

Gladiolus × brenchleyensis: A near-extinct relict of Great Britain is rediscovered in New Zealand

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The gaudy *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis* (Fig. 1), seen in an occasional Christchurch garden (and, more rarely, elsewhere in New Zealand), was as recently as 2009 thought by British plant experts to be all but lost to horticulture. “This plant is rare, and when I say rare, I mean so rare that it was only recently rediscovered. *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis* had grown for around twenty years in a garden on the Isle of Man, with owner Edward Huyton entirely unaware that this bloom was supposed to be extinct,” says Dr Anthony Hamilton, gladiolus enthusiast and a retired senior lecturer from London University.



Fig. 1 *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*.

Things changed when Huyton attended a talk by London University Professor, Michael Tooley. He saw an image of *G. × brenchleyensis* displayed by Tooley and offered that he might have a clump in his Andreas garden on the Isle of Man. “Huyton recognised it, and since that day he has shared corms and bulbils from his plants with specialists around the country,” Hamilton says, “in the hope of preserving the plant.” In 2010, Tooley wrote of this rediscovery on the Isle of Man.



Fig. 2 *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*, growing at Selwyn Huts, Canterbury, 2 January 2010. A, plant in flower. B, close-up of flowers.

Here in Christchurch, New Zealand, I recognised the images accompanying the story in the 2009 British Gladiolus Society's Annual (Hamilton and Pilbeam, 2010). We (Jennifer Barrer and I) travelled out to the reserve at Selwyn Huts, Canterbury, to confirm my observation. Upon arrival, we met a resident, Dr Keith Morrison, who told us how his colony of plants came from a large clump in an old chicken run when he first came to the house. He went on to say that the family had come to call them ‘Christmas Gladiolus’ because they gathered the blooms for their festive decorations (Fig. 2A–B).



Fig. 3 *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*, growing in the Barrington Mall carpark garden, Christchurch. A, clumps of corms with emergent leaves, 30 October 2009. B, clump in flower, 30 December 2009.

I also identified a clump² in the Barrington Mall carpark garden, Christchurch (Fig. 3A–B). True to their history they had clumped up and survived a severe environment – one of those lifeless commercial attempts at landscaping. This clump must have survived from the properties which were bulldozed down to make way for the shopping mall.

In 2011 we sent samples of cormlets (Fig. 4A–B) from three locations (Selwyn Huts and Christchurch domestic gardens) to Britain for confirmation. They were studied under the auspices of Dr A. Hamilton, who is confident they will prove to be the ‘lost’ *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*. “The process of identifying this plant and ensuring it is what we think it is will take a minimum of three years,” he said. “We are now positive enough

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² I use the term ‘clump’ to indicate the tight ball of corms built up over ten years or more, and the word ‘colony’ to indicate plants that are dispersed through a garden by continuous cultivation and random propagation.

to make a serious commitment to the project and start collecting stock from New Zealand.”



Fig. 4 Corms of *Gladiolus x brenchleyensis*. **A**, from an established clump. **B**, corms removed of the current and last season's growth.

The life of *G. x brenchleyensis*

In 1848 *Gladiolus x brenchleyensis* was raised by a Mr Steven Hooker at Brenchley township, Kent, as one of the first successful gladiolus hybrids from the African gladiolus species newly introduced into the UK, and its brilliant scarlet colour and strong growth made it a gardener's favourite³.

There is also a connection with Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*. The first work done to hybridise gladioli species was by an amateur horticulturist Dean William Herbert in 1820. Charles Darwin was a very close friend of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker and wrote to him, “Really obliged should I be if you could tell me the names of the parents of *Gladiolus gandavensis*. Also, whether the six following varieties – Eldorado, Canasi, Ophir, Linné, Brenchleyensis, and Vulcain, are the progeny of *G. gandavensis* by itself, or of *G. gandavensis* crossed by some other species?”⁴. Although

quite distinct in appearance from *G. gandavensis*, *G. x brenchleyensis* undoubtedly has that species as one of its parents. Herbert's work with gladioli had established that species could be crossed and the progeny is fertile⁵, a fact which helped Darwin to confirm his theory of evolution.

