



Sam McGredy.

### **Early family history**

There were four generations of Sam McGredys. Sam McGredy I founded the family nursery in Northern Ireland in 1880. Sam McGredy II focused the nursery on roses in 1895. Sam McGredy III took over in 1926. The rose breeding operation of Sam McGredy IV commenced in 1952 when he reported to work at his family's rose nursery in Portadown, Ireland, after a period away from home. Sam was born in Portadown in 1932 and his father, Sam III, had died at age 38 when Sam IV was two years old.

Sam's father married Ruth Darragh and had three children, Molly, Paddy and Sam. At that time the nursery in Portadown, Ireland, was producing a million plants a year and was around 40 acres in size. With the death of Sam III, the business was taken over and run by Walter Johnson, Sam's uncle and brother-in-law of Sam's father.

During the Second World War period the Portadown nursery was converted to growing vegetables. After the war, Walter Johnson and his team re-established rose production. At this time Sam IV went to boarding school at Enniskillen in Ireland; then in 1948 he had an exchange scholarship to attend the Mercersburg Academy in Pennsylvania, USA. In 1949 Sam attended the Greenmount Agricultural College in Northern Ireland to study horticulture and then

on to Reading University in England where time was spent playing rugby. After this, Sam received some practical nursery experience working with rhododendrons at Slocock's Wholesale Nursery in the United Kingdom.

### **Early breeding**

Rose breeding for Sam began in 1952 when his Uncle Walter gave him the keys to the breeding house. He was given the responsibility to carry on the family's tradition of breeding roses. Sam's first year was spent learning the trade. In this year he endeavoured to carry on where his father left off, but he quickly decided that it would be better to start off a new strain and use his own methods. In the early years he added new selections to the breeding programme to invigorate the McGredy breeding lines. He planted up some good parents and brought in some outsiders. There were problems with rotting of hips, mildew and low germination rates of only 15 to 20%. Sam's philosophy at the start was that the key to plant breeding lay in three areas: observation, quantity and efficiency. Observation taught Sam what was happening with parents and progeny, having a reasonable quantity of seedlings gave a better chance of finding something good and for efficiency, attention to detail with plant production was important for improving germination to more than 75%.

### **Early introductions**

The first rose that Sam released was 'Salute', a cherry red and yellow bicoloured floribunda which was introduced in 1958. This was the only seedling that passed all of Sam's tests out of quite a large crop from 1953. This was followed in 1959 by Sam's first award winners 'Orangeade' (Fig. 1), and 'Chanelle'. The year after, 1960, came 'Piccadilly', a red and yellow coloured Hybrid Tea and another international Gold Medal winner (from trials in Madrid, Rome, Rotterdam and the Nord Rose Award).



**Fig. 1** *Rosa* 'Orangeade'.

In 1961, 'Mischief', a coral salmon coloured Hybrid Tea was Sam's first International President's Trophy Award winner. The President's Trophy is awarded by the Royal National Rose Society (RNRS) of the UK for the best new seedling of the year. 'Paddy McGredy' a deep rose-pink floribunda and named after Sam's youngest sister was introduced in 1962. In 1964 Her Majesty the Queen Mother, patron of the RNRS, gave Sam permission to name a rose after her. This rose was named 'Elizabeth of Glamis' (Fig. 2), a light salmon coloured floribunda which went on to win major honours, the President's International Trophy and the RNRS Gold Medal.



**Fig. 2** *Rosa* 'Elizabeth of Glamis'.

### **Plant Breeders Rights**

Sam had a keen interest in obtaining plant breeders rights for plant breeders. This would give breeders a return on their investment for the considerable expense occurred in developing new cultivars by the levying of royalties on each rose plant propagated.

