Jacqueline Nancy Mary Adams CBE, QSO
19 May 1926 – 27 March 2007

Rhododendron Society Yearbook, the Australian Rhododendron Society Yearbook, the Royal Horticultural Society Rhododendron Yearbook as well as Vireya Vine – an international newsletter. He has been active in the affairs of the New Zealand Rhododendron Society, in particular serving as registrar from 1975 to 1990 and was appointed Vice President of the International Rhododendron Union in 1988. He also chaired the inaugural Taranaki Rhododendron Festival Committee in 1988 and acted as Chairman for the following nine years.

His special interest is vireya rhododendrons and Pukeiti now has one of the finest collections in the world with at least 125 species. He created the first public display of vireyas in New Zealand in 1976, and in 1987 established the covered walk at Pukeiti as a new method of displaying vireyas in New Zealand. In 2000 he was responsible for the new conservatory at Pukeiti to house vireyas and other plants. He has had the good fortune of seeing many of them in the wild in Malaysia and New Guinea, and one has only to listen to him to realise that he has an affection for these plants and really understands their requirements. He has done his best to ensure that at Pukeiti these plants will get the conditions they will enjoy and visitors will affirm that the plants have certainly repaid his efforts. He writes:

“...[Vireya] species are a different matter in that some can be much more temperamental and demanding of special conditions to perform well. As a garden manager, this makes a species collection much more challenging and exciting to grow ... particularly if you have been fortunate enough to collect the material in the wild ... You then learn how to manage their idiosyncrasies to produce exciting plants that really do earn their keep. Does it really matter that your species takes fifteen years to produce its first flower? Not if you have a passion ... and patience ... for them”.

His words demonstrate his strong conservation ethic and this has carried through to his conservation of the native forest at Pukeiti with control of pests, refurbishing of the forest and the establishment of a commercial rimu forest.

Pukeiti is now one of the great gardens of New Zealand – this has been acknowledged by it being assessed as a Garden of National Significance by the New Zealand Gardens Trust. Furthermore, there is no doubt that it is one of the great gardens of the world, not just one of the great rhododendron gardens. The success of Pukeiti is due to many – enthusiastic plantmen with a strong sense of vision, generous donors, committed staff, enthusiastic volunteers. The garden we see today is the result of hard work, a remarkable achievement for a private trust.

Obituary

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Nancy Adams followed in the great tradition of women botanical artists. She was born in Levin in 1926 and educated at Wellington Girls’ College and Victoria University of Wellington where she studied botany and zoology. When she was 16 she joined Botany Division, DSIR and remained there until 1959 when she was appointed to the National Museum as assistant Curator of Botany with a special responsibility for algae, retiring in 1987 but continuing as an Honorary Research Associate of the Museum. She developed the museum’s algal collection and this work came to fruition with the publication in 1994 of Seaweeds of New Zealand: An illustrated guide. This was the publication of which she was proudest and it showed both her botanical knowledge and her marvellous skill in depicting plants. Algae are a real challenge to any artist but her delicate and detailed algal illustrations are as good as any ever published and brought her international recognition. They illustrate her conviction that a drawing can show much more than a photograph, “In a drawing, someone has thought it through and interpreted the plant for you, so it’s more informative” (New Zealand Listener, 191 (3312), 1 November 2003).

Seaweeds of New Zealand was her masterpiece winning the Montana Book Award in 1995 for book production. She is better known to the general reader for her illustrations in Poole and Adams Trees and shrubs of New Zealand used by generations of New Zealand naturalists – both amateur and professional. This was first published in 1963 but has gone through many editions with her drawings greatly assisting ready identification. The quality of the printing varies between editions,
but the best reproductions show the simplicity, economy of line and true understated elegance typical of her work. In all, she prepared illustrations for nearly 40 publications and her work was displayed around New Zealand in a major travelling exhibition between 2003 and 2006.

Miss Adams was honoured for her botanical and artistic achievements. She was awarded the Loder Cup in 1964, was appointed QSO in 1989, received the New Zealand 1990 Medal, and was appointed CBE in 1995. She presented the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture Banks Memorial Lecture in 1985, speaking on New Zealand botanical art.

Oswald Blumhardt: New Zealand plant pioneer

Reviewed by Murray Dawson

Too often our horticultural experts, plant breeders, and skilled nurserymen and women fade into anonymity. Not so for the late Oswald (Os) Blumhardt thanks to the well researched biography written by Catherine Ballard.

As recounted by Ballard, Os Blumhardt (1931–2004) was of German descent but born in the North Island of New Zealand, where he lived for most of his life. He was raised on a dairy farm, and in 1949 left home to undertake a Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture apprenticeship at the Duncan and Davies nursery in New Plymouth. The apprenticeship provided Os with the training to set up his own nursery on his parent’s property. His nursery, located near Whangarei in Northland, was called Koromiko Nursery, and according to Ballard was named after the hebe plants that were first raised there.

As a skilled plantsman, Os was an active member of many societies, including the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture, the New Zealand and International Camellia Societies, the Magnolia Society, the Lily Society, and the Orchid Society. He was an avid plant collector and breeder, and these activities form the basis of subsequent chapters. Assembling the large and unique collection and the careful breeding work that followed was Os’s passion, and no secret is made that he was better at this than running a solely commercial operation. However, in the end, it is the world-class cultivars that he produced that make the real contribution to horticulture.

Following on from the introductory sections, Chapters 3–6 are essentially travelogues, and Ballard recounts Os’s collecting trips to Borneo, Thailand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam. The main groups collected by Os appear to be magnolias, camellias, rhododendrons, and orchids, but many other plants were collected as well. Several species were brought into cultivation for the first time, especially for New Zealand, and it is interesting that comments are made on the increased difficulties in latter trips to import material under the new biosecurity regulations. As a consequence, several consignments were delayed or destroyed at the border.

The subsequent chapters logically shift focus to Os’s hybridisation work; Magnolia (Chapter 7), Camellia (Chapter 8), Rhododendron (Chapter 9), and other plants (Chapter 10).

Magnolia Hybrid ‘Star Wars’ (M. campbellii x M. iliciflora) is an outstanding cultivar arising from his breeding programme, and is regarded as one of the best grown around the world. In 2003, Os received the Todd Gresham Award from the Magnolia Society International for his work on this genus. Camellia ‘Night Rider’ is Os’s best known camellia hybrid, and is still increasing in popularity worldwide for its dramatic foliage and dark red flowers.

The majority of Os’s successful breeding of rhododendrons was in the Vireya group (the so-called “tropical” rhododendrons). As related by Ballard, Vireya rhododendrons have a short history of plant breeding, and provided an important opportunity for Os Blumhardt. He imported several species and produced many fine hybrids, including Rhododendron ‘Tropic Glow’, R. ‘Saxon Blush’, and R. ‘Saxon Glow’.

This book is well illustrated with black and white photos and a central section in colour. Ballard’s writing style is clear and she succeeds in making the subject matter interesting. There are a few small typographical errors and inconsistencies, especially misspellings for some of the plant names, but this is a minor quibble. Although this book will never be as popular as, for example, yet another rose book, we do need more accounts like this. Books like Ballard’s provide an interesting, historically important, and accurate record of our horticultural pioneers. In addition to the cultivars that live on, so too does the memory of the man who created them.