In 1874 William Robinson wrote what others were saying, “Don't forsake the mixed border” and in 1883 wrote, “Those who desire their gardens to be beautiful late in the autumn should not fail to employ the gladiolus largely.” In 1884 he was advising gardeners to place gladiolus with delphiniums at the rear of the herbaceous border. Another reference said gardeners were turning “to ‘cottage style’ hollyhocks, pansies, phlox and gladiolus, and this were primarily for colour in what had become a dreary world.”⁶

Another wrote, “The Brenchleyensis is a hardy and easily grown tribe, of a soft full scarlet which is invaluable to the autumnal garden. ‘First-size’ roots should be planted from the middle of March to the end of April, and treated in the same way as the hybrid kinds. They should be planted in mixed borders in patches of five or six; a bed of a hundred or so would give a piece of colour that might fairly be called ‘sumptuous’.”

Gladiolus x brenchleyensis was one of Gertrude Jekyll's favourites. She thought the large scarlet flowers were “most suitable for big drifts” in her designs, producing “burning hot scarlet to contrast smoky purple themes”. Garden designs featuring *Gladiolus* were captured by pioneering colour photographers in the early 1900s.

Eventually, however, it became lost to Great Britain's gardens. The discovery of *G. x brenchleyensis* six years ago in a sole garden in the United Kingdom was a ‘eureka’ moment for experts there. As already indicated Dr A. Hamilton and others were trying to build up stock.

Now, in 2015, we wondered how many of these ‘rare’ plants are in our district and hoped to send more stock to J.A. Pilbeam, the conservationist and specialist grower in Britain. I made contact with reporter Anna Price of the local newspapers, *The Christchurch Mail*, *Central Canterbury News* (Selwyn) and *Northern Outlook* (Rangiora) and she wrote articles requesting information about these plants⁷. The experience of the project is recorded later.

First, I will present a brief history of gardening and gladioli in Britain and New Zealand.

From Great Britain

When British settlers came to New Zealand en masse during the Colonial period (from the 1840s), when this country was getting a new constitution and when the first double decker bus ran in London, there was a passion for hybridising plants. This was the Victorian era when settlers came to New Zealand, leaving behind the great estates that continued to employ gardeners; where the head gardeners were paid well but the juniors, often boys, were poorly paid and women were treated worse.

It was also the time of the Industrial Revolution, the Romantic Movement and the dawning of amateur endeavour. It was in this period that the recreation of the nobility became important, especially sport. For upper class males this included cricket, tennis, baseball, football, boxing, tightrope walking, badminton, roller skating, bicycle touring, and skiing. Following after these sports, in the last half of the 19th century, were gentlemen golf clubs, cards, gambling, and bingo. For the ladies there were the arts⁸ (reading and entertainment), crafts (needle work) and the etiquettes of entertaining and voluntary social service. But that was for the nobility and nouveau riche. All that was available for the workers were the local pub, handcrafts, mechanics, amateur sport and, if they were lucky enough to have access to land, gardening – hence the phrase ‘pottering around’ as in the absence of land, flowers were grown in pots.

³ *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1910, 11th edition, Vol. XII, Slice 1, p. 65.

⁴ The Correspondence of Charles Darwin, Vol. 9, 1861, p. 257.

⁵ Although the *G. x brenchleyensis* we have is seed sterile, it appears to have fertile pollen.

⁶ This was the industrial era of what W. Blake called ‘black satanic mills’, and a subject for Hogarth's and Dickens's work.

⁷ Also see *Weekend Gardener* 302, November 4–17, 2010.

⁸ Walter Crane, William Morris, etc. The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society London in 1887 to promote the exhibition of decorative arts alongside fine arts from 1888–90, important in the flowering of the British Arts and Crafts Movement until World War I.

In the UK in the beginning of the nineteenth century many horticulturists were of the ilk of the local Anglican clergy. A woman recently spoke of her father who, in England, used to grow Iceland poppies, and took great care and pride in picking them each Saturday to take down to the pub to show the blokes. Never to be outdone, working men grew sweet-peas, poppies, gladioli, etc., to show their mates. Soon they were saying, "Anything you can do, I can do better!" and shows were organised for entertainment and egos that were eventually accompanied by feasts (at least a pie and a pint) in the public houses. For the competition there were prizes – a silver spoon, crafted copper kettle and even money. The money didn't stop at prizes as there was often gambling involved. Thus, in the taverns of England began the horticultural equivalent to the sophisticated societies which came together in the specialist growers and the shows of the twentieth century. Certainly men drove the idea of competing with flowers.

