

Centre field: A case for visualising the fabric of the New Zealand historic garden

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This article is based on PowerPoints presented to an ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) NZ meeting held at Tauranga in November 2010 and the June 2011 conference of the New Zealand Archaeological Association held at Havelock North. Both presentations were in response to criticisms of garden conservation made by Sarah Beresford (2010) in the winter issue of *Heritage New Zealand*.

Beresford's article asked "what defines a heritage garden?" and "how authentically should it be maintained?" Those half dozen owners and managers who were interviewed in the article gave a range of answers, which were unsatisfactory. The primary questions should have been "at what age does a garden acquire heritage status and the associated values?" "What indeed is a 'value'?" "Does a value have a physical expression?" At the end of Beresford's article Gordon Collier states that "most gardens don't survive a generation". But what of those that have survived many generations and those that are documented in drawings (pre-photographs) from the 19th century and remain as archaeological sites full of buried physical garden elements? Those gardens that have already been lost and others that are being lost through being poorly described and prescribed are potentially as important to garden historians as new garden types and styles being created over a generation to be sold and demolished at will. Values come and go but the physical footprint of a garden survives!

The New Zealand historic garden has to be placed into the interdisciplinary centre of those disciplines that negotiate the management issues raised by the New Zealand Historic

Places Trust published in *Heritage New Zealand* (Beresford, 2010). As a solution to the problems of the invisibility of the fabric of historic gardens, and the misunderstanding of what garden fabric is, I have included a list of physical garden/landscape elements (Box 1).

By making these garden elements visible through publication and encouraging discussion across a number of disciplines, the evolving discipline of garden history in New Zealand may be strengthened. I consider garden history as a distinct sub-discipline from other contemporary heritage disciplines of archaeology, arboriculture and horticulture. Garden history has been strengthened by environmental and forest history located in geography.

I propose that the New Zealand Archaeological Association supports the inclusion of a new historic garden 'type' and an associated list of categories. This would be added to any future review of the guide *Archaeological site recording in New Zealand* (Walton, 1999).

Contemporary arboriculture and horticulture, and to some extent archaeology, impose values that are proving the most destructive to historic garden's integrity. Evidence of this conflict is gathered from the many heritage garden projects my business *Endangered Gardens* has worked on over past decades with my anxiety confirmed by some of those opinions published in the *Heritage New Zealand* story. Why is an understanding of gardens important for archaeology, arboriculture and horticulture? The answer is that plants are the dominant element and expressed as the living ornamental (exotic) or functional (line/form/colour) and modernist representations of art history, architectural history, historic cultural landscapes, cultural

geography, forest and environmental history. Historic live plant collections also contain scientific genetic resources for study by agriculture, ethnobotany, commercial horticulture and forestry.

Several attempts to classify garden elements have been published by Walter Cook (1988) for the Alexander Turnbull Library tentative garden history indexing project and Dr Rupert Tipples (1989) who described a typology of gardens in his book about garden designer Alfred Buxton. These efforts and other published reports (e.g., Cameron-Gavin, 1993) never got far. They did not refer to other disciplines and the authors were either oblivious to them or they manoeuvred around them. In contrast, for Australia, Juliet Ramsay (1991) published her important *Parks, gardens and special trees. A classification and assessment method for the register of the national estate* more than 20 years ago that resonates for New Zealand.

A rigorous heritage assessment of the garden is also missing from many New Zealand archaeological reports that I have read. Features such as boundaries, fences, hedges, ditches and banks, orchards, groves, arbours, bush houses and bush gardens are rarely assessed.

To return to the *Heritage New Zealand* article, Beresford (2010, p. 19) quoted the owner of Otago Peninsula's Larnach Castle, who stated that "Larnach was not a gardener..." to seemingly justify not conserving any of the garden elements Larnach oversaw the construction of, including an amazing rustic arbour that stood in the grounds until the early 1980s (Fig. 1).

