

The Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park

Volume 5, Number 1
February 2010



*Friends of Pukekura Park
New Plymouth*



Photo David Medway

This Magazine is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Graphix Explosion

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The Gables celebration

John O'Sullivan



The June 2009 Friends *Newsletter* which outlined the plans for The Gables garden and made requests for both donations and sponsorship created much support. Indeed, on the first Thursday morning after the issue of the *Newsletter*, the volunteers arrived at The Gables garden to be greeted by a member who held a bucket containing two freshly dug *Angelica* plants. We were pleased at the enthusiasm displayed but somewhat nonplussed by the fact that the herb bed had yet to be created. This enthusiastic generosity which was shown by many members resulted in several volunteers establishing "nursery" and "holding" beds in their own gardens. The continuing response was very gratifying. There were phone call invitations to member's gardens to dig up plants and to take cuttings. On some garden visits the plants had already been lifted, potted, and labelled. Money was donated and a very pleasant Saturday morning was spent visiting local nurseries with Ian Hutchinson (Technical Officer Pukekura Park) to purchase herbs which were in "period" with such a heritage building.

Almost every Thursday morning the volunteers meet with Ian at The Gables and discussed ideas as to how the garden might develop. It was on such an occasion as this in mid-August 2009 that Ian outlined his plans for *rugosa* roses, their varieties, and group plantings in threes or fives. Missing from the volunteers on this particular day was Agnes Brabin, one of the stalwarts of the volunteer group. When the variety 'Agnes' was mentioned one of our members innocently remarked "Wouldn't it be nice if Agnes planted it?" From this chance remark the celebration was born.

The plan seemed to stall when later in the month the volunteers were told that the Park was unable to source the variety 'Agnes', but the volunteers are a determined group. A hunt through local nurseries located three containerised 'Agnes' roses which The Friends purchased on behalf of the membership and volunteers. As we now had three roses the question was who should plant the other two? There was very little debate as there were two obvious choices. Heather Allen, as a founding member of The Friends, and long-time volunteers George and Bev Moratti, who as volunteer coordinators have so successfully led the volunteer team. One Thursday morning whilst digging in The Gables borders Adrienne Tatham commented that her family had once lived at The Gables. She also remarked that the spade she was at that moment using dated from that time of occupancy and had "Undoubtedly turned this very soil all those years ago." Four people to plant, three roses, and the spade. We now had a celebration.

On Thursday 19 November 2009 at 10.00 a.m. the volunteers, Friends, and invited guests gathered to celebrate many months of gardening endeavour. The Gables garden resonated with Edwardian gentility. Members and guests reviewed the new plantings and renovations whilst sipping cordial from wine glasses and delicately eating a selection of cakes and biscuits. The morning culminated in the planting of the three 'Agnes' *rugosa* roses. The celebration marked the completion of the main phase of restructuring the garden, but also recognised the support of the membership of The Friends, Park management, and the Park Team. Even the Taranaki Society of Arts played a role by allowing us to use The Gables premises for setting out the buffet.

As the event drew to a close we bade our guests goodbye and tidied up the The Gables. Standing at the gate we surveyed the garden and reflected on what it had been like twelve months ago. You most definitely could see where we had been!



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From the Volunteers



May 2009

September 2009



November 2009

Photos Derek Hughes

Adrienne Tatham

George & Bev Moratti

Heather Allen

Agnes Brabin



Photo David Medway



Photos Derek Hughes

The Gables garden project

Ian Hutchinson
Technical Officer Pukekura Park

The Gables garden makeover project undertaken by the Friends and the Park team is shaping up nicely, and the results of our combined efforts are now being realised with good growth rates and flowering. It is safe to say that The Gables garden hasn't looked so colourful for a number of years thanks to those who have shared the vision and helped make it happen.

In this article I will endeavour to give some background to the design planning and the colour concepts. The Gables is popular and used on a regular basis as a venue for outdoor weddings so it was decided to put in place a colour palette that would suit this activity, using plants that were also reasonably period-correct for the type of cottage old-fashioned garden that fits with the architecture of the building.

