

The Sister Cities Gardens in Christchurch, a Millennium project

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The Beginning

The Christchurch City Council set up a steering committee in 1994 to investigate and report on proposals to celebrate the Millennium. The year 2000 also coincided with the 150th anniversary of the founding of Canterbury. The Trust Bank Community Trust provided core funding for the City Council to formalise, control and oversee the numerous projects and events that were being planned, and leaders from a wide range of educational, cultural, historical, arts and sporting



The lych gate at the entrance to the Christchurch (UK) Garden.

organisations were invited to meetings to provide their input. Representatives of garden clubs, nursery businesses, the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture, the Canterbury Horticultural Society and the Christchurch Beautifying Association formed a working committee to discuss possible Millennium activities of a horticultural nature.

Knowing the limitations of space within the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, my early association with these Gardens led me to suggest that a park featuring gardens of the six Sister Cities of Christchurch would be worthwhile idea. Particular emphasis would need to be placed on acceptable design and appropriate botanical content, and a suitable location within the city parks system would have to be found. The idea received a sympathetic audience from the City Council committees of our Sister Cities: Christchurch (England), Adelaide (Australia), Kurashiki (Japan), Songpa Gu (Korea), Seattle (U.S.A.) and Gansu Province (China). A Sister Cities Gardens Park working committee was set up, which I chaired.



Grandfather and Grandmother at the Songpa-Gu Garden.

Funding

The overall cost of the many Millennium proposals that were being brought forward became the next major consideration. The City Council set up a planning group under the

chairmanship of Mr Ian Leggat, Chancellor, University of Canterbury. Ms Rae Finlay (Knutson) was appointed Director of the group, which was named Turning Point 2000. Eleven different major projects were now on the drawing board for Turning Point 2000 to consider. Prominent among these were



This pergola in the Kurashiki Garden will be covered with *Wisteria sinensis*.

projects on the beautification of Canterbury Highways, conservation in the Port Hills Reserves, the construction of a waka, a sculpture for Cathedral Square, and the Sister Cities Gardens.

Turning Point 2000 assessed the likely combined costs of the various projects, and an application for funds was submitted to the Canterbury Community Trust. The outcome was that the City Council received 3.1 million dollars from the Trust, and these funds were subsequently allocated to approved projects, of which the Sister Cities Gardens was one. A proposal for the development of the Sister Cities Gardens had been prepared in 1998 and presented to a hearing of the Finance Committee of the Council [1]. The proposal was favourably received and a grant of \$250,000 was approved for the initial stages of the development.

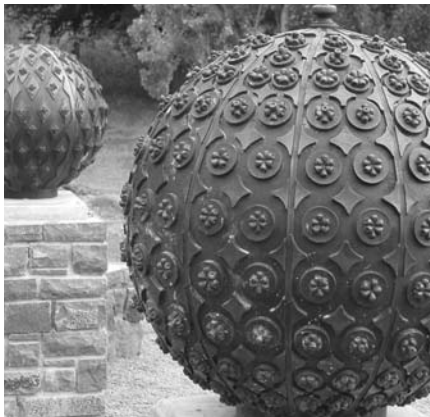
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Site selection

The City Council Parks Planning Department offered five sites within the city for consideration as the location of the Sister Cities Gardens. These were the Styx Mill Reserve, Nunwick Park, Curletts Road Reserve, Halswell Quarry Park and Huntsbury Reserve. In the selection process a defined set of criteria for the requirements of the international gardens was followed. Suitable soils, drainage, access, site microclimates and location were given high ratings. Halswell Quarry Park met these very closely, but there was disapproval



A seat of special significance for the Seattle Garden created by Doug Neil.



Australian seed capsules in a striking setting for the entrance to the Adelaide Garden.



The Canterbury Native Plant Garden.

from some local residents of the plan to establish exotic plantings within the Quarry Park. Some preferred that native plants only be used, despite the park already being studded with many exotic trees from a variety of countries. A public hearing regarding a change of use to the management plan for the park received approval [2].