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Fig. 1 Rustic wooden arbour from Larnach Castle grounds, Otago. 1983. Photo: John Adam.

Larnach would have sought expert garden design advice from nurserymen and landscape gardeners such as George Matthews (Anon, 1898) who was reported as the local 19th century expert landscape designer. Larnach also obtained Government *Forest Tree Encouragement Planting* land and money that generated detailed survey plans of the home gardens². These plans showed where most of the trees were planted and are rarely acknowledged in published histories of the Larnach grounds or other elite settler grounds across New Zealand.

Later, 20th century owners of Larnach Castle grounds employed locally trained and expert garden designers, such as local graduate landscape architect I. V. Thornicroft, to design the grounds. Thornicroft would go on to pioneer teaching of the new discipline of landscape architecture at university level in Tasmania (Hurburgh, 1986).

What does a historic garden contain that might be of interest to archaeologists? Historic gardens are usually enclosed by diverse types of shelter in the form of live hedges, fences, and walls constructed to keep out grazing animals. With regard to these boundaries, complex relationships have evolved that arborists and other land managers appear unaware of. Witness the clearance of the internal and external boundaries across the new Monte Cecilia premier park in Hillsborough, Auckland. Because

the practice of garden history values the maintenance of all the physical elements that make the place, including living and material boundaries, the maximum quantity of physical elements should be retained. If the boundaries are made of old living plants one will sometimes find that these plants shelter previous boundary technologies and, in some cases, will have slowed the aging process of timber or metal artefacts. I discovered this several years ago while walking through the older streets (Renall and Essex Streets) of Masterton, Wairarapa. Ancient totara posts, still upright, were hidden or imbedded in the live hedges of *Olearia* spp., *Prunus laurocerasus* and other species (Fig. 2). Unfortunately, trees and hedges are commonly claimed by archaeologists (Walton, 1999) to produce roots that are considered a threat to the stratigraphy of place, rather than acknowledged as an integral part of the history of the site.

The removal of all living or non-living boundary material with no consideration of the conservation actions they have supported is bad practice. If boundary systems are considered redundant at least they should be photographed and measured before being destroyed. Herbarium specimens should also be collected from any vegetation planned for removal. A contemporary practice is the grinding out of all tree stumps by a machine and the



Fig. 2 Live hedge on earth bank with wire fence and imbedded timber posts, Masterton. 2010. Photo: John Adam.

decaying tree mulch then spread about the site. This practice has the potential to spread the soil disease *Armillaria* from infected timber fibre. The historic tree placement patterns are also destroyed when stumps are removed. Some stumps are not only an important record of tree planting patterns but are historic objects in their own right. For example, in the grounds of Old Government House, Auckland, several large pine trunks were planted with climbing plants in the 1980s. The stumps eventually rotted away and were removed.

The solution to what to me appears as an impasse, in denying that New Zealand has historic elements, is to provide a garden type and category to strengthen the assessment of historic gardens – including modernist urban garden landscapes. Highly significant garden history fabric from the 20th century is probably being lost faster than that of the 19th century. There is a problem too with the 100-year cut-off date defined by the *New Zealand Historic Places Act, 1993*, as there are much younger gardens with historic significance.

To advance the understanding of a new field in Aotearoa-New Zealand, where the garden is valued as a 'centre field' and the practice of garden history is both applied and theoretical, will require detailed descriptions of the archaeology of the garden – tree stumps included!

² *The Forest Tree Encouragement Planting Acts* (dating from the 1870s) and associated detailed regulations saw land owners, such as Larnach, obtain trees that were mostly planted close to their estate homes. This was not actually the intention of the Government at the time, who wanted trees planted on rural farmland to improve shelter and rural climate. See also Adam (2011).

Box 1 Proposed and preliminary list of physical garden and landscape categories.

Circulation

- Walks, paths, carriage drives – bounded by raised curbs (brick, stone), dish drains (brick), and roadways (asphalt, cobble, shingle, timber). Crazy paving ('Rima', 1947).

