

Newsletter

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

No 92, Winter 2013

President's Report

The autumn colours in the Botanic gardens have been wonderful this year. I was walking in the gardens this morning and there is still magnificent colour to be had from some of the *Acers*, *Ginkgo biloba* and other deciduous trees that are late in dropping their leaves.

For those of you who have visited the gardens recently, you may have noticed that some of the pre-cast concrete walls are being erected on the new Botanic Garden Visitors Centre site. The perimeter foundations have been laid down, providing a view of the footprint of the building. There is ample opportunity for the Friends to become involved in providing, and applying for funds for display and interpretation projects in the Visitors Centre that are beyond the budget of the Gardens.

The committee has been involved with organizing and applying for funding for drop-in weaving workshops and demonstrations for children and their caregivers at the Botanic Gardens during Kidsfest 13 – 28 July. You will probably see it advertised as 'the weaving nest - Te kohanga o raranga'. The workshops are aimed at children between 6 and 14 yrs old, and may include making flowers and stars from harakeke (flax), and kites from raupo. There will also be an experienced weaver making items of interest to youths, such as eel traps, a backpack, and sandals. It is hoped that these items will later go on display in the new Visitors Centre. The Friends have successfully applied for funds from Christchurch City Council Community Funding, which has generously provided \$5000 towards this project.

The Cunningham and Townend Houses are still closed to the public, but I am pleased to see that the Fern House is now open, and we can walk around the lush interior and visit this old haunt once again. Hopefully, the Townend House will be the next to open its doors.

As I reported in the last Newsletter, the Friends filed a submission against the proposal made by Canterbury Cricket to build an international cricket oval in Hagley Park, in particular, the grandstands, fencing, pavilion and lighting towers that go with it. Since then we have filed the evidence report for the Environment Court. I have represented the Friends at two pre-hearing conferences, and I will be attending the court hearing during the days that there will be debate or discussion on our arguments. This will be most days, as the only concern that we have not based an argument on is noise. The Court hearing starts on 4 June, and four weeks has been set aside for the case. It is hoped that it may not take that long, but a decision by the Court may not be made for several weeks after. If you see cherry pickers or helium balloons in the oval shortly after the case begins, these will be there to represent the height of the lighting towers. Canterbury Cricket has also been asked to peg out the footprint of the proposed pavilion about this time. If you would like to read either the submission or the evidence report that we have submitted, I will e-mail you a copy, or send you a hard copy.

One of the celebration events that the Friends sponsored for the Christchurch Botanic Gardens 150th anniversary was the photographic competition. This turned out to be very popular with over 600 entries received by the close off date. Many of these were of a very high standard. Judging will now start and all entrants will be informed by email by June 30 whether their entry will receive a prize. The prize winners will be invited to a prize giving ceremony on 9 July, and the winning photographs will be displayed in an exhibition in the Canterbury Museum.

The guides finished their season of daily guided walks in mid April. It was a disappointing year for them with numbers only slightly up from the previous year. They have been busy preparing and trialing their guided walks for the Australasian Guides Conference that we are hosting.

Registration for the conference is now open, and at this early stage we have 53 guides from Australia and New Zealand registered plus 5 partners. The most popular guided walk that registrants have opted for is in the native section. The two most popular break-out sessions following keynote speakers are Gondwana, and

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New Friends' website

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

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PO Box 2553
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or
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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 Philippa Graham – phone 348 5896 or email philippa.graham@gmail.com

Enquiries about membership should be made to Philippa Graham (phone number above)

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Banks, Cook and Solander. The most favoured trips so far are around the Banks Peninsula, and Arthurs Pass.

The propagation groups are in their winter mode, doing seasonal work. By the time this Newsletter is out, they will have a new thermostatically controlled fan heater installed in the propagation house. The team has one new enthusiastic member that has joined them, and another member has also expressed interest.

The Friends AGM is being held on 18 August, so please come along and join us. The venue is the Canterbury Horticultural Rooms in Hagley Park, and the meeting will begin at 2pm. Peter Cooper, one of our new members is going to give a PowerPoint presentation titled "Pumpkins and Pinnacles... Chateaux on the Loire". Peter's presentation will provide us with a rare insight of a garden of a small country chateau in France.