At the beginning of the twentieth century 'workers' discovered they could gain pleasure in the garden and also make money by selling their surplus stock, blooms, seeds and bulbs, especially the cultivars which they themselves had developed. These 'florists' (what used to be the term for 'specialist growers', rather than current usage of flower sellers and arrangers) developed bigger and better blooms. And what began with egos now could pay for the beer and perhaps a new automobile.

That *G. × brenchleyensis* has survived is amazing. Specialist growers who sold them were to be replaced by the large commercial nurseries, or eventually by the mega stores buying in bulk and restricting public purchasing choices. The twentieth century was to be an Indian summer for home gardeners.

The New Zealand garden

There is no doubt the early settlers brought gladioli with them. The corms travelled well on the long seaward journey to the antipodes. But it was into a diffident culture that they were planted. The 'green and pleasant land' of England was changed for a 'great

and glorious land' in New Zealand where they could at least have a quarter acre section and belong to an eclectic society of equals. It was 'God's own'.



Fig. 5 W. Fox's House, Nelson, 1848, watercolour by William Fox.

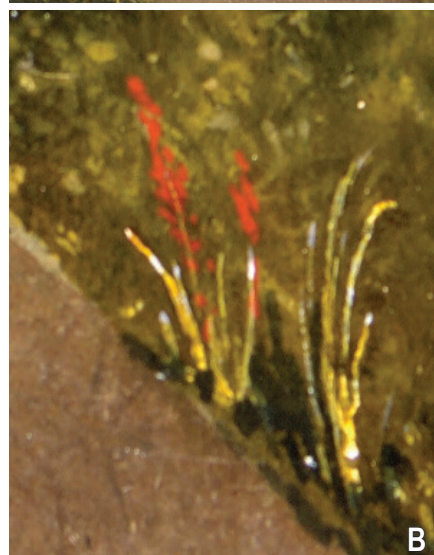


Fig. 6 Lower Westoe, Rangitikei, 1860, watercolour by William Fox. A, full view. B, magnification of what appears to be red flower spikes of a *Gladiolus* growing next to the path. Reproduced with permission from Alexander Turnbull Library, <http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=23123&l=en>

Settlers would bring something of home and introduce a bit of colour to their section. On a corporate basis, aesthetic interests of the Wakefield Settlement wanted to identify Christchurch as the 'Garden City'.

Taking cognisance of artistic licence, gladioli can be clearly seen in amateur paintings of early New Zealand landscaped gardens of estate runholders and homesteads, certainly at Arden's house (*Dear Granny Arden's home in Courtney [Courtenay] Street, New Plymouth, c. 1880*, watercolour by Hamar Arden) and probably at Sir George Grey's house (*The Garden Front, Sir George Grey's Mansion, Kawau, 1884*, watercolour by Alfred Sharpe). *G. × brenchleyensis* may well be the plants featured in two of William Fox's paintings: one of his own house at Nelson in 1848 (Fig. 5) and the other at Lower Westoe, Rangitikei in 1860 (Fig. 6A–B).

In 1864 the *Christchurch Press* reported the first 'flower show' and in the 1870s they ran a competition for the best garden among the working class, 'Cottage Gardens'⁹, but there was little response. This perplexed the organisers, for in Britain such competitions were popular among 'working classes, artisans and mechanics'. The Christchurch competition fizzled out when no entries were submitted in 1873. New Zealand settlers have always abhorred the English class system.

My own great grandfather, William Nichols, at the age of fourteen when his mother died in the Croydon Poorhouse, escaped his condition in England by working his way to New Zealand on a sailing ship, "William Nichol was a prolific exhibitor at the local Taranaki Horticulture show, first in 1887 and right through to 1911. Every year he gained prolific prizes for Pot Plants, Cut Flowers and Begonias gaining comments, 'Notable exhibitor', 'Name frequently appears among the prizes', 'Merited honours.' And in 1908, 'His much admired begonias.'" (Jamieson, 2014).

At the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne I was given a list of nearly three hundred named cultivars that were in the nurseries of Victoria (Australia) before 1889, which listed

⁹ Leach (2000) considers that cottage gardens are a figment of romanticism.

Gladiolus × *brenchleyensis* (LANG 1868, LANG 1873, MARR 1877, BRUN 1882, GSMI 1886, LASAU 1886)¹⁰. *G.* × *brenchleyensis* was the only *Gladiolus* cultivar widely distributed among nurserymen there. This identifies the introduction of this cultivar into Australia before the latter half of the 19th century.

