

Obituaries

Neville Victor Davies

14 April 1932 – 29 May 2013



Neville Davies standing in front of the historic Duncan and Davies Model A Ford (converted to a nursery truck) during the nursery reunion in 2010. Photo: Harry Cast.

The New Zealand nursery and horticulture industry lost a major contributor with the death of Neville Davies on 29 May 2013. The younger son of the late Sir Victor Davies, Neville joined the management team of Duncan and Davies Nurseries in 1960 having trained as an accountant and worked outside the company for a number of years.

Working with his father, and older brother Trevor¹, Neville became a major player in the success of the company with increasing roles in the processes of production of the wide range of trees and shrubs for both domestic and export grown by the company. As the pre-eminent nursery of New Zealand the company was always at the forefront of industry development and innovation and it was in these areas that Neville made significant contributions.

Throughout the 1960s the company was expanding its export trade to Europe, Asia and North America.

While Trevor spearheaded the overseas promotion of this trade Neville played an increasing role in meeting the inevitable and ever changing biosecurity regulations that were brought into play. Within the nursery he was always looking for innovative ways to solve production problems with the mantra “there is always a better way.” From computerised records systems to the improved handling methods for field grown crops to transport of crops, Neville was always applying his enthusiasm to improving the company finances through better methods.

Major expansion of the nursery was required to meet modern production needs and to centralise operation from their traditional Westown base that had served the company since 1899. The new site at Brixton enabled a green field development to build a state of the art nursery; Neville being a critical part of the planning and implementation team.

Upon the retirement of Trevor in 1976 Neville took over the management of the company, leading it through the process of corporatisation as new capital was sought to enable the continuing development of the export market. He retired from the company in 1985 after 25 years’ service.

Neville had a very warm relationship with his staff. His accounting background and his infectious enthusiasm for the task in hand saw him motivating, encouraging and leading staff through many changes. His constant search for improved methods was evident in all facets of the nursery and his work in computerising systems revolutionised their business from production planning to the point of sale.

The nursery industry too was served with distinction by Neville Davies. He served on the Executive

of the New Zealand Nurserymen’s Association for many years and held the position of President from 1975 to 1976. Among other things, he played a major role for the industry when equal pay legislation was implemented in 1972. A completely new set of industry criteria needed to be developed and subsequently negotiated with industrial unions for inclusion in awards. He was elected a Life Member of the Association in 2004.

His special expertise in export development was recognised by the Government when, in 1978, he became part of a Government Export Opportunities Team commissioned to investigate the potential for horticultural markets with visits throughout Europe.

When the Sir Victor Davies Foundation for Research into Ornamental Horticulture was established by Lady Davies after the death of Sir Victor in 1977, Neville became a cornerstone Trustee serving as Secretary until 2012. The Foundation has over the years supported many research initiatives including the fledgling Nursery Research Centre at Massey University. More recently Neville has promoted the written history of Duncan and Davies², the establishment of the Trevor Davies International Scholarship, and digitalisation of the Duncan and Davies catalogues.

The Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust too has been fortunate to have the services of Neville both as a member and long serving Board Member. Again his commitment to success was always foremost in all of the things he did along with hours of voluntary work within the gardens. The Trust awarded him Life Membership in 2011.

When Neville retired from New Plymouth to Taupo he became an active leader and volunteer in the Waipahihi Botanical Reserve. Here he displayed the same energy and

¹ Trevor Davies’ obituary was published in the *New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2009, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 28–29.

² *The growing world of Duncan and Davies: A horticultural history 1899–2010*, reviewed in the *New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2011, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 18–20.

continued to use his horticultural and industry knowledge for the betterment of that treasure of Taupo.

While perhaps not a plantsman in the strictest sense, Neville Davies spent a lifetime immersed in and surrounded by plants and as a result contributed a great deal to the nursery industry of New Zealand as well as through his

volunteer efforts with special gardens like Pukeiti and Waipahihi. His home garden in Taupo with its selection of carefully chosen elite plants was testimony to a life among plants in New Zealand's leading nursery.

