

John William Goodwin

13 February 1912 – 8 November 2005



When Mr Goodwin was appointed to take charge of Pukekura Park in 1949 he was 37 years old and already a very competent plantsman and administrator.

He was born with an instinctive flare for understanding natural phenomena and having been obliged to 'take to the road' with backpack and cycle to find employment during the serious depression of the 1930 era he had risen to the challenge in a great diversity of occupations, gaining skills and making contacts which would serve him well later in life.

By 1939 and the outbreak of World War II he had fine-tuned his focus on horticulture as a vocation. Military service, followed by responsible positions at Christchurch Botanic Garden and the grounds of Massey University sharpened his administrative skills.

Acceptance of the position at Pukekura Park in 1949 carried a formidable challenge. The terms were clinically brief and to the point. There had been unavoidable neglect resulting largely from the consequences of war and the Park had lost much of its attraction with many paths closed off. He was asked what should be done 'to bring visitors back into the Park' and requested three months to prepare proposals by which he felt this could be achieved! With the level of thorough research and attention to detail which were his hallmark he tabled a document detailing no less than 72 suggestions for upgrading existing features and the introduction of new attractions such as a fountain, waterfall and waterwheel.

One of the earliest attempts at enticing visitors went off with a big bang in every sense. Wartime restrictions had curtailed fireworks displays so experts from Auckland were brought in and despite torrential rain, 7000 spectators turned up! In the following two years the number was 17,000 each time but behind the scenes over this period he was hard at work leading his staff in the felling of hundreds of rogue 'opportunist' trees introduced over many years by birds or wind. Restoring existing features, reopening closed paths and adding to the infrastructure to ensure compelling interest in the Park long into the future were other priorities.

If, by 1954 there existed any doubt about his ability to entice people back into the Park it must surely have dissipated completely after the Queen's visit in early 1954. This attracted unprecedented numbers, 14,000 of whom were school children assembled on the sports ground! His planning was a resounding success though marred for him personally by the death of his father in Christchurch just before the visit. It speaks volumes for his planning prowess and communication skills that he was able to leave detailed written instructions and trust staff to undertake final preparations then excuse himself to attend the funeral and return just prior to the visit. That event alone reveals an exceptional level of dedication and respect, not only for his family but also for the community and its leaders whom he served so faithfully. Also taken into account were the integrity and reputation of his staff. The interests of everyone else were safeguarded at considerable personal sacrifice. That was the measure of the man.

Through the 1950s, with a bright future for Pukekura and Brooklands on track his organisational skills sought new challenges in the body corporate. The New Plymouth City Council established a Parks & Reserves Department and he was appointed as its Superintendent, thus extending his realm of authority to encompass all public reserves in New Plymouth. A salient early move was to establish

a plant nursery at Brooklands, a facility destined to become envied throughout New Zealand and one major source of the rich diversity of plants for which the region is famous. Later, as staff with higher qualifications were attracted to this horticultural Mecca, he was able to realise another of his great dreams – the establishment of apprenticeship training. There was great pride in the fact that ultimately, New Plymouth became the North Island centre for annual block training courses, with senior staff involved as instructors.

Concurrent with the surge of activity in the Park something very exciting was happening closer to the mountain. Of all the plants of which he had outstanding knowledge, rhododendrons were a favourite. In 1951, enthusiasts decided to establish a large national garden around a small bush-clad hill called Pukeiti, 17km from New Plymouth. For many years thereafter his contribution to the establishment, maintenance and welfare of the expansive grounds of the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust was simply enormous and by reason of his extreme modesty, incalculable. Apparently, Saturdays were set aside for pilgrimage there. Not only did he subsequently provide expert horticultural input but with a son carried out the original survey then played a major role in layout, landscaping, pathways, location and design of buildings etc. He was elected onto the board and in early days served as Hon. Superintendent. In November 2000 the Goodwin Block was dedicated in his honour and at the A.G.M. he was, to his great delight, elected Patron.

The 1960s and 1970s were very dynamic within the Parks & Reserves Department. Amid great controversy a fountain had already been constructed in Pukekura Park in 1955 to mark the visit of the Queen and in 1957 work began on the Bowl of Brooklands with his guidance. Nearby he set up the Brooklands Zoo and playground. Then followed the drama of large blocks of ancient and sacrosanct

pinus being felled to make way for a unique range of trees that would not only become the skyline features for hundreds of years but also result in the return of native birds to the area. The popular illuminations which continue to annually bring tens of thousands of visitors into the Park were introduced, the illuminated waterfall commissioned in 1970 and the waterwheel in 1976.

Within the city boundaries, six new parks and fifteen playing fields had been established under Mr Goodwin's stewardship and an aquatic centre built. Beyond, a new airport and a crematorium had been landscaped and maintained while a large forestry enterprise surrounding the city's water reservoir had been managed.