Halswell Quarry

In brief, the Halswell Quarry opened in 1850 to provide road metal and building construction stone for the expanding city of Christchurch [3]. Examples of buildings using Halswell stone are the Canterbury Museum, the Provincial Council building, the old Sydenham Post Office, and the Sign of the Takahe. The Halswell Quarry Company was formed in 1890 and it became a public company in 1901. This company went into liquidation in 1925 and the Christchurch City Council purchased the quarry for £31,800. With the adjoining farmland (30.8ha), which was purchased early in the 1970s to provide separation of possible residential subdivision to the north of the quarry, the total land is 54ha. After 140 years of productivity, the reserves of usable rock were exhausted, and in 1990 the quarry was designated a public reserve. Mr John Moore became groundsman-caretaker in 1992, and in 1995 he became a member of the City Council ranger service. In 1996, the City Council transferred the Quarry from the Roding to the Parks Unit. At this time John Moore became responsible for the overall management of activities within the Quarry Park.

Halswell Quarry Park has become one of the Christchurch City's principal outdoor education facilities

catering for large numbers of school parties as well as local and international tour groups. The park is also proving to be very popular with families and casual visitors, who come to experience the impressive views and uniqueness of the site. There are estimated to be up to 4,000 visitors per week in fine weather. Pathways, parking spaces, picnic tables and public toilets have been installed, and several outstanding walks, such as Crater Rim Walk, have been laid out.

Early developments and programme launch

After site inspections within the Halswell Quarry Park to consider the best location for each of the six gardens, a master plan was drawn up by Mr Dennis Preston, Landscape Architect, City Design. Each garden was designed to occupy approximately 0.8ha. After perusal of the plans by the various committees, each plan was forwarded to the mayors of our Sister Cities for their review, comment and suggestions. All plans were duly returned with very few amendments being suggested.

Included in the planning process was the development of approximately 11ha for a Canterbury Native Plant garden to be located principally on the flat land to the west adjoining Kennedy's Bush Road. Surveyors and engineers were involved in developing a small lake that served as a water catchment from the adjoining hillsides. To assist with the cost of this work an application was lodged with the New Zealand Lotteries Grants Board, and a grant of \$61,000 was received.

A site coordinator for the project, Mr Ron Williams, was appointed in November 1998 to oversee the layout of paths, carry out planting and generally assist in the developmental work in association with the Park Ranger, Mr John Moore. In the early days, hares and rabbits proved to be a serious problem and many plants were lost. Netting cages were placed around many of the plants, and a lot of this protection is still in place today.

Mr Roy Edwards, Lincoln University, prepared comprehensive lists of indigenous plants for each of the six gardens. The design of the individual gardens was carefully completed, but obtaining trees and shrubs indigenous to each geographical area of the Sister Cities was fraught with difficulties. Mr Joe Cartman, City Council horticulturist, inquired throughout the country for the plants with limited success. An early objective was to plant the largest trees obtainable in order to establish the character of each garden, as well as to provide some limited shade.

On 1 June 1999, the Mayor, Mr Gary Moore, officially planted the first tree in the Canterbury (New Zealand) garden. The chairpersons of each Sister City committee then proceeded with tree planting in their respective garden areas.

Sister City involvement

As time went by, momentum developed to incorporate special garden features within each garden design to establish the uniqueness of each garden and to provide identifiable entrances. Each city approached the challenge in a

different way. For example, the Christchurch Sister City Garden is located up from the Halswell stone house built for Mr Paterson when he arrived from Scotland in 1925 to manage the quarry. An attractive lych gate has been installed as an entrance to the Christchurch Garden, with the pathway completed and nearby stone walls restored.