I was privileged to work for Neville as an employee and latterly as a colleague. There are many within the

nursery and horticulture industries that knew and worked with Neville Davies who have good reason to be thankful that they have been influenced by him.

Neville is survived by his wife Inger and their five children.

Obituary compiled by Alan Jellyman.

Leslie Hambleton Cleveland O.B.E. 24 March 1931 – 15 May 2013



Les Cleveland planting a totara at the restoration planting at Woodhaugh Gardens, July 23, 2011. Standing behind Les is Christopher Trotter, horticulturist in charge of maintenance at Woodhaugh.
Photo: Paul Pope.

Les Cleveland was a man of many parts; a multifaceted person with worldwide contacts and interests in many spheres that ranged from business and commerce, philanthropy, the arts – particularly music but drama and graphics as well – through to biological sciences including ornithology, plant breeding and horticulture. He was also involved in politics, serving several terms on the Otago Regional Council and the Otago Conservation Board. Like many people with such wide ranging interests and energy, he was heavily committed to serving in his local community affairs. He founded the Cleveland Arts Trust and played leading roles with such diverse groups as Rotary, the Operatic Society, the Dunedin Amenities Society and the

Dunedin Horticultural Society among many others. He was awarded an OBE for services to the community in 1995 and the Dunedin Citizen of the Year in 1998.

Les Cleveland was born into a large family of seven children in what he described as 'really tough' and difficult times but, as is often the case in such circumstances, the strong values and ties the family possessed saw them through. In speaking of these early days living in Dunedin, Les liked to talk about playing in the Town Belt at Jubilee Park as a child and enjoying the trees which were within easy distance from his home. Jubilee Park was planted by the Dunedin Amenities Society in 1887 with 'Trees of the Empire' to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. He knew these trees from an early age.

Les began his horticultural career as an apprentice at the Dunedin Botanic Garden under Maurice Skipworth. Among his contemporaries at that time were Keith Ellis, who went on to establish a successful Dunedin nursery and landscape business, and the twins, Ross and Keith Stuart, both of whom established nurseries in Otago.

He then went on to Massey University to continue his horticultural education. Unfortunately, the early death of his mother brought him back to Dunedin after completing only one year of study. He then went into the transport industry. By 1966 he established, from a private garage with humble beginnings in Fairfield, a very successful business of nationwide proportions. He was ahead of his time in respect to the positive culture and environment that he created for his

staff. This character and attitude was reflected in all his endeavours in other fields of interest that he developed.

Les was a member of Rotary for some 34 years. Throughout this time he was an exceptionally successful fundraiser. Typically, and using his property 'Cleveland Park', he raised literally millions of daffodils to be donated for charity, planting in plots in the towns and cities around Otago and for blooms to be picked to fundraise for Rotary. He was the recipient of many honours but most significantly, Rotary International's highest honour; the 1997–1998 Service Above Self Award which is limited to a maximum of 150 people world-wide in a given year.

His interest in birds was exploited to the benefit of the Dunedin Botanic Garden when their aviary had to be replaced. Once again his managerial skills were employed in utilizing his association with Rotary to raise funds for its replacement. In due course this same interest was extended to the establishment of the Orokonui Ecosanctuary for native birds in Waitati of which he was a patron.

Les possessed an extremely good lyric baritone voice. He took part in many local productions with roles including Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' and Bock's 'Fiddler on the Roof'. In 1967, using his entrepreneurial skills on behalf of the Dunedin Opera Company, Les took charge of purchasing the Mayfair Theatre as a venue for Opera in Dunedin. His interest in opera however extended beyond performance and property development to his philanthropic interests in assisting young singers through the Cleveland Trust.

But Les's true passion was horticulture and it was to this that he was able to return when he purchased his 100 hectare property at Saddle Hill some 26 years ago. Here he established his extensive garden that incorporated substantial areas of native vegetation. This he protected with registration under the QEII National Trust thus satisfying his conservation interests. He could now indulge his passion for breeding and growing plants. This he did with fervour. It seemed that his interest in plant breeding was quite catholic including many exotic plants from many families and genera but his main focus, aside from daffodils, was upon New Zealand genera particularly *Metrosideros*¹ and *Sophora*. He was focused upon using *M. umbellata* to breed cold tolerance into his crosses for colour intensity.