Katherine Raine in her chapter on Victorian Gardens (in Bradbury, 1995), 1860s–1900, says those days were a time of highly competitive horticultural shows, “cultivating and displaying unusual varieties of the dahlia and other such nineteenth century favourites as the gladiolus, carnation and chrysanthemum.”

A search of New Zealand newspapers (1839–1948; Papers Past, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>) has revealed some early dates of cultivation and sale of *Gladiolus*. Sturms & Son of Napier, Hawkes Bay was advertising gladioli prolifically in 1877; in 1889 Messrs Girdwood & Co’s store advertised them for sale in Greymouth, and in 1894 the Snow White *Gladiolus* was offered for sale. In 1897 the *Bay of Plenty Times* had a short article on growing gladioli¹¹. One Christchurch Nurseryman, J. Timbrell (then of Shaw Street, Richmond), in the 1922–23 Canterbury Horticultural Society Schedule of Shows advertised to sell, “*Gladiolus* – the latest from Australia.” The connection with Australia continued so that in 1933 Mr P. Burns trialled his new hybrid *G.* ‘Takina’ at Ballarat trial grounds.

During our filming of *Glorious Gladiolus*¹², Bruce Hughes (an elderly gladiolus enthusiast from Whanganui) made us aware of a valuable historical and cultural period for gladiolus in New Zealand, i.e., from 1900 on. He tells how even in a remote small town, and in spite of his father not exhibiting his blooms, Bruce was inspired by his father to grow gladiolus. It was at the local Country Women’s Institute flower shows that Bruce started competing.

The twentieth century was the time when men shaped the Kiwi mould of masculinity, and that was more than rugby, racing and beer. Men dug the back yard of their quarter acre sections to plant both vegetables and flowers and competed at the A & P shows.

It was also an opportunity for those who had land too small to farm and too big to leave to employ themselves with new-found free time. Many workers were now becoming the new middle class, and many who tasted success in the garden demanded more respect in their workplace and turned their hobby into a business.

Meanwhile the women supported their husbands by keeping their gardens to the front of the section, arranging the floral decorations of their husbands prize blooms, making the show work well, and generally ensuring the social support for their small meetings.

The World Wars were an interruption. In World War I the British buried their gardeners in the trenches of France. The Depression and World War II prolonged the domestic hardships. However, the post war period offered great hope and many contemporary people remember their father’s or grandfather’s patch of gladiolus, often right there among the vegetables.

The ‘quarter acre section’ was an early part of the New Zealand idea of paradise. Take for example the source of clumps of *G.* × *brenchleyensis* at Walton Street, Sydenham, Christchurch, which were found against the front wall of the house and down the side between the house and the fence.

Dr Rupert Tipples has provided some early references from New Zealand newspapers on *G.* × *brenchleyensis* (see Papers Past, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>) from the 1890s on, “*Gladioli* are so imposing and so popular that to omit mention of them would be unpardonable. For ordinary garden decoration a good

strain of such as ... are admirable whilst useful additions are the brilliant *Brenchleyensis*.”¹³ There is one article which highlights *G.* × *brenchleyensis* as the standard by which all other gladioli cultivars were judged.¹⁴

It is obvious that New Zealand garden advisors followed Mrs Jekyll. One writer said, “The scarlet spikes of *Brenchleyensis* gladiolus are also effective, and here and there may be interspersed plants of free flowering single dahlias”¹⁵. A later writer gives support to the strength of the plant, “*Gladioli* want sticks for support ... [but] *Brenchleyensis* grown in full sunshine grow so strongly as to be able to support their spikes.”¹⁶

In those years we were keen to decorate our many halls and churches, “... there are the brilliant sheaths of the gladiolus, which will open their blooms well in the hall, if only the lowest blossom is expanded; lasting longer without the strong sunshine of the garden. We are now so well supplied with these georgous plants, ... such as ... *brenchleyensis*.”¹⁷ Then the usual advice, “... flowers are best cut just as the petals are unfolding, or in half-open state ... *G. brenchleyensis* ... vases may be kept a day or two in a cool room, when every flower will expand.”¹⁸

There are two reports from 1930 which are of special interest. The first refers to the spread of *G.* × *brenchleyensis* and its transmission from clumps to colonies and the second regarding its threat of oblivion. “The fixed varieties of gladioli do not revert to the common red. It often happens that the common *brenchleyensis* have been growing in the ground previously, and, as the spawn of this type ... come up freely, they crowd out the named hybrids. By lifting the bulbs or corms at the right time before the foliage or the old flower stem has properly matured and keeping them separately, they will not revert”¹⁹ as reported by “Arawa” of Devonport.