Spatial pattern and structure

- Kitchen gardens – squared (Tanner, 1979; Morris, 2008) or oblong square (Cobbett, 1819).
- Systematic gardens (e.g., by Rev Richard Taylor, Putikiwharanui, Whanganui) – botanic gardens, acclimatisation gardens, experimental gardens. Raised concrete beds as recorded on Waiwhetu experimental garden plans from the 1940s.
- Nursery grounds – 'hot beds' (e.g., Auckland Domain), medicinal gardens, herb gardens.
- Historic forest tree plantations – Government Forester, Henry Matthews, layout plans with nurse trees. (See Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives of New Zealand [AJHRNZ], C-1 series, 1900s).
- Flower garden – Albert Park 'parterre' with stone mulch (Salmond Reed Architects et al., 1997). Carpet bedding (Fig. 3), raised gardens.
- Market gardens – (Chinese, Māori) – fields, irrigation, dwellings and infrastructure.
- Terraces – Italianate style – earth and concrete.
- Steps – concrete, basalt, brick or tiled, turf or earth.

Garden objects

- Arbour – single dead trees or elevated logs such as macrocarpa (*Hesperocyparis* [*Cupressus*] *macrocarpa*) observed in Old Government House, Auckland grounds in the early 1980s and The Elms Garden, Tauranga. Arbours are sometimes confused with pergolas that are lightweight in material structure and formally displayed.
- Pergola (Fig. 4), bridges, bush house, fernery. Many of the 19th century bush houses/ferneries contained Māori carvings on the door entrance. See Nathan family garden in Manurewa; Morrin garden in Mount Wellington (Adam, 1999).
- Religious/sacred monuments.
- Pākehā ground and built form food storage systems modelled on Māori knowledge (Berridge, 1910³).

- Glasshouses, summer houses, conservatories, vineries. A vinery is illustrated in the plan of Thomas McDonnell's Hokianga estate built in 1830s.
- Garden urns, statuary (*Pomona*, *Flora*, *Hebe*, *Venus*) fountains, naturalistic or rustic features (logs, timber). Imported and locally constructed elements with makers' stamps.
- Terracotta edging tiles (Fig. 5), bricks, bottles, timber, concrete posts (Fig. 6; as seen in ground of Westoe, Manawatu, 1980s), painted (blue/white) timber pegs, paua shell Mount Roskill gardens 2012.
- Tree and plant identification labels – timber (Fig. 7), ceramic, iron, and plastic associated with experimental and systematic gardens.
- Rockeries and rock gardens – created on Government Domains at Te Aroha, Rotorua (Fig. 8), and Queenstown by T. E. Pearson and Palmerston North Square (demolished early 2000s).
- Military and prison gardens using stone boundary ornamentation as detailed by Verran (2010).
- Railway gardens – fashionable between WWI and WWII.
- Rustic tree stumps – ex arbor/ pergola (extinct, Old Govt. House, Auckland).
- 19th and early 20th century children's play equipment – iron, timber, etc.
- Raised concrete planters (e.g., Art Deco style pair at Te Naupata / Musick Point c. 1940; see Adam et al., 2006).
- Dovecotes (pigeon or dove houses).
- Post-WWII precast concrete planters (Anon, 1970) and concrete animals (e.g., cat, lion) such as on Dominion Road extension (Barnett, 1985).

Boundaries

- Mānuka fences (e.g., enclosing 'Māori cultivations' at Rotorua; The Elms in Tauranga).
- Gates – kissing, hunting, wicket, cradle and field which provide information on historic site use (e.g., hunting gates used to accommodate a horse and rider vs. kissing gate which allows people to pass through but not livestock – suggesting that livestock are part of the historic use of the site).