Apart from the successful range of *Metrosideros* hybrids he raised, he was particularly interested in the natural variability of *Sophora* species. He had a large collection built up in his garden with a view to future marketing.

It seems also that there was a strong natural overlap here with his entrepreneurial inclinations because he was, I think, appropriately

focused upon the marketing objectives of his projects. He was, for example, very keen to develop a pure red colour into his magnolia hybrids and had gone some distance towards achieving this objective.

His work with the Otago Conservation Board and including five years as chairman was close to his natural instincts. It seemed to be very fulfilling for him working with his friend and associate Professor Alan Mark of Otago University. Its apogee may well have been the establishment of the Otago Central Rail Trail that called upon his skills in public relations and practical common sense to push through a project whose potential was not universally recognised at that time. The success of this project was certainly influenced by their advocacy advice and effort. Those same skills arising from his personality in relating to people and using common sense also stood him in great stead during his time with the Otago Regional Council.

Les was named as the Otago Gardener of the Year for 2010 being the man donating more than 2 million daffodils and thousands of rhododendrons to the city. But he did much more than that.

For example, as a life member of the Dunedin Amenities Society, (New Zealand's oldest conservation society) he contributed much, including an epic public fundraising effort to develop Anzac Square in front of the Dunedin Railway Station and more recently for the provision of some thousands of native plants to restore Woodhaugh Gardens after a devastating storm destroyed existing vegetation in 2011.

Les had a wonderfully ebullient and cheerful personality. He met everyone as though each was the most important person he knew and his closest friend. His cheerful exuberance was infectious and was possibly why he was so successful in achieving what he did. Les's loss to the Dunedin community was underscored by the fact that the city council cancelled its affairs on the day of his funeral in order that councillors could attend.

First Church was full. His recorded voice singing 'If I were a Rich Man' from 'Fiddler on the Roof' rang out. He was indeed a rich man and he gave all.

**Obituary compiled by
Mick Field.**

¹ Documented in the *New Zealand Garden Journal*, 2010, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 10–22 and Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 10–23.

William Ross Stuart *7 October 1928 – 29 July 2013*



Fig. 1 Ross Stuart in the family nursery during the 1990s.

Ross Stuart was born in Owaka on the 7th October 1928. Being a twin to his brother Keith he was the third equal of six children (four brothers and two sisters).

Ross left secondary school when he was almost 16, to work alongside his brother Keith in their father's sawmill, doing Bushmen's work and keeping the mill supplied with logs. His father once wrote "what they lacked in experience they made up with enthusiasm". Their mother Alice was delighted when Ross and Keith decided not to be involved in the family sawmill business as she considered the mill to be a dangerous place to be working.

The brothers were mill hands for about 22 months before they become trainees at the Dunedin Botanic Garden in June 1946. From an early age Ross helped his mother in the garden, and he always knew that was what he wanted to do – to be involved in plants. Dunedin Botanic Garden was the beginning of his interests in nurseries and he worked in the propagation department. After three years, Ross moved to Christchurch to work in the Linwood Nursery which was associated with the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. His keen interest in plants was fostered by the professionals who worked there. However, in those days you

did not start at the top; you started at the bottom. One of the favourite jobs given to young apprentices was cleaning clay pots. Remaining enthusiastic while cleaning pots in cold water during winter took fortitude and determination. Ross displayed those qualities strongly.

After Christchurch, Ross moved on to Duncan and Davies nursery in New Plymouth to further his experience. He again worked in the propagation department where he learnt layering and grafting. After nine months at Duncan and Davies, Ross moved to Model Nurseries in Auckland (then in Titirangi Road, New Lynn) where he worked for six months. Ross didn't stay there long because the plants he was working with were not going to be the cooler climate ones he wanted to deal with when he returned south, and he was already skilled at propagation techniques through division of perennials, budding, grafting, cuttings and seed.