Charles Graham

Gardens' News

From Curator John Clemens

I have been in the unusual situation recently of needing to take a few days sick leave. I seem to conform to the male stereotype of suffering terribly when I am unwell – and making sure everyone else knows about it! However, on this occasion I have been perfectly healthy. It was another family member who needed extra attention, giving me plenty of opportunity to step and fetch, and – when not chauffeuring, shopping, cleaning and cooking – to read and ponder the big issues.

We are a botanic garden. We are charged with helping our visitors appreciate and understand the plant world and the importance of plants for the health and safety of all biodiversity in that world. In fact, over half of the goals listed in our management plan refer to the promotion of "understanding". In his recent television appearances, David Attenborough has helped us to understand how the introduced blackberry smothers other plants on the forest floor in the Galapagos, and the flowering and pollination behaviour of the titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

However, Attenborough goes beyond the particular to stress the need to understand and act on biological issues at the global scale: the conservation of ecosystems and their species, the supply of healthy food and clean water through the care of catchments, soils and natural biodiversity, and the maintenance of climates that will allow us to grow that food and conserve natural areas. And all of this so that we (and other biodiversity on which we depend) can continue and young people, like the one pictured enjoying herself in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, can be strong and happy.



Young person on swing in playground
from an original image by Neil Macbeth

Thank you to Bruce Tulloch for his recent wake up call to readers of the Opinion page of *The Press*: "Wake up!" to the crisis of climate change, which is expected to drastically threaten habitats, animals (including humans) and plants if not adequately and promptly addressed. Thinking about approaches to fostering understanding of the big issues, it was the 2nd International Fascination of Plants Day on 18th May. As a vote of support the Taylor & Francis publishing house has made several scientific journal papers freely available for six weeks on a number of important themes.

There are many highly accessible papers on offer. In one from the University of Reading, England, the author writes on how climate change can affect disease organisms responsible for crop losses. It does

not come as a surprise that we continue to lose a proportion of harvested crops to diseases either before or after harvest, but the quoted figure of 20-25% worldwide is staggering. Moreover, the author expects plant pathogens to become more difficult to manage in the face of climate change. As well as being very readable (and disturbing), the paper describes some fascinating records of bud break, flowering and other phenomena that have been kept for centuries. There are many other "Fascination of Plants" papers on offer, including a reappearance of the interesting 2005 paper by Helen Leach on pre-European Māori gardens, "Gardens without weeds?".

Reading science papers is not to everyone's taste. Events being mounted worldwide on the ground for International Fascination of Plants Day should reach a far wider audience. Here in our botanic garden we continue to work on how best to convey information contained in those papers to promote understanding of big issues to our visitors. We strive to fascinate and help people to learn through engaging programmes and displays mounted throughout the year. Along with local collaborators, we could take part in this event in years to come, once we have been resettled in our new facilities.

We can look at the young person on the swing and think how lucky we are to have such a facility in our botanic garden. It is not particularly "botanic", but it is a huge local attraction. Writing in a recent Playgrounds issue of the *Escape* supplement to *The Press*, Cecile Dransart lists the good things about our playground: pools, ducks to feed, picnics in stunning settings, toilets, ice cream and walks around the gardens. Taking walks around the gardens (and taking part in discovery trails or exploring exhibitions) sounds like an ideal opportunity to be fascinated, and thereby gain some new understanding.

As I write this, the first vertical concrete wall sections are being erected for the new Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre. All concrete, glass and steel elements will be manoeuvred into place in the next few months to give us and our visitors an airy and exciting new home. Happily, at my own home we are all on the mend.

ⁱ Bruce Tulloch Wake up! *The Press*, Thursday 16 May 2013

ⁱⁱ <http://explore.tandfonline.com/content/est/fascination-of-plants-day.php> (17 May 2013)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07060661.2012.701233> (17 May 2013)

^{iv} Cecile Dransart. All around us. *Escape* in *The Press* Monday 29 April 2013

Friends News

Australasian Botanic Gardens Guides' Conference

Planning is well underway for the Australasian Conference of Botanic Garden Guides to be held in Christchurch from 28 October to November 1 using the "Chateau on the Park" for social occasions (the Maori welcome and dinner), the Canterbury Horticultural Society rooms for the discussions and keynote sessions and the Botanic Gardens for the guided walk and talks.

