

Unfortunately, bio-innovation and economic progress in New Zealand is at present crippled by incompetent bureaucrats who, having been authorised with punitive statutory powers far beyond their level of proficiency, create expensive log-jams at every turn.

The right of people to select and grow plants for every purpose is established by common law throughout the entire history of humanity. New Zealand's future

is dependent on plants to create the resources upon which the country needs. It is imperative that the fundamental human right of New Zealanders to source, select, cultivate and possess plants is unconditionally restored.

The Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture's commitment to horticulture and the world of plants has made an indispensable contribution to the opulence of human endeavour in New Zealand. It has

never been one of my objectives to garner recognition for my adventures into the plant world; my actions were exclusively motivated by my passion for plants. While being awarded the RNZIH Plant Raisers' Award for 2011 is an enormous personal honour, more importantly it is formal recognition of the widespread adoption of native plants over the last forty years by the people of New Zealand. I thank the Institute for the generosity and goodwill they have bestowed on me.

Sir Victor Davies and the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture

Alan Jellyman¹



Fig. 1 Victor Caddy Davies.

Victor Caddy Davies (OBE, AHRIH, NDH(NZ); Fig. 1) was a loyal and active member of the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture from its inception in the 1920s² and throughout Victor's long life. He was made an Associate of Honour in 1952 and received his knighthood for services to horticulture in 1977. He was a remarkable plantsman and did much to promote the use of native flora in our gardens.

Victor Davies was born in 1887, the youngest of six children of Arabella and William Bolland Davies; a family of early settlers in New Plymouth. His father was a keen horticulturist and seedsman and his maternal grandfather Captain Robert James was an orchardist in Auckland. Without the support of his mother from a relatively early age he shared a love of the native flora with his older brother Bob collecting plants near his Frankley Road home and trying to name them. He was befriended by the Arden family who lived nearby and had a home with a large English style garden. Francis Hamar Arden was a well known artist and horticultural advisor to the then fledgling Pukekura Park Board. This family was influential in Victor's youthful development.

Although Victor never went to secondary school he was privately tutored in Latin, an area of learning that was to be a valuable tool for his future career.

By chance James Robertson Duncan had established the Duncan Exotic Nursery on three hectares of land in Westown in 1899 and was looking for an apprentice. The Duncan family had a long history in landscape gardening

and the nursery industry. James Duncan's father, Andrew, had a thriving business in Christchurch and was the third Mayor of that city. By the time James purchased his land in New Plymouth at the age of 30 years he had gained wide experience in several key nurseries in New Zealand and Australia and was a well read scholar of horticultural literature.

It was fortuitous that the young Victor Davies was to become the first apprentice to such an erudite horticulturist as James Duncan. As a 15 year-old he moved away from his home and lived in a small shed on the nursery site studying and learning his native plants by night and the nursery trade by day. Starting at eight shillings per week, working Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings, he flourished.

The profound deafness of James Duncan resulted in an increasing reliance on Victor to deal with the customers, thus developing his plant knowledge and salesman skills. Soon after completing his apprenticeship in 1908 he was appointed nursery foreman, managing a winter staff of 12. Duncan invited him into partnership with effect from 1 January 1910 when the company name

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² "The New Zealand Institute of Horticulture" was incorporated on 18 July 1923, "The NZ Institute of Horticulture Act 1927" passed its final reading on 6 October 1927, and in 1939 the Institute was granted a Royal Charter and adopted the name "The Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture".

changed to Duncan and Davies Exotic Nursery. By that time Victor had been credited with mounting an exhibition of native trees and flowers at the New Plymouth Horticultural Society Show.

Nursery growth continued, as did the reputation of the company. From the outset a separate catalogue of native plants was issued (Fig. 2). These were to grow to the most comprehensive listing of native plants from any New Zealand nursery. The general catalogues also offered a huge range of plants. However, new challenges were to face Victor after the sudden death of James Duncan in 1914 at the age of 45 years. Each of Duncan's four children was under the age of nine years and the family interest was managed by Ronald Duncan, brother of James, who lived in Canterbury. Victor Davies, at the age of 27 years, became the life force of the growing nursery, a task he relished.



