of rainfall. Even in the centre of New Plymouth there were happy tree ferns and at Pukeiti the king ferns (*Ptisana salicina*, formerly *Marattia salicina*) were indeed impressive, some of the fronds being at least 4–5 m long. My preferred gardens seemed to have rather limited plant palettes, repetition giving a feeling of unity and calmness, particularly the great mounds of hostas (with complete unchewed leaves) and ligularias. Plantings were dense with little exposed soil, no feeling of an eclectic collection of plants plonked separately into beds. Some of the colour combinations were great – as was the combination of textures, for example, a fine-leaved acer partially overgrowing a giant-leaved hosta.

It was great to see some plants that don't do well or are less common in Auckland – paeonies, big-flowered clematis and snowball viburnums.

Plants do not always behave as expected. At Saxton Sanctuary, a primula had escaped from the gully and looked very happy in the drier reaches of the garden. At Gravetye, the formality of three beds of white Iceland poppies was disturbed by occasional orange poppies. I thought it was inspired but Jenny Pease admitted that the orange poppies were rogues – fortunately she left them where they

were. At Waiangana, one of the white gardens had a rogue purplish foxglove. Such delinquent plants give a sense of

humour and seem to emphasise the intentions of the design, not detract.

Ross Ferguson

Hurworth Country Garden, Taranaki

Photographs by Jack Hobbs



Saxon Sanctuary



World Green Infrastructure Congress

World Green Infrastructure Congress, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland 2024

In early September, the World Green Infrastructure Congress rolled into Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Speakers and delegates from around the world and Aotearoa New Zealand converged to discuss and share nature-based solutions in urban environments.

With upwards of 100 presentations over two days, the congress was a rapid fire of information designed to inspire and be a catalyst for change for climate resilience by promoting the use of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. The congress theme *Ko au ko te taiao, ko te taiao ko au* - I am the environment, and the environment is me underlined the close connection between humans and the natural world.

Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions are an important part of the story at Auckland Botanic Gardens, with water-sensitive designs for management of stormwater and integration of nature into the garden through green roofs and meadow trials promoted to our visitors. The Domain Winter Gardens are at the start of the journey in nature-based solutions, but for staff at both gardens this congress gave the opportunity to hear from internationally renowned experts and seed ideas for the future.

Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions offer enormous benefits:

- supporting biodiversity by providing ecological habitats and attracting wildlife.
- climate resilience mitigating extreme weather events such as heatwaves and flooding.
- providing equitable access to green spaces where communities have better access to nature, and its associated benefits.
- promoting well-being by enhancing both mental and physical health.
- restoring the balance in our urban environments between intensive housing and development with plants and water for relaxation and wellbeing.
- cultural insights into indigenous cultural practices providing valuable pathways for understanding the environment, reconnecting people with nature and developing more sustainable solutions.

Indigenous cultural perspectives

A strong theme through many presentations was the importance of listening to and respecting forgotten indigenous voices to reconnect people with nature. Keynote speaker, Julia Watson, an international expert and educator in using traditional and indigenous knowledge for a resilient future, relayed “ecosystems go silent, water dies” so we must work to managing people and their relationship with the environment rather than solely managing the environment. Similarly, Eamon Nathan spoke of Reconnecting Northland “Whenua ora. Wai Ora. Tangata ora – the

land, the water, the people – flourishing together” and explored Māori principles informing systems change and action. Ripple effects may take generations to see change, but it is vital to act now. We need to look at the wisdom of indigenous land management and work towards understanding in a more holistic sense.

Not all green is equal

Another common thread was the importance of ecological connectivity by utilising “wasted” spaces in our parks and creating aerial landscapes by adding green and brown roof technology into our buildings. Landscape architect Barbara Schaffer (Sydney, Australia) talked about how “not all green is equal”. A green lawn does not have the same impact nor climate resilience as a more biodiverse space. This is not just down to local councils. Everyone can contribute to connecting the green to create vibrant urban environments: individuals with backyards and balconies, schools, cemeteries, railway corridors, developers, local businesses and even owners of disused lots. Education and advocacy are vital, from the very young to the more mature, and this is where places like Auckland Botanic Gardens are so very critical.