The conferences are held every second year and this is the first in New Zealand. It is a wonderful opportunity for our guiding team to be involved without having to travel to Australia. In the past the Friends of the Botanic Gardens has subsidised the conference registration fees and the guides have paid their own travel and accommodation costs. This time the committee considered that it is important that as many guides as possible register and has offered a 50% subsidy on the fee.

Our guides will not only be learning much from the keynote speakers, breakout workshops and walks and talks, they will be also delivering many of the sessions. This will be invaluable experience as will the interaction with the visiting Australian guides.

This will be a busy time for our guiding team and we would very much appreciate some volunteer help from members close to and during the conference; preparing conference packs, directing guests, setting up venues, signs, etc. Please contact Faye Fleming 351 7798 if you can help.

Articles

Look at that tree –



Parasol tree *Firmiana simplex*
US photo of a parasol tree *Firmiana*

A little East of the Cherry Mound and the maritime pines is a newcomer. The straggly young tree is a parasol tree, *Firmiana simplex*, or Wutong in its native home of China. It is found also, in Japan, Korea and South East Asia.

The tree is named after Karl Joseph von Firmian (1716-1782), an Austrian statesman and promoter of the arts and sciences.

Simplex tells us the leaf is simple, not compound. *Firmiana* belongs to the very large family of *Malvaceae*; other well-known members of this family are hibiscus, mallow, okra (ladies fingers or gumbo) and cotton. At maturity the tree may reach 12 m with a rounded crown having a spread of 8 to 10 metres. Full sun or light shade suits it well and it can tolerate a range of good soils and adequate water, but does need some protection from strong winds in open sites.

The leaves are its outstanding feature, being palmately veined, 3 to 5 lobed, bright green above, pu-

bescent below and some 30 cm across. As a deciduous tree, the autumn tones are rather drab. Flowers, which are star-shaped, yellow-green and 20 mm across are born on 30 cm long panicles. Flowers give rise to leathery capsules that split into 4 or 5 sections each containing 1 to 3 seeds. The bark, at least in younger trees, is not unlike that of the snake-bark maples.

Two uses of the Parasol Tree are as shade trees and street trees. However, in its native China the timber, which is said to have sonic properties, is in demand by the makers of musical instruments.

Firmiana, does have a darker side. In places such as the warmer parts of North America it is a serious pest as it is aggressively self-seeding. This means it produces countless seedlings just as sycamores do in this country. Every effort is made to eradicate it, even to the extent of removing it from nurseries. An article written in an American journal in 1884 reported that the leaves could be dried and smoked as tobacco.

There is no doubt that this unruly youngster we see today, will grow into a handsome specimen under Curator David's expert care.

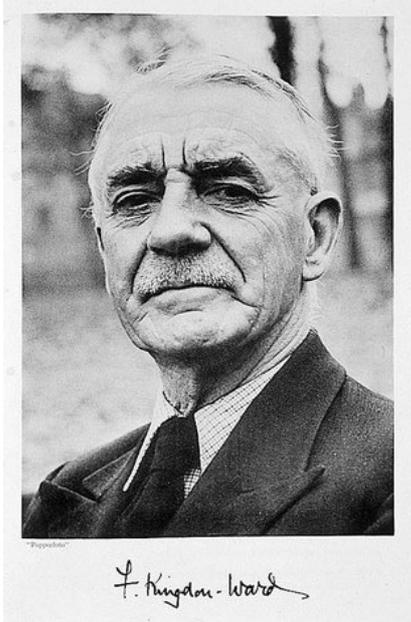
Neil O'Brien.

Plant hunter – Frank Kingdon Ward (1885-1958)

Frank Kingdon Ward was a Victorian Englishman. "His father, a self-made university professor, had worked himself to death by the age of 58, leaving his family at the edge of poverty. Frank, then a second-year student at Cambridge, had to terminate his studies in natural science and do as many young Englishmen of his class did: He went east to the colonies in search of the opportunities denied to him at home" (from Tom Christopher's Introduction to *In the Land of the Blue Poppies*).

