

2008 Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture Awards

Award in Garden History

Helen May Leach

Horticulture in New Zealand did not start two centuries ago with the arrival of the Europeans. These settlers brought with them a gardening tradition from northern Europe but New Zealand was already the home of a gardening tradition which had been brought down from the tropical Pacific more than 800 years earlier. This is the theme of *1000 years of gardening in New Zealand* (1984), one of the most important and stimulating books on garden history ever published in New Zealand. The author was Dr Helen Leach FRSNZ, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Otago. Professor Leach was uniquely qualified to write this book as her academic studies initially focussed on aspects of the pre-European diet and Maori plant use in New Zealand, largely summarised in the book *Subsistence*

patterns in prehistoric New Zealand (1969). She was also a pioneer in the archaeological excavation of prehistoric Maori gardens. Then in 1979 she was awarded a Rhodes Visiting Fellowship for Women and her time at Oxford allowed her to study in more detail the history of gardening in Europe. This allowed her to appreciate the combination of the two gardening traditions in New Zealand. Her work at Oxford eventually also led to *Cultivating myths: fiction, fact and fashion in garden history* (2000) which investigates different types of gardening in the European horticultural tradition.

Professor Leach is a keen cook and a passionate gardener. This has encouraged her to join her sisters, Mary Browne and Nancy Tichborne, in writing a number of more popular

books and articles on the history of gardens and home cooking. Good examples are *The cook's salad garden* which won the New Zealand Guild of Food Writers Food Book of the Year Award in 1999 and more recently *The cook's herb garden* (2001). Her latest achievement is establishing unequivocally the New Zealand origin of the pavlova in *The pavlova story* (2008).

Professor Leach has combined academic rigour with an interest in the social history and anthropology of gardening and cooking. She has an enviable ability to make her work available to the general reading public. She has done much to encourage scholarly investigations of garden history in New Zealand and she is a most worthy recipient of the Institute's Award in Garden History.

Award of Associate of Honour of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (AHRIH)

Peter Harcourt Arthur



Jack Hobbs (President of the RNZIH) presents Peter Arthur with his award certificate.

Many keen gardeners find a new horticultural book as enticing, sometimes even more enticing, than a new plant. Just as an overgrown wilderness of a garden does not prevent a really committed gardener from buying new plants, an

overstuffed bookcase and tottering piles of books on the floor do not prevent an avid bibliophile from buying yet more books. Peter Arthur of Touchwood Books has led many of us into such temptation and too often we have not been able to resist.

Peter spent his early childhood at his parents' farm at Waiwhare, about 50 km west of Hastings, on the Napier-Taihape Road. He then spent four years at Hereworth School in Havelock North and another four years at Christ's College in Christchurch. He confesses that his interest in plants and trees began when smoking in the nearby Christchurch Botanic Gardens, keeping a careful eye out for prefects

and teachers. After leaving school, he became a journalist working at *The Dominion*, *The Daily Telegraph* in Napier and *The Marlborough Express* in Blenheim, supplementing his income by writing scandalous stories for *New Zealand Truth*. Marriage and an obligatory OE followed including a period in India when his weight fell to an unimaginable seven stone (45 kg).

The return to New Zealand saw him take up sheep and beef farming again at Waiwhare. His involvement in bookselling came through his joining the Farm Forestry Association in 1974. Peter is an enthusiastic planter of trees and Waiwhare is now well planted with shelter belts and thousands of ornamental trees

including hundreds of oaks, cedars and magnolias. His aim was to find trees that will withstand westerly gales, summer droughts, frosts and also provide useable timber. His enthusiasm for trees led him to become a member of the International Dendrology Society. He also started selling copies of books such as John Mortimer's *Trees for the New Zealand Countryside* at local A&P shows. He soon became aware that there was a good market for horticultural and gardening books, especially those dealing with specific plant groups. It was difficult to find the technical horticultural books that he and his friends were seeking. He and his wife, Diane, therefore decided to set up business in June 1987, ordering books mainly from overseas, and taking them to sell at horticultural meetings and conferences throughout the country. The Touchwood Books stand has become a regular feature at field-days and gardening shows, an irresistible magnet for those of us who like to see a book before we buy.

Initially Peter thought he would remain a farmer by day and sell a few books by mail order, working at night. Bookselling prospered, however, and eventually he needed a farm manager. At the peak of the gardening boom, he was turning over more than \$1

million of stock per year, he had 25 agents around New Zealand and he opened a shop in High Street, Auckland. Changing tastes and the waning of interest in gardening made it difficult to justify the shop or keep the outlets supplied and Touchwood Books have now retrenched to an efficient mail order business. This was possible because it was one of the first New Zealand bookshops to have all their books listed online. In 2003, a new bookshed, the Red Barn, was built at Waiwhare to house the stock of about 20,000 titles, both new and secondhand.

