

1940s in black and white on glass plates and film and then on colour slides from the early fifties. At his Victoria Road house the laundry was often turned into a darkroom where he would process black and white film and photographic prints. These photographic skills were also transferred to his children as they grew up. This photographic treasure is significant (in size and history) and the intention is to digitise some of the material and make it available through the relevant organisations.

There are stories of George's experiences with slide shows and every now and again he would have disasters where the slide cassette would be dropped or have to be transferred messing up the order and flow of the presentation or many of the slides would come up sideways. He even did one presentation backwards because of this phenomenon and recalled one experience where a couple of slides even popped completely out of the projector startling everyone.

He was awarded the MBE in 1990 for his services to the community and in 2009 he wore this medal proudly on his suit during his campaign to save the trees on the Bowl road when the New Plymouth District Council decided to form a new road

connecting the Racecourse with the Brooklands Bowl because recent stables development had blocked the entry to the current road. As proposed and passed in urgency by Council, this road would have wiped out a shelter belt and destroyed a large pūriri (*Vitex lucens*) tree estimated to be about 400 years old, as well as some 25 other mature native trees. He dubbed the pūriri tree "Enigma" and stood vigil at lunchtimes for seven consecutive days, explaining to the public about the need to preserve the tree and its roots, as he had painstakingly probed the road surface for root structures and found that this tree had grown on the edge of a cliff. He traced the roots of other native trees and taped the area which would be affected and was protective of a kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) which arched over the present roadway. While various Friends of Pukekura Park supported him at these times, it was because of his tenacity that in the end a compromise was reached. George was overwhelmed by the Council turnaround and he stated "It's proved that an individual with a little bit of logic, enthusiasm or obsession can move people in big ways." He was unique, he put his heart and soul into the Park and his fight, his "last stand" was typical of his strength of mind

and dedication to the Park.

In 2010 *The Taranaki Daily News* voted him Person of the Year, a merit he richly deserved.

For those of us who have known him, George was a man with sparkling humour, who knew his subject and was prepared to stand up for what he believed in. He was a man of integrity who had a vast array of knowledge about his precious home, Pukekura Park. We will miss him.

Many thanks to the Fuller family for their input and use of photographs.

**Adapted with permission from an obituary compiled by Adrienne Tatham for *The Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park*, Vol. 10, No. 3, October 2015, pp. 6–10.**

**Also see the obituary for George at [www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/69571866/former-pukekura-park-curator-dies](http://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/69571866/former-pukekura-park-curator-dies).**

**Images of George's remarkable orchid collection are at <http://fuller3.wix.com/gforchids>.**

**George Fuller joined the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture in November 1965, and was made a Fellow (FRIH) in 1989.**

## William Russell Sykes AHRIH, ONZM, FMLS 13 October 1927 – 5 January 2018



**Fig. 1** Bill on his 89th birthday in colourful clothing, including a mauve scarf, his favourite colour.

Born in south east England in 1927, Bill Sykes (Fig. 1) came to New Zealand in 1961 to become a botanist specialising in cultivated and adventive plants at Botany Division of the DSIR Lincoln, a position he held until his retirement in 1992. Remarkably, this was followed by 25 more productive years as a Research Associate at the Allan Herbarium at Lincoln.

Bill's expertise was very wide, encompassing the cultivated and wild floras of Europe, the Himalayas, the tropical South Pacific, and New Zealand's native, adventive, and cultivated floras. He was one of three main authors of our *Flora of New Zealand*, Vol. 4, *Naturalised*

*Pteridophytes*, *Gymnosperms*, *Dicotyledons*. Bill continued to publish up until 2016, culminating in the publication of the Cook Islands flora that year.

Bill was much loved by the research community in New Zealand for his botanical enthusiasm, his encyclopaedic knowledge, his gentle manner and a warm sense of humour that made him friends everywhere.

### Life summary

Bill's interest in botany started at primary school with collecting the local English chalk flora. After leaving school he worked for the seed nursery of Thompson and Morgan in Ipswich in 1946 and 1947, which gave him his first grounding in horticulture.

