

Obituary

Marguerite Joyce Amos, 29 December 1919 – 13 January 2011



Joy Amos at Joan Dingley's 90th birthday party in May 2006. From the left are: Keith Hammett, Joy Amos, Alan Esler and Sue Davison. Photo: Rod Bieleski.

Marguerite Joyce Amos, always known as Joy, died on the 13th of January 2011 aged 92. There was no newspaper death notice and the service was a private one, so her death, like a lot of her life, was a private affair.

Joy was destined to be a horticulturist. She grew up on the Welsh Plant Breeding Station, Aberystwyth, where her father, J.W. Watkins, was superintendent. He was a gardener, trained in the traditional way by working in a succession of gardens, including Kew. The Director, R.G. Stapledon, was intent on improving the incomes of the hill farmers of Wales, by breeding and selecting more productive grasses and clovers. In that environment, horticulture was the obvious choice of career for her, though unusual for a woman at that time.

Things did not change when she arrived in New Zealand in September 1958. She was the only woman in the Department of Agriculture group she joined, and something of a mystery to the old-school Director. He was concerned that having her working as an orchard adviser to Dalmatian orchardists might put her in difficult situations. He did not know Joy, who was not a blusterer but could quietly freeze the undeserving at ten paces.

Joy's job was broadly that of an instructor in horticulture. In theory, she was to specialise in ornamental horticulture which, with floriculture, was her own personal preference. Inevitably, however, her official duties covered almost every aspect of horticulture. In her early years Joy wrote monthly notes on the flower garden for the *New Zealand Journal of Agriculture*, as well as many other articles and information leaflets.

In 1972 the Department asked Joy to support the development of ornamental horticulture throughout the North Island, including the organisation of seminars and field days for nurserymen and flower growers. This she did with her characteristic thoroughness and dedication. During this time she made an especially important contribution to the growing, marketing and packaging of cut flowers for local and overseas markets. In my view, her contributions played a central role in turning a cantankerous, suspicious local 'industry' into a significant player in our export market.

Her association with the Auckland Botanic Gardens, spanning 40 years, was just as important to the RNZIH (and to all of Auckland) as her contributions to the industry. From 1971 until 1982 she served on the Auckland Botanic Gardens Technical Advisory Committee as the MAF representative (developing her friendship with Joan Dingley) and continued her association with the Gardens after her retirement in 1981. From 1982 to 1999 she was a member of the Tree and Shrub Evaluation Panel under the chairmanship of George Rainey to assess and select the most reliable species and cultivars for Auckland gardens and compile appropriate advisory leaflets. She remembered the meetings as lively and most enjoyable when conflicting experience was voiced (particularly by Jean Veal) and then amicably resolved. Subsequently the Bulb and Perennial Evaluation Panel was convened with Joy as chairperson and Brian Buchanan as secretary. She became a foundation member when the Friends society was formed, and was a generous donor of books and periodicals for the library.

Joy was a strong believer in the need to keep botany in the Auckland Botanic Gardens, and not have it become simply an attractive garden park. It's worth repeating her comments, published in a history of the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens, *The first twenty-five years 1983–2008*, p. 15:

"Looking to the future, long term planning and clear objectives are needed, to develop this as a *botanic* garden, not just a park. The relevance of Botanic Gardens has exercised the minds of those involved with Kew Gardens and the new National Botanic Garden of Wales, and others. Their ideas and conclusions are published, and are possibly the most worthy of consideration for the future of the Auckland Botanic Gardens".

With this in mind, she took pleasure in the work of Steve Benham in identifying plants and developing the endangered plants garden, Roger Price's work with children, the Māori flax collection, the Children's Garden and the major role of significant plant breeders such as Jack Hobbs, Terry Hatch, Keith Hammett and others. Her wishes are still on track.

Her contributions were recognised by her peers. In 1981, Joy was elected an Associate of Honour of the RNZIH to recognise her distinguished contributions to horticulture and in 1992 she was elected a Life Member of the Friends of Auckland Botanic Gardens.

My own memories of Joy go back almost 40 years to when I was a keen orchid hobbyist and Joy was a key player in the nascent industry, and then later when I headed the DSIR Division of Horticulture and Processing. Joy (in MAF) stood out at this time as one of the most influential horticultural advisors in the country. Later in the Friends she became a personal ally. With Joy's death, New Zealand has lost a great horticulturist, New Zealand horticulture has lost a great guide and teacher, and all of us have lost a great friend.

**Obituary compiled by
Rod Bieleski**

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