In the front bed we have used pastel shades with the selected roses being mostly pale pinks, apricot, and white. All are old-fashioned varieties so the plants will be more pest and disease resistant. The varieties used are 'Penelope', 'Sparrieshoop', 'Sally Holmes', and the *rugosa* varieties 'Martin Frobisher', 'Schneezweg', and 'Agnes'. Dahlias which have been added to carry on the theme are two light-pink varieties 'Pretty in Pink' and 'Pink Lady', a white 'Tsuki-yori-no-shisha', a vibrant red-pink 'Spasmacher', and last but not least, 'Yellow Star'. There are three different-coloured *Canna* lilies. In amongst these groups of plants we have *Aquilegia* which will be in flower during the spring, *Delphinium*, Mignonette, and *Liatris* for the summer and the autumn, rounded off with Michaelmas Daisies. All these will be set off against the blue flowers of *Plumbago capensis* 'Royal Cape'.

The hedge that bisected the front border has been relocated to the southern edge of the garden. The garden adjacent to the hedge will be a lot brighter with darker pinks and reds using *Penstemon*, *Phlox*, and *Alstroemeria*. Further along under the Magnolia we have used *Salvia involucrata* 'Bethellii', and Lacecap Hydrangea which are fronted with *Pulmonaria* 'Majeste' whose silver leaves lift the shade and set the pink of the *Salvia*.

Under the Maple opposite the southern border we have planted *Aquilegia*, *Alchemilla mollis*, and the white-flowered form of *Geranium maderense* a giant Geranium from Madeira. This border is fronted with *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost' whose silver foliage stands out in the shade.

The garden next to the morgue has been returned to a herb garden. We thought it appropriate that the Gables have a herb garden considering its past as a hospital. We have chosen a Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) as a centre-piece. This will be trimmed either as a column or a cone and should look suitably formal. The herb plants selected have traditionally been used medicinally with many of them having culinary uses as well. The collection includes common herbs like Lavender, Rosemary, Thyme, Chamomile, Bergamot, Lemon Balm, Feverfew, Golden Marjoram, Lemon Verbena, Common Sage, Pineapple Sage, Florence Fennel, Bronze Fennel, Globe Artichoke, *Angelica*, Curry and Alpine Strawberries. The herb garden has flourished and is already sparking comments from visitors to The Gables.



Photo Derek Hughes

May 2009

From the Garden

The Gables Garden as it develops.
Below November 2009, the other photos February 2010.



February 2010

Photos Derek Hughes

The planting of the Fillis Street native botanical reserve**David Medway**

Section 1117 Town of New Plymouth, situated in Fillis Street, was purchased by the Pukekura Park Board of Trustees from one Alfred Atkinson in January 1923. This acquisition was reported by the Chairman of the Board at its annual meeting in July 1923 – “The section known as “Atkinson’s”, at the north-eastern corner of the park, was purchased from the owner at a reasonable price, completing the park area in that locality” (*Taranaki Herald* 18/7/1923). Adjoining Sections had been part of the Park since its inception in 1876. These Sections, now vested in the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of the District of New Plymouth in trust for a botanic garden and public recreation grounds, contain the area which became known as Fillis Street Gully and, later, also as Kindergarten Gully. In 1936, the gully was described as being “more or less isolated from the park proper as known by the public” (*Taranaki Herald* 26/2/1936).

Thomas Horton, Superintendent of Pukekura Park from 1924-1949, reported to the August 1931 meeting of the Pukekura Park Board that the chief work undertaken during the previous month was in the Fillis Street gully – “All the blackberry, gorse, fern, sycamore, and other useless growth had been grubbed and thoroughly cleaned up It would be desirable to plant the larger part of this area in native trees, but first the pines on the hill would have to be cut down” (*Taranaki Herald* 12/8/1931). Horton advised the November 1932 meeting of the Park Board that “Gorse, fennel and other noxious weeds and rough fern growth on the bank at the end of the Fillis Street gully had been grubbed and cleared preparatory to tree-planting” (*Taranaki Herald* 9/11/1932).