Kingdon Ward taught in an English, Eton-style public school in Shanghai but jumped at the chance to join a zoological expedition to Western China in the early 1900s. He found two new species of vole and some plant specimens, which he sent back to the School of

Botany in Cambridge. His resilience and resourcefulness were noted, as were the beginnings of his extraordinary talent for spotting promising garden plants. So began a very long career as a plant hunter. Kingdon Ward's live and pressed specimens totalled more than 23,000.



From the early 1900s until his death in 1958, Kingdon Ward's expeditions in the Eastern Himalaya encompassed Upper Burma, Assam, the Yunnan-Tibetan border region, areas in which George Forrest and Reginald Farrer were also working. In fact, there was considerable angst from the territorial George Forrest about Kingdon Ward collecting on his patch in northwestern Yunnan and southeastern Tibet (1921-23). "Ward had an instinct for a garden plant and Forrest knew this" (Brenda McLean, *George Forrest, Plant Hunter*). It seems that Kingdon Ward also had a knack for causing trouble at times: he had tried to enter Tibet without a passport in 1913-14, and his surveying equipment led local Chinese to suspect he was a spy.

Certainly, all who knew Kingdon Ward described him as a profoundly taciturn and difficult man. Botanist Bill Sykes, who met him in the early 1950s, described him as "a short, stocky man, renowned for his toughness and vigour, a man who expected a lot of mental and physical stamina. He didn't tolerate anyone who couldn't keep up and was a strict disciplinarian to boot." The series of wealthy young aristocrats who paid to accompany him on his expeditions all testified to his silences, which could last for two or three days at a time.

On paper, it was different matter. Frank Kingdon Ward was a prolific writer, publishing twenty volumes from his 24 expeditions. His writing is clear, descriptive, engaging and often lyrical. He took excellent photographs of the dramatic landscapes he travelled and the many tribal peoples who lived in the Eastern Himalaya.

Kingdon Ward is often dubbed "the Blue Poppy Man". He first saw *Meconopsis betonicifolia*, which had been described by the Jesuit Father Delavay in this area forty years before, and in 1922 in south-eastern Tibet by Lt-Col. F M Bailey, but no seeds sent to France or the UK had germinated. Kingdon Ward found it flowering against the edge of a glacier at 16,000 feet on the Yunnan-Tibetan border. He sent home packets of sturdy seed in 1925, and his detailed analysis ended, "It will be perfect". We all agree he's right.



Blue poppy *Meconopsis betonicifolia*

At the same time, he collected primulas—the fragrant yellow giant cowslip *Primulus florindae*, named for his first wife, and the beautiful rose trumpet *Lilium mackliniae* for his second wife. His most frightening experience occurred in 1950 in Assam, now part of China, when a devastating earthquake struck. It was of such intensity that at a seismological station in Dorking, Surrey, the violent trace was unreadable. Kingdon Ward, his wife and two assistants later discovered they were only fifty miles from the epicentre. Miraculously, they survived; a thousand people died. Our gain from this adventure was the introduction of the cascading *Cornus kousa* var. *sinensis* gathered from seed. It differs from *C. kousa* in having larger and sturdier bracts.

In his last expedition with his wife, to Burma in 1952, Kingdon Ward's focus was rhododendrons; his sponsors included the NZ Rhododendron Society. Like all the other great plant hunters, prior to the Second World War, plants were collected in quantity as well as quality. Little thought was given to the preservation of natural habitat in those days. His introductions cover the widest range of plants – alpines, trees and shrubs, honeysuckles, berberis, acers, gentians – but it was the glut of rhododendron species released into English parks and gardens in the first half of the 20th century that enabled enthusiastic gardeners to set about prodigious breeding, crossing and hybridising programmes. New Zealand's internationally renowned hybridiser was Edgar Stead at the Ilam Gardens in Christchurch, who acquired much of his seed from Exbury in Hampshire, the estate of Lionel de Rothschild, who founded the British Rhododendron Society. Stead's other major source was the Loder Gardens in England. Both these wealthy, upper-class men financially supported the plant-hunting expeditions of men such as George Forrest and Frank Kingdon Ward, the giants of the plant-hunting world. They were all part of the frenzy for woodland plantings with so much of their stock coming from China. Their dividends were the seeds of new species, eagerly awaited.