In 1977 he retired and though he and wife Maude remained in New Plymouth until 1996 their very modest natures had resulted in them tending to vanish into obscurity from the public. Throughout his life he had exercised a remarkable level of modesty and had honed a skill at avoiding public limelight, preferring to deflect praise onto others. He belonged to something like thirty organizations associated with plants, birds, animals or fish, several of which were founded as the result of his influence yet he avoided high office in practically all. His input into many was however so great that he was accorded the highest honours that the organization could bestow.

A move by the couple to Napier in 1996 to be near their daughters resulted in yet more obscurity from the Taranaki scene. There was a risk that his great services to this region in particular but to the advancement of horticulture and administration of parks on a much broader scale would never be fully recognized but in late 2002 this was rectified when his contemporaries very willingly supported a nomination for NZ Royal Honours. In the Queen's Birthday Honours of 2003 he was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit

(MNZM). That was not his only internationally recognized award. His exceptionally vast knowledge of plants, great contribution to the administration of parks and deep dedication to Pukeiti set him on the world stage and in 1978 the Royal Horticultural Society based in London had honoured him with bestowal of its prestigious and rare Veitch Memorial Medal.

In recent years prospects of revisiting Taranaki and his beloved Pukeiti had a powerful revitalising effect on him and it was always a privilege to accompany him to share in his reminiscences over old haunts. Here again, his incredible ability to recall detail was simply mind boggling and it soon dawned upon me that I was being the recipient of such volumes of unrecorded history that there was no hope of me remembering it. This information just had to be recorded. The result was that during 1997/1998 we recorded eight tapes mostly 'in the field' and often 'on the hoof', harnessed together, each with a wire from a lapel microphone attached to the portable tape-recorder. I gain great satisfaction from the fact that I had the unique opportunity to make the recordings and that they are safeguarded for posterity in the archives of what is now Puke Ariki.

He certainly did not stand on ceremony and would not expect to be addressed formally, but was always held in such high esteem that I and many others tended to respect his high principles and level of ability by always addressing him or referring to him as 'Mr.' Long after I retired I still felt slightly uneasy over using his given name.

Mr. Goodwin, –John, –Jack, set a shining example of efficiency, loyalty, dedication and vision in all his endeavours yet graced every achievement with exceptional modesty and humility. Generations long into the future who may never come to know his name will have reason to be appreciative of his good works developed with them in mind. He leaves those fortunate enough to have known him, much the richer for the privilege.

From a eulogy compiled by George Fuller of New Plymouth. In 1965 George Fuller was appointed to join Mr Goodwin's dedicated team at Pukekura Park and served under his leadership until John Goodwin's retirement in 1977. George Fuller had kept in contact since.

Qualifications, honours and memberships – extracted from 'John William (Jack) Goodwin'. Biography written by Doug and Margaret Foster, December 2001.

- National Diploma Horticulture New Zealand, 1942
- First Campbell Memorial Prize winner, 1939
- Royal NZ Institute Horticulture Fellow, FRIH (NZ), 1948
- Royal NZ Institute Horticulture Associate of Honour, AHRIH (NZ), 1961
- Fellow NZ Institute of Parks and Recreation Administration (Honorary Fellow and life member)
- International Federation of Park & Recreation Administration (IFPRA) (founder member, NZ delegate 16 years, retired member 1978 to 2000)
- New Zealand Recreation Association (replaced the NZ Institute Parks and Recreation). Fellow and honorary life member

- Veitch Memorial Gold Medal (RHS 1978)
- Royal Horticultural Society (England) member for 50 years (1949–2000)
- Qualified wool classer (two certificates of 96% and 100% in successive years)
- Quartermaster Sgt (RQMS), 19th Field Regiment NZ Army, WW II
- Life member New Zealand Lily Society
- Taranaki Floral Festivals
- New Zealand Pond and Aquarium Society (Christchurch, Manawatu and Taranaki)
- New Zealand Rhododendron Society
- New Zealand Rose Society
- New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust (regular supporter in a small way)
- International Camellia Society
- New Zealand Camellia Society
- New Zealand Alpine Garden Society
- Member Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society NZ (from the 1930s, many years beyond their records, helped found the Taranaki branch)
- World Wide Fund for Nature
- NZ Institute of Turf Culture

member (represented NZ Institute of Parks, contributed to *Turf Culture*)

- Board and Executive member Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust; Hon Superintendent for 16 years; Hon Life Member and recently made Patron. The Goodwin Block was recently dedicated in his honour (2000).
- Life member Friends of Eastwood Hill (advisor to Mr. Cook 1944–1964)
- International Dendrology Society member 1954; Hon Life Member (Hon member of NZ Chapter)
- Life member Eden Garden
- Miranda Naturalist Trust (Migratory Birds) (assisted with building project for many years)
- Associate of NZ Institute of Foresters
- Canterbury Horticultural Society in the early 1930s and a member for many years
- Ornithological Society of NZ
- NZ Avicultural Society
- North Taranaki Cage Bird Club (Vice patron)
- Pheasant Breeders' Association of NZ
- New Zealand Botanical Society