In 1954 he moved back south to join his brother Keith in a family nursery business – Stuart Brothers Nursery. One of the first major contracts they secured was to establish a plantation of *Pinus radiata*. To grow and plant 1,000 acres (405 ha) in pine trees is a major task. The brothers grew saplings from seed, raised them in their nursery, harvested them in winter and planted them out in the (sometimes) aptly named Mt Misery Station. Ross and Keith undertook the job with vigour and planted the plantation for the princely sum of 6 pounds per acre.

In 1960 Ross married Mary. They had three children, Elizabeth in 1962, Victoria in 1964 and James in 1966.

The family nursery in Clinton (Fig. 1) developed to include roses, shrubs, deciduous trees, plantation and forestry trees and the planting of farm gardens. Ross was generous with his plants. Often he would put an extra tree in an order and he would choose a special selection to match up to the customer. This in return resulted in many loyal customers over the years.

Another example of Ross's generosity was loaning out his wrenching machine for free to other local nurseries. For many years the machine moved around the Gore, Tapanui and Balclutha areas harvesting open ground trees. It is perhaps unusual nowadays to help a competitor but they were all welcome to borrow it.

Ross was a hardworking and talented plantsman with a passion for a wide range of trees and other plants. He gave talks at local garden clubs and exhibited roses at flower shows. Ross was a long-standing member of the RNZIH and joined on the 6th June 1952. In addition to these plant-based interests, Ross was a keen fisherman, deerstalker and duck shooter and, in his day, had many adventures in the great outdoors.

Ross had always been an inveterate seed collector. *Abies* (or silver firs) was one of his favourite plants and he would collect seed from the tops of 20 m high trees for growing on.

The first conifer named by Ross was a golden juniper. Ces Wallis (of Wallis's Nursery in Mosgiel) had imported some junipers and the two of them were inspecting these new plants. Ross was given some seed from *Juniperus* 'Keteleeri', which was growing in a bed next to *Juniperus* 'Pfitzeriana Aurea'. The seed was germinated in 1961 and plants grown from this batch showed interesting variation. Ross spotted a particularly nice seedling with golden yellow foliage which he kept an eye on for the next few years. The colour and form of this selection indicated that the seed parent, *Juniperus* 'Keteleeri', had crossed naturally with *Juniperus* 'Pfitzeriana Aurea'. This hybrid went on to be propagated and was released in 1975 as *Juniperus chinensis* 'Kuriwao Gold'. It is a compact plant with a rounded (1 × 1 m) growth habit, pendulous stem tips, and as the name implies, has fresh golden yellow foliage. Its commercial release was timely as the 1970s were the heyday of conifer gardens and *Juniperus* 'Kuriwao Gold' found a ready market. Thousands were sold for home

gardens throughout New Zealand and this cultivar was grown in prodigious numbers in the UK. Two other junipers were selected from the original batch of seedlings; *Juniperus* 'Kuriwao Mist' and a plant given to Denis Hughes of Blue Mountain Nurseries which he named *Juniperus* 'Sunshine'.

Another of Ross's successful conifer selections (Fig. 2) is *Thuja plicata* 'Can Can'. This was propagated from a small vegetative side branch sport that arose in a tray of western red cedar seedlings germinated by Ross in 1968. This side branch had different foliage with pale gold flecks. The parent plant was pruned to encourage development of this sport and grown on for another year until it was of sufficient size to propagate from cuttings. Two one-inch cuttings were taken and this material provided the basis from which the cultivar is still propagated and sold today.



Fig. 2 Ross Stuart in the mid-1970s kneeling behind his selection *Juniperus chinensis* 'Kuriwao Gold', with *Thuja plicata* 'Can Can' on the left of the photo.