Horton recorded in his work diary for 19/12/1932-11/8/1937 (Puke Ariki ARC 2003-860, Box 3) that on 5/4/1934 the Park Board authorised him “to plant Fillis Street gully with natives not now in the Park”. On that day R.C.Hughes, in the presence of Board members and Horton, planted a Kauri (*Agathis australis*) tree donated by V. C. Davies at the recently-reclaimed southern end of the Lily Pond, now Hatchery Lawn (*Taranaki Herald* 6 & 11/4/1934). It must have been on this occasion that the Park Board authorised Horton to plant the Fillis Street gully. It was later recorded that the gully was “specifically set aside some years ago as the exclusive botanical section of the park for native tree specimens, as was the fernery for New Zealand ferns” (*Taranaki Herald* 26/2/1936).

Further work on the proposed native plantation in Fillis Street Gully began on 5/9/1934 when Horton recorded they were in the gully all day and took a load of trees there. On this day he received a collection of rare native trees from Duncan & Davies. Two days later his men were in the gully cleaning up, and from 11-14/9/1934 all hands were preparing the gully for planting. It was reported to the Park Board meeting in late September 1934 that “Preparatory work at the Fillis Street Gully was in progress and a number of shrubs and trees had been planted in temporary beds” (*Taranaki Herald* 26/9/1934).

The 1935 planting season saw the first permanent plantings in the gully. Horton noted that on 2-4/9/1935 he and one of his staff were “planting trees in Fillis St gully & nursery, Kauris etc”. He reported to the Park Board a few days later that “The collection of rare Native trees presented had been planted in their permanent position in the Fillis Street gully, after having been in the nursery for a year” (*Taranaki Herald* 11/9/1935). This was probably the collection of rare native trees that Horton had received from Duncan & Davies in 1934. In February 1936, it was recorded that “In the Fillis Street Botanic Reserve 96 trees, mostly rare varieties of natives, and forming the nucleus of a botanic collection, have already been planted. These trees have mainly been donated to the committee exclusively for this purpose. The plan calls for the planting of a further 850 native trees in this section” (*Taranaki Herald* 26/2/1936). In May 1936, Horton told the Pukekura Park Committee (as it had now become) that the Auckland City Council had offered to donate any native trees required for the Fillis Street native botanic reserve, and that “Generous offers of trees and plants for the same purpose were also received from all the leading civic superintendents in New Zealand. As the result of these offers New Plymouth would probably have the most complete collection of native flora in the Dominion” (*Taranaki Herald* 12/5/1936).

However, it was considered not advisable to further plant the Fillis Street gully while a row of pines (*Pinus radiata*) was still existent along the top of its western side – “It would be suicidal to proceed further with the work in the meantime, for the two-fold reason that the specimen trees will not flourish within the influence of the falling pine needles and the impoverished soil, and even if they did make some growth run the risk of their being ruined when the pines, if not now, are ultimately felled, having reached their life’s limit” (*Taranaki Herald* 26/2/1936). These pine trees were visible from the nearby sportsground, being on the skyline at the top of the eastern terraces. They

are shown in the accompanying photograph by A.W. Reid of Stratford, now in Puke Ariki (A.4.26), which is undated but which, from internal evidence, was probably taken in the 1910s. There were 14 large pine trees on the eastern skyline in November 1931 at the height of the public controversy about their proposed removal and the removal of other pines in the Park (*Taranaki Herald* 11/11/1931). The Park Committee, on the recommendation of the Superintendent and despite considerable opposition, eventually resolved to have the pines on the eastern



Puke Ariki collection A.4.26

skyline removed so that planting of the Fillis Street gully could proceed. Horton mentioned in his work diary on 21/9/1936 that “Brewster started felling Pines”. This must be a reference to these pines because the Park Committee had not authorised the removal of any other pines in the Park at that time. Their slowly-decaying stumps are still present today, some 73 years after they were felled.