After a break in 1947–1949 as a medical attendant for the Royal Navy, he became a diploma student at the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), Wisley Gardens 1949–1951. At Wisley, the garden's Curator, Francis Hanger, set a weekly plant identification test of 20 plants for the students. Bill related that "I had the happy knack of getting my identifications correct most of the time, and more consistently so than anyone else". Plant identification was one of Bill's strong points throughout his career. Bill had an exceptional memory and an intuitive ability in plant identification that meant he rarely made mistakes.

He was chosen from the Wisley students of his final year of study to be the youngest of four botanists (along with Oleg Polunin, John Williams, and Adam Stainton) for two plant collecting expeditions to Nepal for the RHS and British Museum. The Kingdom of Nepal had been closed to outsiders up to 1949, so was the last part of the Himalayas to be botanically explored. The team, with help from Nepalese government officers, collected more than 5,000 specimens over an eight month period in 1952 and 9,500 plant specimens over a similar period in 1954 (Hunter and Sykes, 2015, 2016). Following these two trips, he studied for a BSc in botany at London University, 1957–1960.

Bill was invited in 1961 by Dr Eric Godley, the then Director of Botany Division, DSIR, New Zealand, to take a scientist position at the herbarium at Lincoln (CHR). Why New Zealand? Bill wanted to go somewhere where he could see an exotic flora growing naturally. If he had taken a position offered at Kew to work on tropical African plants, he'd be doing that from specimens, not in the field. At that time there were no vacancies for taxonomic botanists in Australia or New Guinea. He didn't want to do a PhD in North America and he couldn't stand the thought of working in the then land of apartheid, South Africa.

A good proportion of the Allan Herbarium's cultivated plant collections were made by Bill, starting only weeks after he arrived at Lincoln. Bill's main work was on the New Zealand dicot cultivated and adventive flora (Arthur Healy specialised in the adventive monocot

flora). This work culminated in the 1988 adventive flora volume (Webb, Sykes and Garnock-Jones, 1988). Bill, throughout his life, was a prolific collector of plants (at the Allan Herbarium there are probably 20,000 collections made by Bill, including 5,000 Cook Island specimens). Bill's son, Julian, describes how on family holidays, Bill never missed an opportunity to collect plants seen from the road, often involving perilous climbs on bluffs.

During the 1960s, Bill started work on the flora of Niue, leading to a publication in 1970, followed by two trips to the Kermadec Islands (the first trip curtailed by a volcanic eruption of the Raoul Island volcano) leading to an annotated checklist in 1977. He made nine collecting trips to the Cook Islands between 1974 and 2002 and was persuaded to embark on a full flora treatment of that country in 1982, but work on that flora started in earnest only after his retirement. A book launch for the Cook Islands flora was held at Lincoln in 2016, a festive event and the last big celebration of Bill's work that he was able to attend (Fig. 2–3). A second launch was held in Rarotonga in 2017 that Bill was unable to attend due to his failing health.

#### After retirement

Bill retired in 1992 but continued to work at the Allan Herbarium nearly every day up to about 2015, writing papers, writing the Cook Islands flora, and freely providing his remarkable plant identification skills to the herbarium.

Bill had a particularly rich and productive life in retirement, both in the botanical sense and in his participation in community life. He was botanist on trips to Nepal organised by Diane McKinnon. He and his wife Peggy were active in the Packe Street community and community garden in St Albans, Christchurch. In recent years, he worked one day a week in the garden at Orton Bradley Park, Banks Peninsula. Bill supported the Free Tibet movement (but nevertheless had a strong interest in the Chinese flora and made a work trip to China in 1990). He was a thoughtful letter writer to *The Press*, Christchurch, and took part in street protests, most recently the TPPA Christchurch street marches in 2016.



Fig. 2 Bill at the Cook Islands Flora launch in 2016 with the Cook Islands' Queen Marie Pa Ariki on his right and the Cook Islands' High Commissioner Teremoana Yala on his left.

