

New Zealand city garden style (with Gil Hanly & Lynda Hallinan, David Bateman, 2000).

Pots: bright Ideas for the modern New Zealand container garden (with Janine Arents, Random House, 2000).

Creative ideas for New Zealand gardens (with Diana Anthony & Gil Hanly, David Bateman, 2002).

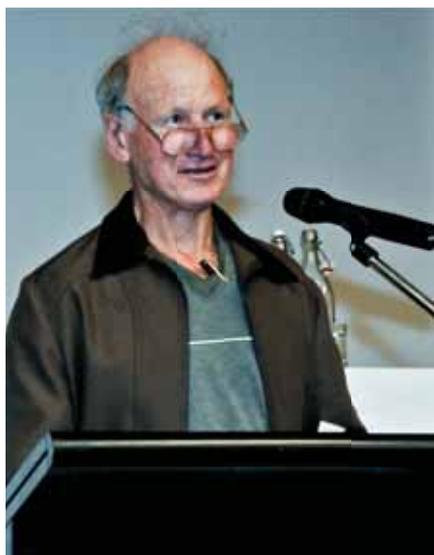
The kitchen gardener (Woodslane, 2007).

Foliage for the contemporary New Zealand garden (Random House, 2007).

**Citation prepared by
Jack Hobbs**

Associate of Honour

John Robert Massy Wills



John Wills at the award ceremony.
Photo: Gil Hanly.

Just off the road on the Napier-Taupo highway is the 30 acre (12 ha) Trelinnoe Park – a remarkable collection of woody plant species set to take advantage of a dramatic landscape. A testament to John, and also to his wife Fiona, Trelinnoe Park has become a nationally recognised garden and amongst the pioneers of garden tourism in New Zealand.

John's love of plants extended from his youngest days. A school project on native plants won him a prize as a 3rd former. This brought on derisive snorting by the headmaster who scoffed that if a 3rd former had won it, then it wasn't much of a prize. Little was he to know that John would develop one of the finest private woodland gardens in the country acknowledged by the New Zealand Gardens Trust as a Garden of National Significance.

In 1956 John and his brother Brian purchased 2800 acres (1134 ha) of previously burnt-over and scrub-covered land to farm for "business and pleasure". Starting from the mid

1960s John created a memorable garden which by the 1980s was complete with accommodation and café. It has an extensive collection of *Magnolia* and *Acer* species and cultivars interwoven with a magnificent woodland style garden. These were grown in what is generally recognised as a hostile environment for these species but John's understanding of the land and his keen farmer's observation noted that the site was unusually frost free. The rolling landforms and shelter from the northwest helped protect the plantings and create the garden as it is today.

John has acquired a deep knowledge of plants during his development of the garden and has brought to it an innate sense of design. John describes botany as humbling, saying "the more you begin to know the more you realise how little you know". Species from sources as diverse as Brazil, Mexico and the Himalayas can be found throughout the garden. John has always enjoyed the creative opportunities that working with plants and the landscape offers, turning a keen eye to the staged development of his garden. As a member of the New Zealand Wool Board he had the opportunity to travel and amongst his fondest recollections is Bodnant Garden in North Wales which he credits as having the most influence on his own garden design.

Another of John's plant passions has been rhododendrons. He recalls visiting both the Chinese and Indian sides of the Himalayas and seeing hundreds of acres of rhododendrons in bloom through the mountains. His love of rhododendrons resulted in his chairing of the New Zealand Rhododendron Association in its earliest days and he is a life member

of the association. Today, he continues his rhododendron connection as a Trustee of Heritage Park in Manawatu which has been established to ensure that heirloom rhododendrons are not lost to cultivation in this country.

Along with his membership of the New Zealand Wool Board his business associations have included being a board member of the Eastern and Central Trust Bank, Regional President of Federated Farmers and chairman of Farmers Mutual Insurance Group. John modestly notes that "you have to come out of the back blocks every now and then to see what is going on!" The farm itself is an industry model for sustainability as the family fences off the ravines and gorges leaving them to revert to native bush and focuses on the production areas of the farm. Thousands of trees have also been planted to help protect the land.

In developing his garden John spoke of working with the land and using its natural forms to create sweeping borders and paths. Gordon Collier commented:

"John has amassed a noteworthy collection of woody plants – in area probably the largest private collection in New Zealand and second only to Gwavas in importance. Though a comparatively young collection, John's understanding of the climate, soil and topography at Trelinnoe has enabled him to establish plants not usually seen on a cold temperate site and furthermore to grow them on to near maturity in a remarkably short period of time."

John Wills believes that gardens are part and parcel of humanity and ingrained in the civilisation of

man from earliest times. He saw that he had an opportunity to create something very special at Trelinnoe. Few would contradict his vision and a great many would celebrate it.

For his contribution to horticulture in New Zealand John Wills is a worthy recipient of the Associate of Honour of the RNZIH.

Websites (accessed April 2011)

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www.trelinnoepark.co.nz.

Citation prepared by David Sole