Frank Kingdon Ward died of a stroke at home in England. It's worth reading something of his prolific writings to get an idea of this extraordinary man.

Diana Madgin

Art in the Gardens: the Keeper - Kaitiaki



As part of the Festival of Flowers 2013 internationally acclaimed landscape architect, Craig Pocock, and well-known Nga Puhī artist Darren George combined their talents to create a state of the art, five metre high, installation. The artwork was named *Kaitiaki* or *Keeper* to give the people of Christchurch a guardian to watch over them and provide hope for the future of the city.

The site of the work was important in the concept behind *The Keeper*. *Kaitiaki* is the Maori word for *Keeper* and can be seen in the sculpture. This is significant in relation to the roles that the Botanic Gardens and the Canterbury Museum play in our community's identify and well-being. The other word in the sculpture is *Atua* the Maori word for God. The significance of this word can be read in relation to the text carved into the facade of the Canterbury Museum, "Lo these are the parts of his ways. but how little a portion is heard of him." (Job Chap.22 v14.)

The installation has a wooden frame made in sections with irrigation built into the felt-covered base. Holes were cut into the felt to take pots with potting mix and plants. The bottom section was hung first and it built upwards from there. *The Keeper* will remain on-site for two years and will be replanted each time the annual beds in the Botanic Gardens are changed.



Craig Pocock gained honours in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University. He has been a guest lecturer at Lincoln University and also an examiner and judge for NZ Landscape Architecture design awards. He has travelled to Peru, India and USA as a critic and guest lecturer.

Darren George is art teacher at Christs College He gained a Master of Fine Arts (Painting) from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He was a finalist in the Wallace Trust Art Award. Darren often uses traditional Maori colours (black, white and red), numbers, Maori words, rectangles, patterns of moko, koru, and kowhaiwhai.

Events in the Gardens

From Lynda Burns, Visitor Services Team Leader. 941 7585 or 027 559 0181.

Writing from the Gardens. Commencing from late May. A self-guided history tour of the Gardens through the fictitious correspondence of the Paul family. Pick up a map from the Botanic Gardens Information Centre and start from the Peace Bell.

150th Anniversary - a public tree planting. Tuesday 9 July, late in the afternoon.

Kidsfest activities:

Hidden history hunt. Saturday 13 to Sunday 28 July. A family activity following the trail of giant post-cards and finding clues to what is hidden in an old chest. Pick up treasure hunt maps from the Botanic Gardens Information Centre.

Editor's note. My wife and I took our Auckland grandson on the children's trail in June. He quickly became absorbed in the challenge, an absorption that continued until we reached the end. We had a similar experience 18 months earlier when our Australian grandchildren also enjoyed the experience. The trails are educational and are a wonderful way of introducing young children to the Gardens and developing an interest that should remain with them as they grow into teenagers and then adults. It is a good way to remind parents of the delights that the Gardens hold. And it is a boon for parents, grandparents, or other child minders, who are looking for ways to entertain children in the school holidays. The staff of the Information Centre should be justifiably proud of this continuing attraction that they provide in the Gardens.

Light up the leafy night. Thursday 18 to Sunday 21 July and Thursday 25 to Sunday 28 July. An experience for all ages in the Botanic Gardens after dark with a light show and performers on a 500m light trail. Starts at the Armagh Street carpark, running between 5.30 and 7.00pm. Please bring a torch and stay on the lit trail.

Drop-in weaving workshops. Tuesday 16 to Saturday 20 July and Tuesday 23 to Saturday 27 July. Learn how to make stars, flowers and kites from native plants. Free 20 minute workshops for children aged between 5 and 12 years start every half hour from 11.00am. Last workshop at 2.30pm. Bookings taken on the day at the weaving bungalows beside the Fernery.