An early supporter of the Songpa-Gu Sister City Garden, Mr Charlie Lee, organised the introduction of several specially made granite carvings from Korea. At the entrance to the garden are two statues, donated by Jeju-do Province, depicting grandfather and grandmother. Also two impressive and colourful 3m tall “Jangseung” or guardian poles have been erected in a prominent position overlooking the garden to the west. A stone lantern, “Suk Deung”, was dedicated by Songpa-Gu mayor, Lee Yoo Taek at the official opening ceremony. The Korean Veterans Association unveiled a Memorial Bridge within the garden on 26 July 2003 to mark the end of the Korean War .

The Kurashiki Sister City Garden features a long paved pathway that leads to a teahouse. The pathway has been lined on either side with standard Toshino cherries (*Prunus yedoensis*). The national “tree”, *Wisteria sinensis*, has been planted to cover (eventually) a large “Fuji” or pergola. In a nearby dry creek area, a Japanese style bridge has been constructed.

In the Seattle Sister City Garden a large artistic seat, with carved Oamaru stone ends depicting a scene from American Indian mythology, has been installed to identify the centre of this garden. Mr Doug Neil, a sculptor from Seattle,

now living in Christchurch, did the carving. Steps leading to an impressive area for seating identify the Adelaide Sister City Garden, located on a dry, hilly site. Striking art work mounted on stone walling depicts Australian plants, such as *Eucalyptus*, *Grevillea* and *Hakea*. Apart from the planting of appropriate trees in the Gansu Province Sister City Garden, a proposal for the development of an elaborate Chinese gate and Courtyard is now being finalised [4].

The large Canterbury Native Plant Garden is laced with wandering pathways. Where low, wet areas are dominant in this generally flat site, ornamental bridges allow for easy movement. The feature lake that has been formed is now attracting much bird life back to the park.

In the last three weeks before the official opening day, there was a flurry of activity to bring all of the Sister Cities Gardens up to top condition. Two volunteer groups of 26 members of the Canterbury Horticultural Society descended on the gardens to clear weeds and to tidy.

Official Opening

RNZIH Patron, His Excellency, the Governor General, Sir Michael Hardie Boys officially opened the Sister Cities Gardens before a very large crowd on 17 February 2001. Also present were the mayors of Christchurch City, Mr Garry Moore, of Christchurch, England, Mr Eric Spreadbury, of Gansu Province, Mr Feng Hun Hai, of Kurashiki, Mr Nakada Takeshi, and of Songpa Gu, Mr Lee Yoo Taek. The past New Zealand Honorary Consul in Seattle, Dr John Bollard, and Cr. Bruno Ventura, Adelaide were also present. Flags of each city were flying, plaques were unveiled and trees were planted in each garden [5].



Governor General, Sir Michael Hardie Boys (right) and John Taylor jointly planting a totara tree at the official opening of the Sister Cities Gardens.

John Taylor (President, RNZIH) commenced training at Christchurch Botanic Gardens, followed by naval service in Great Britain (1944-45) and a studentship at Kew Gardens. Further study continued in the USA at Arnold Arboretum (Harvard), New York Botanical Garden and the Botanical Garden of the University of California at Berkeley. He was owner-operator of a wholesale nursery for 17 years, and was then appointed Senior Lecturer at Lincoln College in 1972. John retired in 1986 but remains committed to training in horticulture.

References

- [1] *Sister Cities Garden Park Proposal* (1998). J.O. Taylor, Turning Point 2000 and City Design, 30pp.
- [2] *Halswell Quarry Park Draft Management Plan* (1998). Christchurch City Council, Christchurch, 45pp.
- [3] *Halswell Quarry, Its Past and Its Future Resources* (1975). Street Works Division, Christchurch City Council, Christchurch, 35pp.
- [4] *Halswell Quarry Park Design Guidelines* (2002). Parks and Waterways Department, Christchurch City Council, Christchurch, 16pp.
- [5] *The Sister Cities of Christchurch* (2002). International Relations Section, Christchurch City Council, 20pp.