Prof. Reid Coffman discussed reweaving nature into the city by mimicking local native ecologies and niche communities on living roofs, rather than selecting a variety of plants that would do well on a green roof but come from different ecological habitats. An example given was reclaiming sand dune ecology on a green roof. Experimenting with plant ecologies on green roofs on public buildings can lead to failure, which is unpalatable to the local community. Designing the green roof to be aesthetic along the front edge

filled with top-performing plants and leaving the experimental plants to the back help ensure success at a community level should those plants fail.

Green roofs were referenced with Dusty Gedge (United Kingdom) creating quite a murmur when he confidently exclaimed “topsoil is depressing”. He was referring to nutrient-rich soils not being resilient and green roof plants needing nutrient-poor soils to be resilient enough to survive droughts. The opposite of what most gardening is about where we try to improve soil nutrient value.

Wellbeing

The benefits of being in nature for our wellbeing have been widely discussed; however, more research into the benefits of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions using an integrated salutogenic approach (considering factors that support health and wellbeing as opposed to factors that cause disease) is needed to fully appreciate and maximise wellbeing. Gayle Souter-Brown’s results on her research into designing spaces to have a more positive impact on health outcomes were inconclusive, but theory suggests sensory gardens are very important. And the benefits are not just about seeing nature, they are about sitting with nature. So, green infrastructure offers the potential to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, but that potential is perhaps currently unrealised.

Global trends

Following global trends does not necessarily provide the answer for New Zealand. Prof. Margaret Stanley, ecologist at Auckland University, gave several examples of this. Why resort to installing bird feeders or beehives when you can

plant some good indigenous pollinator plants in your backyard or patio; when you can implement less manicured green spaces to provide more complex and biodiverse habitats; and when you can co-design using indigenous cultural practices when greening urban environments?

The time is yesterday

A real sense of urgency was promoted through the congress with needing to “go greener faster” to adapt to the impacts of climate change regarding Auckland’s (and global) infrastructure.

In many cities worldwide, developers currently have little incentive to integrate nature-based infrastructure. It is easier and more cost effective to incorporate green solutions from the start of a project than to retrofit them later and while initial implementation may seem a bit more costly, the long-term benefits of green infrastructure far outweigh the upfront investment. Data-driven policies are needed to support design and consent processes to ensure success, like that which is so well illustrated by Singapore with its evolution to being a city in nature.

The Future?

During the field trip 60 delegates saw some of Auckland Botanic Gardens’ green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, and it became clear from comments that the sustainable water trail is a world-leading approach to interpreting green infrastructure for community and industry. Some delegates were inspired to return home to connect with their local botanic garden to discuss how they could work in partnership to showcase green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in their countries.

Moving forward in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, partnerships between the Botanic Gardens and Auckland Council departments like Local Parks and Environmental Services are important, collaborating for the benefit of city-wide greening. The return to open streams and waterways, such as the stormwater course in the Gondwana Arboretum, using water-sensitive design and revegetation plantings provides ample opportunities for visitors to Auckland Botanic Gardens as well as industry professionals to learn from great water management through green infrastructure.

Barbara Wheeler, Jonathan Corvisy,
Micheline Newton, Ella Rawcliffe

Rousham Park

An 18th century landscape garden rich in classical narrative

Part II

In Part I, in the previous issue of the newsletter, Steve Benham described the origin of the garden at Rousham, a special and very important place in the history of gardening. In this part he describes the house and the garden.

A visit to Arcadia.

Rousham is a good example of an 18th century *ferme ornée*, an ornamental farm, emulating Arcadia, a pastoral paradise designed to reflect man's harmony with the "perfection" of Nature. A working farm with domesticated animals is set within the "natural" landscape. The kitchen garden, and the pleasure or ornamental garden are combined with the farmland. Living up to Kent's design principles of using follies and ornamental farm buildings in the landscape to extend the eye beyond the garden boundary, he designed an attractive structure on the furthest side of each boundary.