Horton recorded in his work diary on 1, 15 & 16/3/1937 that the men were in the Fillis Street gully cutting long grass and weeds and “grubbing gorse, mowing, etc”. Horton reported to the Park Committee that preliminary work was being done on the Fillis Street gully preparatory to winter planting (*Taranaki Herald* 17/3/1937). On 20 & 21/4/1937 the men were clearing and digging holes for trees on the Fillis Street hilltop where the pines were felled, and on 26/4/1937 they were marking out and digging in the gully. Horton recorded that on several days between 15 and 23/6/1937 all hands were preparing for planting Fillis Street, and that they “Planted Kauris & general coll(ect)ion of natives; only about 100 more to plant to complete planting here”. More trees were planted in the gully on 24 & 28/6/1937. Horton informed the Park Committee at its August 1937 meeting that, during the recent planting season, 650 native trees were planted in the new botanic reserve at Fillis Street (*Taranaki Herald* 11/8/1937).

I have not found any reference to plantings in the gully in 1938, but Horton’s work diary for 13/8/1937-21/8/1943 (Puke Ariki ARC 2003-860, Box 1) records that several days throughout the year were spent in the gully mowing it, or cutting grass and weeds from around the trees, or hoeing or digging around them. Horton reported to the September 1939 meeting of the Park Committee that tree planting for the season had been completed, including replacing dead and unsatisfactory trees in the Fillis Street plantation (*Taranaki Herald* 13/9/1939).

On 13/5/1940, Horton wrote a report on the “Fillis Street native botanical reserve” for the annual meeting of the Park Committee the next day. Fortunately, his original report still survives (Puke Ariki ARC 2003-860, Box 4, Folder 41) - “The planting of this reserve was started in 1935 and completed last year. The area comprises four acres approximately, and is set apart as a botanical reserve for native trees and plants. Here we have planted not less than two each of all native trees, but the collection does not include alpine, rockery and bog plants. These trees are doing well. Cultivation has now ceased, and it will be necessary to scythe the rank grass growth two or three

times a year. This work and general maintenance of the area will cost about £25 a year. When these trees have sufficiently developed, it is proposed to make suitable paths through them, to give easy access to every part, and also to attach name plates to them all, and it will be essential to provide a suitable entrance to the reserve from Fillis Street. These matters need not be done immediately, but must not be overlooked; probably the work should be done in about three years time. It is difficult to estimate the educational value this reserve will be in future years as it is the only reserve of this kind in one area in this country. There are about 1200 trees of over 200 varieties in this reserve". Horton is not known to have prepared a record of the species, and the number of each, that he planted in the gully.

The later history of the botanical reserve in Fillis Street Gully will be considered in a future article. Suffice to say here that, today, the gully does not contain anything like the number and variety of trees that Horton planted there in the 1930s.

From the Friends

Walks on the wild side

Elise Smith



Three recent walks guided by David Medway have taken us to some wild places, indeed, different worlds in Pukekura Park and Brooklands. So, whilst we are perhaps only twenty metres from habitation, we may be deep in the rainforest, and far back in time. As we strolled under gigantic Totara (*Podocarpus totara*) and Kauri (*Agathis australis*) trees, or scrambled through plant collections selected to show foreign and rare species, we discussed how the apparently incomprehensible scientific names of plants link the history of adventurers, scientists,

Thanks to the New Plymouth District Council for providing the aerial imagery.