- Cairns – concrete, stone, and timber.
- Ditch and turf bank with live hedges, posts and rails.
- Hedges – various species (e.g., *Rosa* spp., hawthorn).
- Balustrades – concrete, plaster, stone, and timber (Fig. 9).
- Concrete modernist low nib wall structures (e.g., Hayes Paddock, Hamilton; Mt Eden and Mount Roskill, Auckland), prefabricated/ cast concrete c. late 1930s.
- Trellis ('Rima', 1947).

Trees

- Commemorative single or mass plantings, sacred groves, arboreta.
- Shelter trees, to protect buildings from wind and snow (e.g., the Otago blizzard of 1863); landscape elevation for maximum effects (1880s – quoted by Truby King for Hamilton planting scheme).
- Tree guard enclosures, timber constructed to exclude grazing stock (e.g., Auckland City and Provincial towns 1870s through 1880s).
- Arbor Day plantings – school grounds, urban parks and street trees – later between WWI and WWII (e.g., Auckland suburbs of Epsom).
- Abandoned pollarded trees; clipped live hedge garden furniture (Fig. 10), topiary animals.
- Bush house and native shrubbery ('Rima', 1947), bush gardens (Strongman, 1984).

Water

- Lakelets – T. E. Pearson's designed features at Auckland, Rotorua, Christchurch and Queenstown Domain.
- Ponds (for fish and enclosing 'rabbit breeding islands'⁴), water races, dams; Japanese style and modern functional biomorphic form.
- Concrete birdbaths (Fig. 11) and fountains (Fig. 12).

Scenery – spatial

- View shafts (e.g., The Elms garden in Tauranga).
- Earth mounds – Sunnyside (Christchurch) and Mt View Asylum (Wellington) that were formed to enable patients to have elevated views across the countryside while still enclosed.

³ ... "Sweet potatoes, or kumaras, are grown in three varieties... Kumaras [are] keep best in a warm, dry, equable dry bank, as is done by the Maoris....". Berridge (1910, p. 365).

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuniculture>.



Fig. 3 Carpet bedding scheme in Auckland Domain. Source: Postcard, c. 1905.



Fig. 4 Wire woven garden arch. Source: Advertisement in Murphy (1904).



Fig. 5 Terracotta garden edging tiles discovered about Auckland central city in the 1980s. Photo: John Adam.



Fig. 6 Concrete fence posts used as a garden border at Westoe. 1980s. Photo: John Adam.



Fig. 7 Wooden plant label of a New Zealand bred rose cultivar. Government Gardens, Rotorua. c. 1985. Photo: John Adam.



Fig. 8 Local rock contained rockery gardens alongside stone enclosed 'lakelet' in the Government Gardens Rotorua. 2011. Photo: John Adam.



Fig. 9 Rustic timber and concrete bridge in a Masterton garden. 2010. Photo: John Adam.



Fig. 10 Macrocarpa plants shaped and trimmed into living furniture in a Pahiatua garden. Source: *The Garden*. AWN, 6 August, 1947, p. 38.



Fig. 11 Ornamental bird bath from Woodville Gardens, Auckland. 2006. Photo: John Adam.

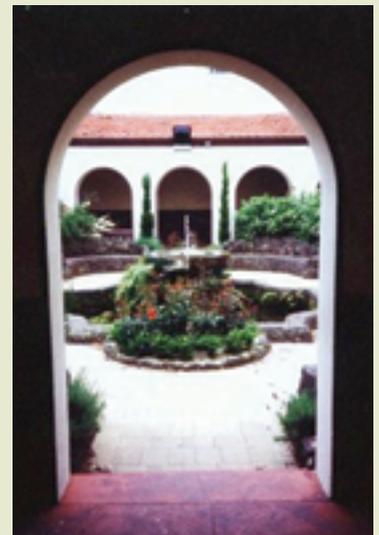


Fig. 12 Spanish style garden court with a 19th century fountain reused from the demolished Rotorua Town Hall. c. 1997. Photo: John Adam.

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