At Rousham, this Arcadian impression is reinforced by the choice of a heritage breed of long-horned cattle and the brightly speckled and extravagantly shod Belgian bantams (Mille Fleur d'Uccle breed) usually to be seen on the gravel driveway between the house and the stables.

The well-proportioned Palladian-style stables with an ogee-domed turret, a centrally positioned arched portico surmounted with a pediment is very

reminiscent of the Horse Guards building in Whitehall, London, designed by John Vardy and Kent. In the walled garden, there is a very splendid dovecote dating from the mid-17th century.

Rousham House

(Grade 1 listed building)

A visit to the house, if it can be arranged, helps greatly in understanding General Dormer's personality and hence his intentions in the garden.

The house was originally built in 1635 but greatly modified by William Kent between 1738 and 1741. He added wings, crenellated the exterior in a free Gothic style and redecorated the interior. The outstanding room is the Painted Parlour, described by Pevsner as one of the most exquisite small rooms of 18th century England. It almost remains the same as the day that Kent decorated and furnished this room with his painted ceiling and elegant furniture positioned where he originally decided. In contrast to much of Kent's heavily ornate furniture elsewhere, the furniture at Rousham is light and beautifully proportioned.

Kent's painted ceiling depicts Ceres, the Goddess of food, grain, agriculture and fertility together with Bacchus, Roman God of wine, leaning for support against Venus, Goddess of love, and her son Cupid, God of love and erotic desire. This is interpreted as meaning without food or wine, love grows cold. There are two small medallions decorated with his landscapes: one has a beautiful maiden, a nymph, the other a lustful satyr showing

an exaggerated tumescence.

Copies of famous erotic painting such as Titian's *Rape of Lucretia* adorn the walls. Lucretia is voluptuous and vulnerable, her body soft and sensuous like the Goddess *Venus*. Her assailant Tarquin is dressed in hot reds which emphasises his sexual ardour. In another painting (Correggio's *Education of a Cupid*), Cupid's overly large buttocks seem to dominate the room. The general impression has been described as exuding a boozy sexuality: we don't know if the inspiration was Kent's or Dormer's, but the General does not seem to have disapproved.

Amongst the busts in what was the General's library is one of the Emperor Hadrian, larger than life, with naked chest and shoulders. Hadrian seems to have had a special significance for the General so much so that when he chose a life-sized lead statue to be strategically placed in the garden looking out over the River Cherwell it was of Antinous, an attractive young man, Hadrian's lover, who was deified after his early – and suspicious – death. The choice of paintings and sculptures in the house and the garden was not by chance.

The garden

The 18th allegorical garden is to the north-east of the house and is long and thin and irregular in shape. The garden front of the house overlooks a well-manicured lawn, known as the Bowling Green, which ends in Bridgeman's concave slope down to the Cherwell River. On the other side of the river is an artificial ruin designed by Kent as an "eye-catcher" or focal point. On the house side of the river is a landscape rich in classical narrative.

Displayed in niches on the garden façade

of the house is an array of stone busts and lead statues. This eclectic gathering of deities looked very much like the General launching into a drama performance of male and female nudity with a theme of paired qualities and moral choices. There is a 'Dancing Faun' a naked curly-headed youth holding a pair of cymbals and pressing down on a foot-operated castanet operated by the foot. Dionysus (the Greek equivalent of Bacchus) stands close by, a long-legged nude male holding a basket of fruits around his neck with a bunch of grapes in his right hand being held over his head. His panther sits on the plinth begging from his master. Venus - goddess of love - stands modestly and demure with her head turned sideways looking towards Apollo trying to cover her breast and pudendum. Apollo stands in a suggestive pose with his head thrown back and arm behind his head of thick hair. One suggestion is that this vain appearance and pose is due to his trying to hold on for ever to his youthfulness. There are also stone busts of Venus and Alexander the Great. So here we may have the General's choice between love, sexuality, knowledge, prophecy and truth.