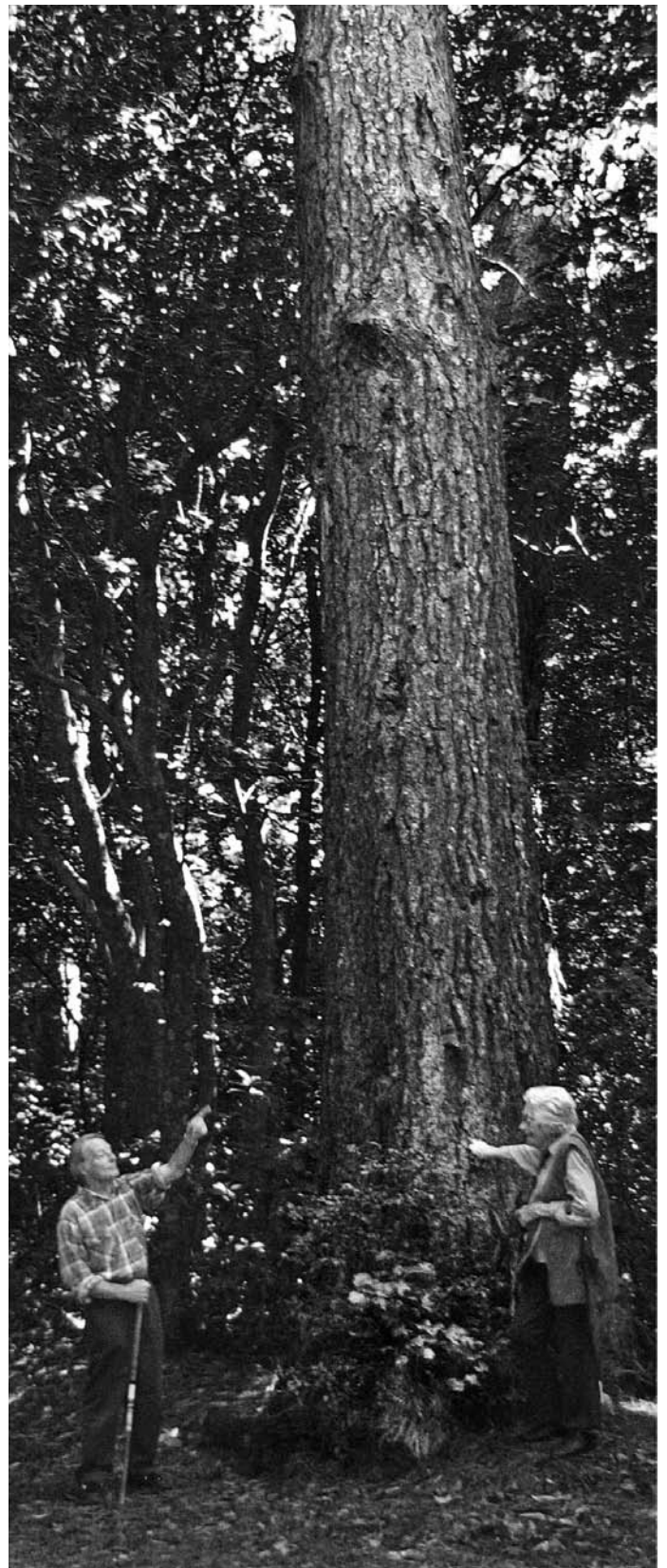
and gardeners. The Pukekura Park staff planted thousands of trees in the early 1900's, which now provide not only rare and interesting vegetation from around New Zealand and abroad, but form the main features and skylines of the Park today.

Our walks at most are 1.5km long, a leisurely pace over two hours,



enough to enjoy and appreciate a stroll along the path behind the Zoo to Kauri Grove, or from Kaimata Street through the List Garden to the Bowl of Brooklands. We explored Kindergarten Gully, looking at the site of the proposed new cricket practice nets, then up through a seventy year old planting to join Claffey Walk, thence down past the Curator's office back to the Bellringer Pavilion. When one is negotiating the steeper paths along gully sides, arrested from a tumble by only a walking pole or friendly hand, there are few sounds of city life, only the exclamations of walking companions and background bird song.

For images of the walkers, the plants, and audio clips from the guided walks visit Kete Pukekura, <http://kete.pukekura.org.nz>.



Photos Elise Smith

The Gables Colonial Hospital – The Brooklands era

Ron Lambert
Senior Researcher Puke Ariki



One of New Zealand's most historic buildings now graces Brooklands Park. The only survivor of Sir George Grey's four colonial hospitals - the others were at Auckland, Whanganui and Wellington - The Gables Colonial Hospital is a fitting monument to our early medical heritage.