Another plant that took Ross's eye was a New Zealand native. In the 1970s natives were not keenly sought after but that soon changed in the decades to follow. Ross found the original plant in 1960, among a line of *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Purpureum' seedlings. As well as the usual green foliage of the species, there were a large number of purple foliated seedlings. In addition, a few had neat and compact bushy growth habits. *Pittosporum* 'Tom Thumb' (Fig. 3) was selected as the best of these seedlings and was well known in the New Zealand market by the mid-1970s¹. This delay to market demonstrates that growing and selecting trees and shrubs is not a rapid process and you need the

¹ *Commercial Horticulture* magazine (August 1975, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 28) documented the origin of *Juniperus chinensis* 'Kuriwao Gold', included *Thuja plicata* 'Can Can' as a postscript, stating that at the time it was not yet available to the market, and mentioned *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb' as being well known. *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb' was listed as a new release in the 1972 Duncan & Davies Nursery catalogue (p. 86).

dedication and patience shown by Ross. Being a dwarf plant, *P. 'Tom Thumb'* was slow to grow on for assessment to make sure that its colour, habit and size were reliable and constant. *P. 'Tom Thumb'* is a dwarf form of its parent cultivar, *P. tenuifolium 'Purpureum'*, with leaves from light green through deep wine-red and eventually purple-black, and all colours often appearing at the same time.



Fig. 3 Ross Stuart in May 2013 standing behind an early planting of *Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Tom Thumb'*. Photo: Denis Hughes.

Within the next 10 years *P. 'Tom Thumb'* was growing well in the United Kingdom. In 1993 it was given the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit. This award is the Society's premier accolade, granted to plants that show consistent excellence in the garden. Mike Grant, editor of the RHS Journal *The Plantsman*, says that *P. 'Tom Thumb'* is still a highly thought of plant. It is probably Ross's most notable selection and a testament to his plantsmanship and expertise.

Ross didn't rest on his laurels – he continued selecting plants throughout his life. Two more pittosporums were selected, *Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Elizabeth'* (Fig. 4) and *Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Victoria'*. Both have distinctive variegated foliage and are named after his daughters. They were released in the late 1980s and are still popular today.

Pittosporum 'Victoria' originated in 1980 as a branch sport on a seedling of *P. tenuifolium 'James Stirling'*. It has attractive small silver-green leaved variegation, with creamy-white edging, which catches the sunlight, and with the cold of winter this edging takes on a delicate pinkish tinge. It is a bushy upright grower with dark red stems.

Pittosporum 'Elizabeth' is quite striking, being stronger growing and with a larger leaf. During winter, the yellow marginal variegation takes on a more pronounced pink colouring. Both are available in the UK and visitors to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2012 would have found all three of Ross's *Pittosporum* cultivars displayed.



Fig. 4 *Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Elizabeth'*. Photo: NZ Plant Pics, www.nzplantpics.com.

Another cultivar selected by Ross is a golden five finger he named *Pseudopanax arboreus 'Aurea'*. This little known selection arose as a chance seedling from material that Ross had collected at the Dunedin Botanic Garden in the 1980s. Its new foliage is yellow and this colouration remains under strong sunlight – whereas the shaded parts are green. If you visit Larnach Castle on the Otago Peninsula and stand on the platform overlooking Margaret Barker's South Seas Garden you can look down on the yellow tops of established *Pseudopanax 'Aurea'* plantings (Fig. 5). You can then follow the path down which leads into these trees; in the shade you can look up into the intense green leaves of this same planting – which provides a fascinating contrast.

A distinctive golden form of Norway maple, *Acer platanoides 'Moonlight'*, was raised by Ross in his former garden at Clinton. *Acer 'Moonlight'* has bright creamy-yellow spring growth that matures to green over the summer and changes again

in the autumn when the leaves turn a brilliant gold. Ross found it very difficult to bud-propagate and because of this it was not a commercial proposition. Some plants were sent to Britain, where nurserymen there had the same difficulty propagating it. There is a mature specimen of *Acer platanoides 'Moonlight'* growing in Chingford Park, Dunedin.



Fig. 5 A grove of *Pseudopanax arboreus 'Aurea'* planted below the South Seas Garden lookout on the Larnach Castle grounds. Photo: Steven Wooster.