A browse through the website of Touchwood Books indicates the tempting range of books available. Most are related in one way or other to gardening but the range has expanded in recent years to include viticulture and farming. It is only when a search is made for specific books in the catalogue that it is realised just how comprehensive the collection is. Currently, there are, for example, more than 100 books listed on New Zealand native plants, more than 50 on fruit and nut trees for New Zealand conditions, 70 on various aspects of botanical art, more than 200 on food and cheese, nearly 150 on garden history, more than 50 on wine making,

another 50 on wine appreciation, and even 16 on handmade soaps. These are all quickly revealed by the excellent website and are dangerously easy to order. Peter particularly enjoys sourcing books, spending hours on databases looking for a special title.

Since it was established, Touchwood Books have sold more than half a million books, a remarkable achievement for a specialist bookseller in a country the size of New Zealand. Touchwood Books have made available to us the world's riches of horticultural books. The Award of Associate of Honour of our Institute is restricted to those who have rendered distinguished service to horticulture in New Zealand. There is no doubt that Peter Arthur of Touchwood Books has made many distinguished contributions to horticulture in this country. In 2008, Touchwood Books is 21 years old, it has truly come of age and it is fitting that this year we now honour Peter Arthur for all that he has done for us.

This citation is based in part on the article: Johnstone, K. (2007). This month we meet Peter Arthur. *Commercial Horticulture*: 8–11, 34, 35.

Award of Associate of Honour of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (AHRIH)

Peter Sergel

Peter Sergel has been the Director of Hamilton Gardens for the past thirteen years, and the most influential person in its development since the project commenced.

In the late 1960s Peter attended Lincoln University where he initially studied for a Diploma in Horticulture and then became one of the first students to study Landscape Architecture. After graduating he worked for a Christchurch consultancy called Michael Littlewood and Associates. Then in partnership with Hans Schurmann he established the Hamilton firm Anthos.

He initially joined the Hamilton City Council in 1979 to gain the necessary experience to qualify for Associate membership of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architecture. However he ended up staying because of his involvement in several exciting projects including Hamilton Gardens.

In the 1970s most of Hamilton Gardens was gorse and scrub covered wilderness. It had been the city dump in the 1960s and the only development at that stage was the Municipal Nursery, some glasshouses and the Rogers Rose Garden. Initially Peter was involved in writing a Management Plan for

Hamilton Gardens and then became more involved as the designer and fundraiser.

The original plans for Hamilton Gardens envisaged a traditional botanic garden but Peter introduced a different concept inspired by the Gartenhaus sites he had seen in Germany. This concept utilised alternative themes to the usual traditional plant collections.

The most popular area of Hamilton Gardens has been the Paradise Garden Collection which demonstrates the major small enclosed garden design traditions. The Chinese Scholars Garden was the first of these to be developed in

the late 1980s largely because of the interest and support of the local Chinese community.

Since that time Hamilton Gardens has set up twelve different fund raising trusts each involving the community in fundraising and organising events associated with Hamilton Gardens.

The other Paradise Gardens to be developed include the English Flower Garden, Japanese Garden of Contemplation, American Modernist Garden, Italian Renaissance Garden and recently the Indian Char Bagh Garden.

The overall theme for Hamilton Gardens is 'to promote the appreciation and understanding of gardens, their history, context and meaning'. At present only about 65% of the overall concept for Hamilton Gardens has been developed.

The latest project at Hamilton Gardens was the new Information Centre and attention is currently focused on the second stage of the Te Parapara Maori Garden. After that the next gardens to be developed

will probably be the 'Fantasy Garden Collection' representing different forms of garden fantasy. These will be located between the Paradise Gardens and the Herb and Kitchen Gardens.

Hamilton Gardens has become the Waikato's most popular visitor destination 'by a country mile'. Of the 1.3 million visitors attracted annually more than half come from outside the local district. Conservatively the economic benefit to the city economy from these visitors is \$12 million each year. There are of course many other benefits to the local community including the involvement of various cultural groups in the Gardens development and use.

Hamilton Gardens has become a major hub of activity, with more than 2100 booked events per annum, including those in the central exhibition pavilion.

Peter authored *Inspiration in the Garden* (2004) based on the Paradise Gardens. This book looked at how the same forms of fantasy have

inspired innovation in garden design throughout history.

In 2005 Peter delivered the Banks Memorial Lecture on the topic of public gardens engaging with their local community and the casual visitor¹.

Peter has also contributed to horticulture in this country as convenor of the organising committee for the Botanic Gardens Australia New Zealand (BGANZ) conference held at Hamilton Gardens in October 2007. This conference was a resounding success, and the delegates in attendance were enthusiastic in their praise of Hamilton Gardens.

Through his work at Hamilton Gardens Peter has made a major contribution to his community and to horticulture in the country. It was his persistence and passion throughout the development of the gardens and his driving of the individual trusts that has led to the success of Hamilton Gardens today.

He is a most worthy Associate of Honour of our Institute.

¹ Editors' note: see Sergel, P. (2006). 2005 Banks Memorial Lecture: Gardens that involve people. *New Zealand Garden Journal* 9(1): 6–10.