In February 1903, W. H. Skinner, on behalf of the Scenery Preservation Society, initiated a meeting "of all those interested in the preservation of the Old Colonial Hospital" which was to be disposed of "... to make room for a snug, up-to-date structure of vile taste and indifferent workmanship" (*Taranaki Herald* 20/2/1903). An article by Skinner captioned "The

Disappearance of an Old and Picturesque Landmark" was published in the *Taranaki Herald* on 21 July 1904 - "On Saturday last the old colonial hospital was submitted to public auction "to be removed within fourteen days." A well-known "house breaker" secured, it is said, a bargain, and in a few days the familiar old building will have passed away to make room for a more spick and span, smug, up-to-date villa!" Skinner then goes on to briefly outline the establishment of the hospital which was erected in 1848 on Mangorei (then Hospital) Road, now the site of the New Plymouth Girls' High School. He concludes his somewhat sardonic article - "One could go on reminiscing about the old place, but its doom has been pronounced by a progressive Council, and councillors of all shades of opinion were agreed that it should disappear as it had become an eyesore (?) to the neighbourhood".

That could have been the last we heard of New Plymouth's Colonial Hospital, but the editor of the *Taranaki Herald*, in a footnote to Skinner's article, was able to report a development - "We are sure that many of our readers will be pleased to learn that the building is after all to be preserved, a well-known local gentleman having, we understand, purchased it for removal to his property...". That "well-known local gentleman" was, of course, Newton King, who is reported to have bought the building for £10 at the behest of his wife, Mary, who was the daughter of the highly-respected local doctor, George St. George. Nothing is known of the manner in which the building, whole or in sections, was transported to Brooklands and re-constructed, but it must have been an impressive and costly process, completed with an almost unbelievable focus on maintaining its integrity.

The Gables, as the building then became known, was used by several members of Newton King's family as a temporary residence. Newly-weds, Eliot and Dorothy King and son-in-law Sydney Allen and his family - including grandsons Peter and Chalmers Allen both of whom became well-known local doctors - all lived in The Gables at various times. Adrienne Tatham, Eliot's daughter, recalls that her mother was terrified of the "black beetles" (native cockroaches) that used to fall from the ceiling while she was living in the house after World War I. In 1934, the building was transferred, as part of the Brooklands estate, to the New Plymouth Borough Council. It appears to have subsequently been rented out as private accommodation.

Michael and Elizabeth Smither lived in The Gables from 1964 until 1969 after which the family moved to Otago for a few years. Many of Michael's classic early family paintings were completed during The Gables years and show identifiable parts of the building. The Gables became the residence for New Plymouth's Public Relations Officers - Patrick Connell from 1969 and, subsequently, from 1975 to 1982-1983, Bryce McPherson. Part of their lease agreements required them to open a small section of The Gables to the public on a few days each year.

It was at that stage that the New Plymouth Borough Council, in association with the Taranaki Branch of the Historic Places Trust and Dr Peter Wilson's biographer, Gail Lambert, embarked on an extensive restoration of the building. After the removal of many years of interior accretions, re-shingling of the roof, installation of fire and security systems and painting, the restored building was leased to the Taranaki Society of Arts as a gallery which



Puke Ariki collection A2b.103



Taranaki Daily News 9/11/1985

opened in November 1985. One aspect of the restoration that proved somewhat controversial was the abandoning of the “Elizabethan” colour scheme that the Kings adopted for the building. Before that, photographs show the building had been unpainted, or possibly oiled. The grey scheme adopted was designed to re-create that original unpainted appearance.

With an “A” classification from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and a “Category 1” listing with the New Plymouth District Council, The Gables Colonial Hospital is now acknowledged as one of Taranaki’s major heritage buildings. Its survival is due, initially, to one woman’s close association with New Plymouth’s pioneer medical fraternity and to her husband’s ability to achieve marvels.

The photographs that accompany this article are of The Gables in its newly applied “Elizabethan” finery soon after its re-erection at Brooklands (Newton King Glass Plate Collection, c 1904, A2b.103, Puke Ariki), and of Harry Fryer, President of the Taranaki Society of Arts, sketching The Gables which is reproduced, with permission, from the *Taranaki Daily News* of 9/11/1985.

Some recent working bees in Pukekura Park

David Medway



Honeybee on *Phormium cookianum* flower
17 November 2009



Honeybee on *Metrosideros* 'Mistral' flower
22 November 2009



Honeybee on *Callistemon salignus* flower
12 November 2009

Honeybee on *Doryanthes palmeri* flower
14 November 2009



Photos David Medway