Fig. 2 Cover of an early Duncan and Davies native plant catalogue.

World War One was on the horizon and in 1917 Victor enlisted and entered training in Trentham before going to Britain and seeing notable service in France. This experience was both enriching and sobering. He relished the wide variety of plants that he saw wherever he travelled, and his letters emphasised the plants as much as they downplayed his experiences at the front. At the end of the war Victor spent time in Germany as a forestry instructor travelling widely and gaining new horticultural experiences. He returned to New Zealand in mid-1919 to resume

his horticultural career, and having to rebuild nursery stocks and catch up with maintenance.

Victor became actively involved in national activities, particularly the Horticultural Trades Association of which he was appointed Vice President in 1921 and later serving as President for terms in the 1930s and 1950s. As always he saw that training of staff was paramount to his industry and continued the model of his predecessor James Duncan in training apprentices. After World War Two he was one of the leading appointees in the establishment of a national system of apprenticeships in horticulture and gardening.

The Horticultural Trades Association was delighted when the Institute of Horticulture was formed and the Diploma of Horticulture examination system introduced in 1927. The Association had for the first time a recognised qualification in horticulture for the industry and one that went beyond the limits of industry learning of the traditional apprenticeship. Thomas Waugh in his report to the 1928 Horticultural Trades Association conference said:

“Parliament, during the session just closed, passed the Institute of Horticulture Bill which places horticulture on a higher plane than it has ever occupied. It is now possible for any young man wishing to enter the profession to do so by study and learning which will fit him to carry the Diploma of Horticulture and thereby raise the state of horticulture to the position it should occupy”.

Thomas Waugh reported that 82 Diplomas “by experience” had been granted to recipients including 66 members of the Association. Victor Caddy Davies was one of those awardees and his certificate is dated 21 December 1927 (Fig. 3).

So began a lifelong active interest in the Institute of Horticulture by Victor Davies. I remember how active he was in the North Taranaki Branch of the Institute early in the 1960s. Always at meetings with a handful of specimens to talk about and always pleased to share his knowledge. On field trips he was no less active leading forays on to ancient Māori pā sites and sharing his knowledge of

Māori history and folklore as well as naming all of the plants.



Fig. 3 Victor Davies Diploma in Horticulture certificate, one of the first issued by the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (later to become the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture).

In 1926 Lord Wakehurst, Gerald Loder, donated an award to be called the Loder Cup, commenting:

“Having for many years taken an interest in the flora of New Zealand and having cultivated as many New Zealand plants as possible at home I am prepared to offer a challenge cup to be held for one year by the exhibitor of the best collection of native plants and flowers at certain shows.”

In 1929, at the Auckland Horticultural Society's Rose Show, Duncan and Davies became the first recipient of the Loder Cup. At the show, the company exhibited more than 500 named native plants labelled with botanical names, habitat, cultivation details and usage. Decades later, in 1968, the Loder Cup was awarded personally to Victor Davies as an acknowledgement of his lifetime of work conserving, cultivating and introducing native plants to cultivation (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Victor Davies holding the Loder Cup in 1968. Reproduced from the *Journal of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture*, N.S. Vol. 1, December 1968, No. 1, p. 6.

Along with his brother Bob Davies, Victor built an encyclopaedic knowledge of where to find native plants and, during his extensive travels throughout New Zealand as the chief salesman for the company, he was always able to find sites where seedlings of plants could be found in quantity. He was constantly on the lookout for areas where recent native logging had taken place as the margins of access tracks were often rich with regenerating seedlings. There was a steady demand for stock to maintain the range of native species for sale so wild source collecting was a regular occurrence. Bob Davies was a prospector often finding his way into remote locations. He was able to pinpoint the location of various species for future collection and of course often collected material for the nursery himself.

