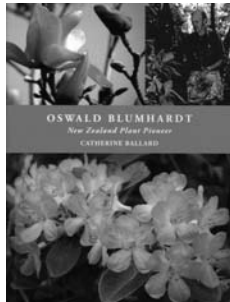


Book Reviews

Oswald Blumhardt: New Zealand plant pioneer

By Catherine Ballard, published by David Ling Publishing Ltd, PO Box 34 601, Birkenhead, Auckland, New Zealand, 2006, 119 pages, 240 × 185 mm, ISBN-13: 978-1-877378-11-9, ISBN-10: 1-877378-11-9. NZ\$40.00

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. liliiflora*) 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 Glow', and *R.* 'Saxon Blush'.

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.

Supplement to Eagle's Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand: Additional notes

Published by the Botanical Society of Otago, Dunedin

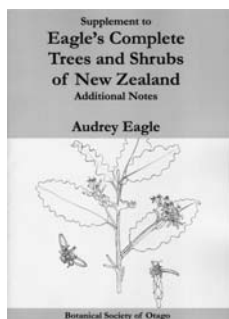
Paperback, 114 pages, 205 x 290mm, NZ, 2006

ISBN-10: 0-473-11727-4

ISBN-13: 978-0-473-11727-6.

NZ\$20.00

Reviewed by Murray Dawson



In the last issue of the *New Zealand Garden Journal* (2006, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 32), we published Brian Molloy's book launch speech for *Eagle's Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand*.

Audrey Eagle's superb two-volume set contains some 800 paintings and information on nearly all of the trees and shrubs found in New Zealand. The formatting and emphasis of this outstanding work is naturally placed on Eagle's wonderful illustrations, so throughout the book the drawings are placed on the right hand page and the text on the left hand page. As a consequence of this design constraint, the accompanying text is at times concise.

The Botanical Society of Otago has stepped in and published additional information on about 630 of the plants illustrated by Eagle. As explained by Audrey Eagle in the Foreword of this valuable 114-page Supplement, these notes;

"include interesting and useful information not necessarily apparent in the paintings such as important comparative differences between similar species, taxonomic notes, conservation status, threats, special features, breeding systems, regional variation (morphology, colour etc), historical information, discoverers, cultural uses and values, hybridism, cultivation, phenology (flowering times etc), ecological notes, and much else."

This Supplement has been collated from Audrey Eagle's notes as well as those provided by many of New Zealand's leading botanists including Mike Bayly and Alison Kellow, Shannel Courtney, Helen and the late Tony Druce, Eric Godley, Peter Heenan, Peter de Lange, Brian Molloy, Colin Ogle, and Neil Simpson, among others.

Cross-referencing is easy, as the additional notes in the Supplement are arranged following the page number and botanical name (family, genus, species, etc) for the relevant plant illustrated in Eagle's two-volume set.

If you have already spent NZ\$200 on *Eagle's Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand* (and I strongly recommend that you do), then the additional NZ\$20 being asked for the Supplement represents good value indeed.

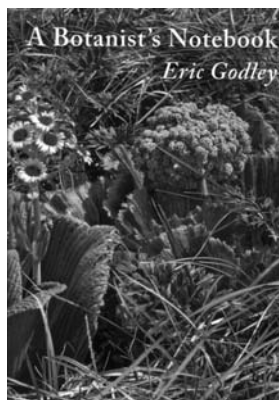
Further information is available at the Botanical Society of Otago's website (<http://www.botany.otago.ac.nz/bso/supplement.php>). The Supplement can be purchased from the University Book Shop, Dunedin (or order online at <http://www.unibooks.co.nz/>), or from Touchwood Books (<http://touchwoodbooks.co.nz/>).

A Botanist's Notebook

By Eric Godley

Published by Manuka Press in association with The Caxton Press 2006, 125 B&W illustrations, 235 p., A5, paperback
ISBN 0-9582399-4-X
\$NZ25.00

Reviewed by Murray Dawson



Dr Eric Godley's interesting collection of 72 of his botanical essays spans some three decades and cover a wide range of topics.

The majority (63 of them) are brought together from a series bearing the same name (*A Botanist's Notebook*) and published in the *New Zealand Gardener* magazine from 1978 to 1984.

The remainder are from a variety of sources, including a couple of articles from the RNZIH journal, and there are several new essays written by Dr Godley and published especially for his book.

Dr Godley has wide research interests and has published extensively on the reproductive biology of the native flora, the biogeography of southern temperate floras, and botanical history. This broad knowledge is reflected in his clearly written essays arranged within the following sections: Banks and Cook (botanical exploration resulting from the *Endeavour* voyage); The Seasons and Winter; Mount Haast; Flowers and Pollination; Fruits and Seeds; Seedlings; Kōwhai; Pōhutukawa and Rātā; Fuchsia; Tropical Outliers; South America; Far South (plants of our southern islands); Botany Division and Floras (the Flora of New Zealand series); New Chums (naturalised plants); Reviewing the Regions (the botany of Auckland, Manawatu, and Mount Aspiring National Park); Plant Names and Families (including why plant names change and Māori words in plant names).

Additional notes and observations made since the original articles were written are indicated by frequent footnotes throughout. Rather than detracting from the book, the footnotes nicely demonstrate how botanical knowledge has advanced over the intervening years. This book has plenty of illustrations with informative captions, and each article will give the reader a fresh insight into the botanical world that surrounds us all.