The 17th and 18th centuries were an ideal time to purchase both lead and stone statues. The aristocracy were returning to England from the Grand Tour and looking to decorate their stately homes both interiors and exteriors with copies of classical Greek statues and ancient Roman busts and herms. All Rousham lead statues were originally coated in a pink skin coloured paint making them look even more realistic.

There is an abundance of other statuary in the garden, mostly copies of famous classical works: the 'Lion and Horse',

Athena, Hercules, Pan, Flora, Plenty and a statue known in the General's day as *The Dying Gladiator* but more probably a Galatian chieftain dying on the battlefield. He has a youthful, naked, muscle-bound torso and his head, thickly covered in curly hair, glances down to the ground where his dagger lies. The elegant curvature of his spine is one of his many striking features. This is a site to linger, to ponder and reflect on the futility of mortal conflict. The General's most likely reason for choosing this statue was to show his intellectual identity with Republican Rome and his adherence to its strict moral code or just as likely to be a prescient *memento mori* for himself. Directly behind the gladiator is a stone balustrade running the length of the roof of Kent's other key monument, the arcade inspired by the Roman remains at Praeneste (Palestrina). The arcade is just

over 24 m in length and heavily steeped in classical symbolism paying homage to the great classical civilisations. Mounted on either end of the balustrade are two Arcadian figures in the form of hermae: Hercules, the Roman god of war and Pan, the Greek god of shepherds and flocks, a choice between strength coupled with war or the rusticity of Arcadia.

A well-educated gentleman of the 18th century would have known whom the various statues represented and their significance and why they were chosen. The size of the General's library certainly indicates that he was well-read. As an example, the presence of lewd satyrs is a reminder that there was another side to Arcadia besides an idyllic conception. Arcadia was a place to prepare youths for the hunt as well as for older men to instruct their protégés of their choice in

The Dying Gladiator



the arts of war and of homoerotic love. There is the choice between love and war. Today, most of us must rely on Wikipedia for information on classical Greek mythology and the ancient Romans.

There are so many other features at Rousham to admire: the octagonal pond and the associated serpentine/sinuous rill flowing through a shady glade; or the bathing Venus, goddess of gardens and love, spied upon by a satyr and Pan; or the pyramid with its possible Masonic connotations; or the life-sized magnificent statue of a naked Antinous at the end of the Elm Walk. The General purchased four differing casts of Antinous for Rousham. This one is a copy of the design found in the gardens of Hadrian's villa, Tivoli, on the outskirts of Rome. At Rousham he has been placed singularly alone and appropriately close to the river, since he was found suspiciously dead in the Nile.

The importance of Rousham

The garden historian Christopher Hussey wrote "Rousham alone remains intact. Consequently, it is not only a historic and beautiful garden, it is a unique document of art: the earliest surviving ancestor of all landscape gardens and parks in the world". The landscape at Rousham can be appreciated at different levels relating to the designed landscape, the planting design, the ground-breaking geometric outline and iconography of differing elements. It is the most important surviving Picturesque English Landscape design. Nothing has changed for a very, very long time. It is a landscape rich in

classical narrative. It is an historic garden, but above all it is an enchanting garden. Today's visitors can enter, as I did, even if for just a fleeting experience, into Arcadia.

Steve Benham

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I am so very grateful to Shirley Finnel who passed onto me *Country Life*, January 5, 2022, containing an article "A garden of the imagination" by Timothy Mowl. It was this description of Rousham that captured my imagination taking me on several journeys in more ways than one.

Also, to Caroline Landless, historian and house guide with a fountain of knowledge who kindly ushered me enthusiastically around Rousham House and kindly edited my notes of any inaccuracies regarding family history, chronology, etc., as well answering my endless questions with such patience.

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Chrysanthemums
at the Winter Gardens,
the Domain.
Clockwise from top left:
Chrysanthemum 'Fantasy
Swandance',
Chrysanthemum Exhibition
'Ivor Mace',
Chrysanthemum display





Hand Down by Josh and Amelia Olley, with Kim Stretton, Catherine Hamilton and Jack Hobbs.



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