On 30 June 2013, Ross attended the 150th anniversary celebration of the Dunedin Botanic Garden. Standing alongside Mayor Dave Cull, Ross was chosen to cut the cake being the oldest former apprentice of the Garden (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Ross Stuart (RHS) cutting the cake alongside Mayor Dave Cull (LHS) at the Dunedin Botanic Garden 150th birthday celebration in 2013. Photo: Chris Sullivan, Seen in Dunedin, reproduced courtesy of the Dunedin City Council.

At the funeral service, Ross's son James aptly noted that his father's legacy will live on in the plants he selected, propagated, sold, or planted during a professional career spanning 65 years. These plants remain for all of us to enjoy.

Obituary compiled by Murray Dawson, Denis Hughes, Ross Stuart himself, his wife Mary, and their son James.

Stewart Langdale Preston

11 November 1932 – 2 June 2013



Stewart Preston at a *Trillium* weekend held in Timaru, October 9, 2011. Photo: Susan More.

Stewart Preston was born on the 11th of November 1932, the second child of four children, to Phyllis and Len Preston. He went to Mosgiel District High School and Kings High School in Dunedin before leaving at the age of 17. He did mainly labouring jobs in both New Zealand and Australia, before moving back to Dunedin, marrying Beth, raising three children and becoming manager of Dunedin Airport, where he stayed for 26 years.

In his early life he had raised polyanthus and sold the plants for pocket money, but it was at the airport that he began to make his mark in horticultural circles. He started a collection of conifers that was unique, and well known around the world. Many people would visit on their way into Dunedin, in fact one was even known to have flown to Dunedin from Auckland to see the collection in the time that it took to turn the plane around, before heading back to Auckland and then home to the United States. It was a heartbreak to him to be dismissed when the management structure of the airport was changed and a great loss to the city when the majority of the collection was eventually destroyed. He was also responsible for some of the mature plantings seen around the airport today.

Stewart was always willing to share his knowledge and his plants. He grew a wide variety of different plants, including alpinas. He cultivated many of the great gardeners who lived in the Otago and Southland region in earlier days. Usually they were women (the late Gladys McArthur and the late May Spence were but two) and he obtained some very good plants from them.

Some years ago, encouraged by the enthusiasm of these women, Stewart became interested in growing trilliums in which he became an expert and which were eventually to become his trademark plants. The rush he had at Rhododendron Festival time as busloads of people, mainly women again, pushed and shoved to buy his plants, had to be seen to be believed. He grew peonies to perfection and had a superb collection of small bulbs and rare plants.

He was one of the first people who could sow *Trillium* seed and have it come up like cress. He was never backward in sharing that information and as a result many of us have some very beautiful cultivars and have ourselves been able to raise seed successfully. Some of his trilliums, both species and hybrids, were particularly good, and the loss of his

knowledge will be sorely missed. Many years ago, and being the gregarious person he was, he made many friends within New Zealand with whom he exchanged seed and plant material. Before the severe import restrictions that we are now inflicted with came into law, he also made many contacts with overseas growers and exchanged seed and plant material with them.

Stewart never hid his light under a bushel – and often said that one thing he didn't suffer from was humility. He had a good sense of humour and did not suffer fools gladly. It wasn't that he was boastful but he certainly would let you know when he thought he had something special in his garden. He had an innate feel for plants and their growing conditions and as a result produced some wonderful plants.

He belonged to a number of garden groups over the years, both in New Zealand and overseas. Included were the Dunedin Rhododendron Group, the Otago Alpine Garden Group, the Dunedin Horticultural Society, the NZ *Trillium* Group and the NZ *Fritillaria* and Small Bulb Group. He took an active part in all these groups, being an office bearer in some, and was always a generous donor of seed.

Stewart had a lot of wisdom, and a lot of that knowledge has gone with him. In the early days of garden visits many of us would soak up whatever he had to say. It is rare to find someone who could and did impart that knowledge so readily and we shall all be better gardeners for knowing him, and many of our gardens will have something from Stewart that will be constant reminder of him. His conversation, humour, knowledge and plants will be missed by many. Spring will never be quite the same.

**Obituary compiled by
Susan More.**