Dr Eric J. Godley OBE, Hon. DSc (Cantuar), FRSNZ, AHRH has made a sustained and distinguished contribution to New Zealand botany. After completing degrees at Auckland and Cambridge he spent most of his career as the Director of the Botany Division of the Department of Scientific and

Industrial Research. Under his leadership, the Division greatly expanded its research and extension programmes, established a network of regional stations, and became New Zealand's principal centre for research on native and naturalised plants.

His book was launched at the Canterbury Museum on Friday 8th December 2006, and is available from the publisher, Manuka Press (<http://www.manukapress.co.nz/>).

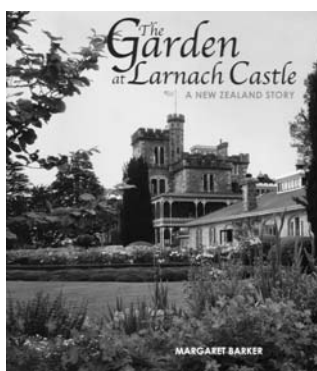
The Garden at Larnach Castle: A New Zealand story

By Margaret Barker

Published by David Bateman, Auckland

Hardback, 159 pages, 245 x 275mm, New Zealand, 2006
ISBN-13: 978-1-86953-639-8
ISBN-10: 1-86953-639-8
NZ\$49.99

Reviewed by Murray Dawson



Larnach Castle is truly unique. Located on the Otago Peninsula near Dunedin, it is New Zealand's only castle.

The Garden at Larnach Castle: A New Zealand story is written by the castle owner, Margaret Barker, and recounts her families' personal journey of some 40 years transforming the castle and grounds from a near ruin into the award winning tourist attraction of today. The garden is of National Significance, as first assessed by the RNZIH New Zealand Gardens Trust in 2004.

Many famous buildings of the world are also renowned for their associated gardens – UK has Hampton Court Palace in London and Sissinghurst in Kent, France has Versailles and Monet's former

home Giverny, and Italy has Villa Aldobrandini and Villa d'Este, to name but a few. Equally, the gardens at Larnach Castle are an essential living companion and also steeped in history.

The Prologue of the book sets the scene with the Barker's first sight of the Castle in 1967: "The tangle of overgrowth opened out and suddenly it was before us, Larnach Castle, dreaming in the summer sun of lost days of grandeur", and the Barker's decision to buy it was made there and then.

The first chapter provides a brief biography of William Larnach's life, explaining that he became wealthy on the back of Otago's goldrush, started work building the castle in the 1870s, and later became bankrupt and took his own life in Parliament buildings in 1898. The Castle was stripped of assets, taken over by the state and used as a mental hospital for several years, before passing through several owners, most notably the Purdies.

The early years of the Barkers' guardianship is told in Chapter 2, which recounts the great challenges faced getting the Castle buildings functional while raising a young family and looking after elderly parents at the same time. The first paragraph sums it up: "The Castle roof was shot, essential services were unreliable, floors unstable ... It was bitterly cold and damp ... and we had a baby on the way".

The remaining 10 chapters trace the development of particular garden areas in the Larnach Castle estate.

Aside from large-scale weed management and clearance of out-of-control trees and shrubs, the first major project was restoration of Mr and Mrs Purdie's original rock garden (Chapter 3) that was completely lost in overgrowth.

Development of the "Serpentine Walk" is described in Chapter 4, so called because it is a curvy path designed to slow people down so that they can enjoy the adjacent perennial border. The plants in this border have been carefully chosen to provide colour and interest throughout the year.

Chapter 5 covers the patterned garden established to link the

former ballroom, now a café, to the outside eating area. To create this outdoor flow, a window had to be replaced by a new door constructed by craftsmen using castings and materials copied from an original door elsewhere in the Castle.

And so the stories flow over the subsequent chapters. This book is well illustrated with some 150 carefully chosen photographs, mostly in colour, but also including historic black and white photos of the Castle and grounds.

A recurrent theme that comes through in this book is that gardens are living works and never truly finished. The Larnach Castle gardens have been influenced in different ways and at different times by Margaret Barker's travels to other great gardens of the world and to 'nature's gardens' – intrepid adventures in the wilds of South America, China, Tasmania, Lord Howe Island, the Chatham Islands, and the subantarctic islands of New Zealand.

Many of the plants used and fashions followed in other great gardens, such as extensive rose beds, were found to be unsuited to the soil and climatic conditions of the Otago Peninsula. This is where Margaret Barker instead took her inspiration from nature, planting more New Zealand native plants and cool-temperate Pacific plants. This also provides a uniquely New Zealand context to the gardens. In the so-named South Seas garden (Chapter 10), much of the extensive *Rhododendron* collection was replaced with nikau palms and other coastal and island plants.

Margaret Barker is always willing to replant, redevelop, and refine her ideas, and these are the sure signs of an expert plantswoman. And what an achievement to have the Poor Knights lily *Xeronema callistemon* from the far north thriving in the same grounds as the subantarctic megaherb *Stilbocarpa polaris*!

This is more than just a garden book; it documents an important part of the Castle's history and garden legacy. This record will, thanks to the author and current owner, endure for future generations.