¹⁰ For these records (Brookes and Barley, 1992), nursery names are abbreviated and followed by the year of the catalogue.

¹¹ *Bay of Plenty Times*, Vol. 9, Issue 3533, 9 April 1897, p. 4. The gladiolus.

¹² *Glorious Gladiolus* was a documentary produced by Chalice Productions in 2008, filmed by myself with Jennifer Barrer as the interviewer. The film was about the culture of gladioli including visiting shows and Aorangi Bulbs, a commercial grower.

¹³ *Clutha Leader*, Vol. XLV, Issue 65, 14 February 1919, p. 3. The garden ... treatment during February.

¹⁴ *The Evening Post*, Vol. CVII, Issue 82, 3 October 1929, p. 26. The useful gladioli.

¹⁵ *The Star*, 6 January 1894, p. 2. Work for the week. To gardeners.

¹⁶ *Auckland Star*, Vol. XXIX, Issue 285, 2 December 1898, p. 3. Hints.

¹⁷ *Otago Witness*, Issue 2333, 17 Nov 1898, p. 52. Floral decorations. The hall vase.

¹⁸ *The Press*, Vol. LV, Issue 10201, 24 November 1898, p. 3. Some garden mems for lady readers.

¹⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Vol. LXVII, Issue 20484, 8 February 1930, p. 5. To correspondents.

The second point, “*Brenchleyensis* is one of the older types, and has not found much favour in recent years, although it generally throws up spikes of intense vivid red flowers.”²⁰

While I was collecting samples of *G. × brenchleyensis* from a neglected section a neighbour called out, “Oi! What’cha doin’?” After I explained she said, “Awh, that’s good, you know it’s only that old red one, though!” I realised that this term, “You know the old red one”, had been tossed at me many times over the decades and I had treated the conversation with disdain and ignorance (thinking of the thousands of named red cultivars). It connected with the memory of an inexperienced member of our gladiolus society bringing *G. × brenchleyensis* to a table show as a ‘show-stopper’ saying they called it “Old Red”. Who among any culture is going to remember a name such as “*Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*”?

“Old Red” was special but it had to cope with the perversities of people. The horticulture societies did not always understand the needs and difficulties of labourers and craftsmen in those early days, e.g., workers couldn’t get off work to enter the exhibits and had to transport their metre-long blooms to the show in a box on the back of their bicycles. Even the ordinary meetings were difficult for workers to attend; if they wanted to attend they had to rush (cycle or tram) home, eat, bathe, change clothing and hope to be able to cycle, walk or take public transport to meetings in time.

It was in a culture of tough working men that the Addington Railways Workshop in Christchurch had one of the biggest horticultural groups in the country with a large interest in gladiolus. The workers even ran a shop which sold gardening supplies and tools at much reduced prices. At such shows cash prizes were a great attraction. This was also the time when people queued in the rain for local flower shows and presold tickets ensured entry to members of affiliated horticultural groups. These Addington Workshop shows were open and popular in the Christchurch horticulture calendar. Unfortunately in

the 1980s the government closed the workshop down and the shows went with it.

Hybridising was the natural outcome from the burgeoning of horticultural science and the desire for ‘bigger and better’ following the post-war period which was a very creative era. Specialist growers came into their own, breeding new cultivars and publishing small catalogues of the best to buy, especially their own creations. These special people worked from their backyards (sometimes a ‘section’ or extra land they could obtain). Christchurch people may remember D.M. Hill of New Brighton, D.S. Bowles, W. Larsen, W.A. Pollard, G.F. Roberts and E. & E. Taylor, and elsewhere, Brogden, Kerr, H. Pierce, Toon, Williams, etc.

In the 1940s this vibrant horticultural atmosphere caused the establishment of the New Zealand Education Department Boys and Girls Agricultural Clubs, and parents saw the excitement of the children when they were handed a brown paper bag of corms and again when they received their ‘Certificates of Special Merit’ for their ‘Farm or Garden Projects.’