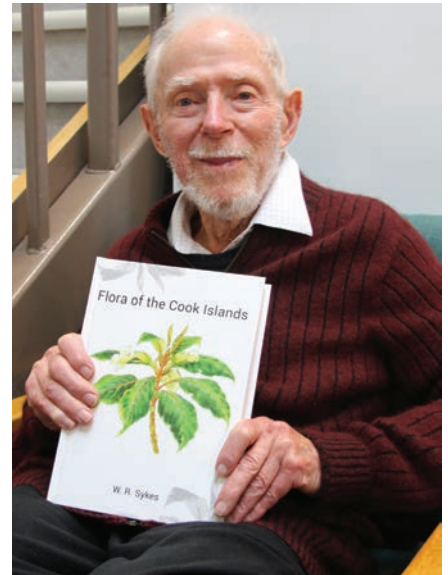


Fig. 3 Bill proudly holding the first copy of the Cook Islands Flora to arrive at the Allan Herbarium, 2016.

Bill stayed well and active until early 2017, and then slowly declined in health but still managed to live at his home in St Albans. This was made possible by Peggy, the rest of his family, and support from community care workers. Bill's funeral was held in Christchurch on 9th January 2018, attended by his extended family and hundreds of friends, with many standing at the back of the chapel. It was a great celebration of an extraordinary life, with many stories from his family showing the many aspects of Bill, and a eulogy delivered by Anthony Wright on 'Botany Bill' as he was often called.

#### Awards and memberships

Bill was made a Foreign Member of the Linnaean Society of London, 2017, an award with only 50 members at any one time. He was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2005 for services to botany (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Bill and Peggy at the award ceremony for Bill's New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) in 2005.

Bill was a long-standing member of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture<sup>1</sup>, the Royal Society of New Zealand, the New Zealand Botanical Society, and the former Institute of Noxious Plants Officers. Bill helped found the Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Garden and for this and for his services to the botanic garden as a volunteer he was made a life member in 2017.

#### Eponymy

Bill had the following plant species named after him: *Eulaliopsis sykesii* Bor 1958, *Epilobium sykesii* P.H.Raven 1962, *Erythrina sykesii* Barneby & Krukoff 1974, *Corydalis sykesii* Ludlow & Stearn 1975, *Geniostoma sykesii* Fosberg & Sacht 1981, *Haroldiella sykesii* J.Florence 1997, *Urtica sykesii* Grosse-Veldm. & Weigend 2016, and *Pandanus sykesii* H.St.John 1989 (gleefully made a synonym of *Pandanus tectorius* by Bill in the Cook Islands flora).

#### Taxa named or co-authored by Bill Sykes

× *Carpophyma mutabile*  
Heenan & Sykes

× *Carpophyma pallidum*  
Sykes & Heenan

*Blechnum glabrescens*  
T.C.Chambers & Sykes

*Convolvulus verecundus*  
Allan subsp. *waitaha* Sykes

*Crassula manaia* A.P.Druce & Sykes

*Lepidium makateanum* Sykes

*Macropiper melchior* Sykes

*Myoporum kermadecense* Sykes

*Pittosporum rangitahua*

E.K.Cameron & Sykes

*Plantago obconica* Sykes

*Santalum insulare* Bert.

ex A.DC. var. *mitiario* Sykes

*Senecio hauwai* Sykes

*Senecio lautus* Willd. var. *esperensis*  
Sykes

*Tetramolopium mitiarioense*

Lowrey, Whitkus & Sykes

#### Publications

Bill published on New Zealand botany, as a co-author of the New Zealand flora volumes 4 (contributing sections on gymnosperms and dicotyledons), and 5 (contributing the section on bamboos). He wrote 15 articles for the *New Zealand Journal of Botany* as well as a number of checklists as precursors to the New Zealand floras. He co-authored a further eight articles in the *New Zealand Journal of Botany*.

Bill's largest work was his 970 page Cook Islands Flora, published in 2016, representing 20 years of research and field work in the Cook Islands. In addition, he wrote a number of unpublished reports for the Cook Islands government describing

the vegetation of the various islands. He wrote a DSIR bulletin on the flora of Niue (1970) and an annotated checklist of the Kermadec Islands flora as a DSIR bulletin (1977). In 2000, an update to this publication was produced. With Ian Atkinson, he wrote a report on rare and endangered plants of Norfolk Island for the Australian government, and several publications on the flora and vegetation of Tonga.

#### A partial list of publications

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<sup>1</sup> Bill joined in 1961, was made an Associate of Honour in 1992, and remained a member up until his death.

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