Separate native catalogues were issued from 1910 up until the early 1950s. Many fine introductions were made over that period. In the earliest catalogue found (c. 1916) the purple-leaved rangiora, *Brachyglottis repanda* 'Purpurea', was introduced along with one of the first red-flowering mānukas, *Leptospermum scoparium* 'Nichollsii'. Early in the 1920s the white kaka beak, *Clianthus puniceus* 'Albus', was introduced, raised from seed collected by Taranaki botanist Frances Mason near Wairoa. In 1935 the pink-flowering mānuka, *Leptospermum scoparium* 'Keatleyi', was released by Duncan and Davies. This cultivar was named after its discoverer, Captain Keatley, and cuttings were dispatched in a matchbox for propagation.

Whenever something special was found and reported Victor Davies was tenacious in his efforts to obtain and introduce it. A case in point was the report of a fisherman who had seen a yellow-flowered pōhutukawa in bloom on Motiti Island near Tauranga. Firstly it was necessary to persuade the Māori owners to provide cuttings, and then graft them at the nursery and wait up to five years for the plants to flower. The first lot was all red-flowering and it took three such efforts before a selection of yellow- and red-flowering cuttings were received and brought

into flower, creating a new sensation among the new introductions of 1954. Priced at forty-two shillings this was indeed an exclusive plant when the common pōhutukawa sold for three shillings and sixpence. Today this selection, *Metrosideros excelsa* 'Aurea', is a notable tree planted around New Plymouth and elsewhere, always flowering at the beginning of December.

Although he officially retired from the business in 1964 after 60 years with the company, Victor continued to play an active role partly as Chairman of Directors and as a collector of native plants. He would set out with one of his favoured staff members, or a grandchild, and tour his old haunts. At the same time the first of the company garden centres was established on the original Westown site and he would be a presence there, always respected by customers for his knowledge and sometimes embarrassing staff by suggesting that the plant selected for a customer was not right. This activity continued right up until 1977 when he received a knighthood for his services to horticulture. However, a fall at that time saw a rapid decline in his health and his inability to attend Government House for investiture resulted in a bedside ceremony just a few weeks before he died (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Sir Victor Davies knighthood investiture, 25 February 1977.

Sir Victor Davies generally maintained a principle that plants should not be named after the nursery person who produced it and throughout his life only a few exceptions have been found. After his death the company planned to release a variegated cabbage tree under the name of Sir Victor Davies, however this was not to be as the plant was already in the trade as *Cordyline australis*

'Albertii'. It was not until c. 1990 that a camellia was selected and named "Sir Victor Davies"³. This was selected from a distinct blue/red flowered seedling from his friend and local camellia breeder, Les Jury.

Upon his death Lady Davies initiated the Sir Victor Davies Foundation for Research into Ornamental Horticulture. This Foundation (www.svdf.org.nz) supports projects that will improve technology and/or systems for the betterment of the ornamental nursery industry. Grants have been made to a wide variety of endeavours, ranging from the work of the Nursery Research Centre at Massey developing virus free daphne stocks and perfecting hardwood cutting propagation of Japanese maples, to supporting doctoral studies of horticultural faculties. This work carries on the legacy of Victor Davies who was always striving to see improvements in the nursery industry.

The Trustees of the Foundation commissioned the research and writing of a history of Duncan and Davies in 2006. As a Trustee, and former apprentice with a long local association, I accepted the challenge. The result, *The growing world of Duncan and Davies: a horticultural history 1899–2010*, was published in 2011 (Fig. 6)⁴. The history reveals in detail what a remarkable man Sir Victor Davies was among New Zealand horticulturists. His work and enthusiasm inspired many; his training of staff enriched the nursery and parks industry throughout New Zealand. He lived his life as an extraordinary lover of plants with a special place in his heart for his beloved natives.



Fig. 6 Book cover of *The Growing World of Duncan and Davies* by Alan Jellyman.

³ *Camellia* 'Sir Victor Davies' was named 1988–1992, not 1982 as stated in the caption (p. 183) of *The Growing World of Duncan and Davies*.

⁴ There are two reviews of Jellyman's book in this issue of the *New Zealand Garden Journal* (pp. 18–20).