The project

The collecting of *G. × brenchleyensis* material has been an interesting experience.

It showed how important community newspapers are and how people are interested in our subject. I received responses for more than three weeks following the newspaper’s delivery. Near forty responses came by phone, email and post, and responses came mainly from older folk, women and of the middle socio-economic population, good keen gardeners, ordinary homes and also academics, and from the city, plains, foothills and the western side of the Southern Alps.

A good majority of plants offered were modern cultivars but we did find *G. dalenii* and *G. × brenchleyensis*. *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis* was identified on the West Coast, Selwyn Huts, Southern and Eastern suburbs of Christchurch.

The Eastern suburbs and Selwyn Huts are both seaside properties. The clumps were found either beside buildings or fences, mostly from a strip of the front garden, traditionally the women’s domain. Several women offered the comment that their husbands wanted to get rid of the plants.

Edward Huyton has suggested that deep frosts account for the demise of *G. × brenchleyensis* from colder sites in the UK – the milder climates of the Isle of Man (UK) and Canterbury (New Zealand) may be a common factor for survival. It may also be that the plant survived because of the common practice of enthusiasts harvesting the corms and protecting them in storage during the winter.

Secondly, in lifting large clumps I noticed that cormlets appeared to be trapped between the old dead and the newer corms, which makes the idea of saving gladiolus offsets for an extra year before planting a sound proposition. I also noticed that some were sprouting in the autumn and the clumps looked as if individual plants have different life cycles, though they do die down over mid-winter and sprout in spring. We found blooms over a three month period.

From our observations we have made some tentative hypotheses regarding the presence of *G. × brenchleyensis* in Canterbury, New Zealand.

Interpreting *G. × brenchleyensis* in Canterbury

It is feasible that someone from Kent (or any English county) brought corms of *G. × brenchleyensis* to Canterbury, New Zealand. From the very beginning settlers have come from Kent, the best known going to Prebbleton which is halfway between Christchurch and the Selwyn Huts. During the project Dr Rupert Tipples²¹ said, “I saw an article in the *Central Canterbury News* on January 14 [2015, p. 5] which intrigued me – I come from near Brenchley in Kent, where *G. × brenchleyensis* was bred/selected. The name caught my eye.” After reading the newspaper article, Margaret Flintoft of Ohoka helped in the search for *G. × brenchleyensis*, her great-grandfather’s second

²⁰ *Hutt News*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, 19 June 1930, p. 9. Gardening notes. The gladiolus.

²¹ Dr Rupert Tipples, Honorary Associate Professor of Employment Relations, Faculty of Agribusiness and Commerce, Lincoln University.

Christian name was Brenchley from the Brenchley estate in Kent where he was born. They immigrated to New Zealand and her grandfather Eugene Moses Flintoft who came with them at the age of sixteen remembered being taken off school to scare the birds away from the crops at Brenchley before harvesting. He died in 1955 over the age of 90 which meant they arrived about 1875.

A significant colony of the gladiolus was in the property of Nancy Meherne. Her husband was an Irish gardener at Kew Gardens after World War II, after which they came back to New Zealand. At 85 she is still a keen surfer and music teacher as well as gardener!

The colony of *G. × brenchleyensis* at Selwyn Huts is of particular interest; not only because it was the first place where I recognised the hybrid, but because a feasible history may be traced. First of all the setting – Selwyn Huts was originally the protectorate of the more affluent families of the province, Warren, Anderson, Moorhouse, Buxton (Tipples, 1989), etc. – a place where even the Duke of York came to fish. In 1897 fencing was installed for property to be made available for suitable fishermen's huts but not for permanent residency and by 1907 sixty people had built there. It was a designated fishing reserve but over the years became packed with holidayers from late December to the end of January. There the Kiwi Christmas could be experienced – community celebrations, running races for children, boat races, fancy dress competitions and concerts, and celebrations again at New Year with bonfires and fireworks – all organised by a community association. At ordinary times the men went fishing, the ladies played bridge and the children played on the substantial grounds supervised by mothers sitting in their cars with doors wide open and gossiping to each other; and there was tennis and swimming. From 1913 crowds of 'flappers' and 'larrikins' turned up to join in the fun at Selwyn Huts and wanted dances so a community hall was suggested. The Committee objected and it never happened.

There are at least two possibilities for *G. × brenchleyensis* coming to the Selwyn Huts (Fig. 7). It is certainly

possible that a woman of an estate nurtured a flower garden around her cottage, bringing something from her own garden which would flower as they arrived for their holiday but which could be left unattended for the rest of the year – *G. × brenchleyensis*. A second possibility is offered by Tipples, "I was particularly intrigued by the find of G.b. in the garden of Keith Morrison at Selwyn Huts. That is where the Buxton connection may come in. A.W. Buxton Ltd. produced Descriptive Catalogues which showed they had several species of *Gladiolus* for sale but not specifically *brenchleyensis*. The connection is that Buxton had a family holiday home at Selwyn Huts, where they could get away from the pressures of business" (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7 Selwyn Huts, the bach (holiday home) settlement in Canterbury.



Fig. 8 Alfred Buxton's bach at the Selwyn Huts. He is shown standing among his children and their friends. Reproduced with permission from Tipples (1989).

Properties containing *G. × brenchleyensis* in Christchurch were found mainly in the East side of the city, the lower socioeconomic population, or in the southern suburbs which is more middle class. One inference is that as the more affluent estates upgraded their gardens they passed on their *G. × brenchleyensis* corms to their gardeners and maids or anyone else who was 'less fortunate' and needed a ready brightener for their humble homes. We know the lower socio-economic group is more generous in sharing what they have,

especially the women; hence that is where the plants have been found preserved in the front gardens of the quarter acre sections.

These are hypotheses that remain to be disproved but they are consistent with what was hinted at by Prof. Tooley himself. The article he wrote in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* (2010) says in the very first paragraph that Gertrude Jekyll, in 1929, bemoaned that the loss of garden plants and the absence of *G. × brenchleyensis* from reputable gardens is "attributed ... to fashion and novelty." Simply put, the affluent in 'upgrading' their properties disposed of their old plants and those of the lower socio-economic homes saved the unwanted.

The task of sorting out genuine *G. × brenchleyensis* among all the responses had an interesting twist. Most respondents had modern cultivars in their gardens, some had the *G. × brenchleyensis* we were seeking, but another plant presented itself – the parrot gladiolus. John Manning, the world's most respected botanist regarding African gladioli has identified it as *G. dalenii*. *Gladiolus dalenii* is the currently accepted name for plants that have in the past been known as *G. psittacinus* and, before that, *G. natalensis*. *Gladiolus dalenii* is similar to *G. × brenchleyensis* except that it has a bright yellow throat and the bud looks like a parrot's beak. It seems obvious then that *G. × brenchleyensis* is a hybrid from this species which Sir W.J. Hooker may have had a hand in taking back from South Africa. Here in Canterbury, *Gladiolus dalenii* is found in gardens of similar circumstances as *G. × brenchleyensis* (although I have not seen them growing together).

Garden escapees

A.J. Healy (1980, p. 124–125) recorded two *Gladiolus* species as fully naturalised garden escapes – *G. dalenii* (under the synonym *G. natalensis*) and *G. undulatus*. Healy also noted that some large-flowered, modern hybrid gladioli may persist in waste places after being discarded from gardens. Healy further commented that "Other specimens collected growing wild which have red flowers and white markings on the lower lobes may be *Gladiolus × cardinalis* hybrids."

The future for *G. × brenchleyensis*

Early quantities of *G. × brenchleyensis* (or should I say “Old Red”?) have been sent to Great Britain for testing and preservation. We trust there will be no economic exploitation of these gifts.

We need established institutions, or at least one, that will make some commitment to keeping the more significant heritage gladioli alive into the future and available for public viewing.

The Christchurch Botanic Gardens has retained some early hybrids including *G. gandavensis*, *G. ‘Tropical Frost’* and *G. ‘Victor Borge’*, all long lost to nurserymen. We have recently arranged for some more recent New Zealand hybrids for the same garden, and are hoping they will also take on *G. × brenchleyensis* and *G. dalenii*.

In the meantime I hope to build up a heritage collection at a suitable location in Canterbury, namely David Hobbs’ Broadfields New Zealand Landscape Garden which is set aside for New Zealand native and New Zealand raised exotic

varieties. Covering four hectares of landscape, the garden was designed by Christchurch landscape architect Robert Watson and already has a collection of Joan Wright’s famous fragrant gladiolus hybrids.

Well, we have a lot of hypotheses to be disproved or learnt from but at least a significant plant can be saved for posterity.

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