Sam played a large part in convincing the Government of the United Kingdom to introduce Plant Breeders Rights in the UK. The Government of the time, after much consultation and discussion, passed an Act of

Parliament in 1964. Sam obtained Plant Breeders Rights on climbers 'Handel', 'School Girl', the floribundas 'Arthur Bell' (Fig. 3), 'Molly McGredy' (Fig. 4) and 'City of Leeds'. Sam also played a major part in the introduction of the New Zealand Plant Varieties Act of 1973. The first Plant Varieties Right in New Zealand was granted in 1976 to Sam McGredy Roses International for his rose 'Matangi' (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3 *Rosa* 'Arthur Bell'.



Fig. 4 *Rosa* 'Molly McGredy'.



Fig. 5 *Rosa* 'Matangi'.

### New Zealand

At its peak under his stewardship, the Portadown nursery in Ireland grew one million plants on 120 ha and had 160 staff. From about 60,000 seedlings a year, two or three were chosen for release to the market.

Sam visited New Zealand in 1971 for the first World Federation of Rose Societies (WFRS) Rose Convention held in Hamilton; he had visited the country twice before in the 1960s. This taste of New Zealand together with the political problems in Northern Ireland at that time turned to thoughts of emigration. Sam moved to New Zealand in 1972 with wife Maureen and two daughters Kathryn and Maria. The events that followed included, third daughter Clodagh being born, Maureen and Sam parting company and, later, Sam marrying second wife Jillian.

When Sam first arrived in New Zealand, he leased a glasshouse from Frank Schuurman at Henderson, in Auckland. This arrangement continued for twelve years where Frank and his team at Sunbeam Roses budded Sam's field trials and introduced a series of Sam's miniature roses. These included 'Ko's Yellow' (Fig. 6), named for Frank's wife, 'Wanaka', 'Takapuna', 'Kaikoura' (Fig. 7), 'Moana', 'Otago' (Fig. 8), 'Waitemata', 'Firefly', 'Snow Carpet' (Fig. 9) and a number of others.



Fig. 6 *Rosa* 'Ko's Yellow'.



Fig. 7 *Rosa* 'Kaikoura'.



Fig. 8 *Rosa* 'Otago'.



Fig. 9 *Rosa* 'Snow Carpet'.

### Rose introducers of New Zealand

Sam was behind the establishment of the Rose Introducers of New Zealand (RINZ). This was the organisation to represent breeders and their agents in the marketing of new selections of roses. RINZ was to promote and introduce new cultivars and license producers to grow and collect royalties.

RINZ established a rose trial at the Auckland Botanic Gardens at Manurewa with the Auckland Regional Council. This had come from an idea from the late John Martin with inspiration from Sam. The driving force behind this trial was to assess the commercial potential of the newer selections. The first trial was judged in 1990 and was known as the Auckland Rose of the Year. The trial moved location to the Rogers Rose Garden in Hamilton in 2001 then, known as the New Zealand Rose of the Year, became part of the Pacific Rose Bowl Festival. Sam instigated the Pacific Accord of Friendship between rose trials in Adelaide in Australia, Rose Hills in the USA and Gifu in Japan to promote friendship and exchange of information among the countries that host these trials.

### Awards

Sam received numerous awards for his roses. His first Gold Medals were in 1959 for 'Chanelle' and 'Orangeade'. He was awarded All American Rose Selections (AARS) for 'Mullard Jubilee' ('Electron') (Fig. 10), 'Coventry Cathedral' ('Cathedral'), 'Sundowner', 'Olympiad' (Fig. 11), 'New Year', 'Spek's Centennial' ('Singin' in the Rain') (Fig. 12) and 'Fosters Wellington Cup' ('Mount Hood', 'Fosters Melbourne Cup').





Fig. 10 *Rosa* 'Mullard Jubilee'.



Fig. 11 *Rosa* 'Olympiad'.



Fig. 12 *Rosa* 'Spek's Centennial'.

Sam was awarded the President's International Trophy for the Best New Rose at the Royal National Rose Society trials in the United Kingdom trials for 'Elizabeth of Glamis', 'City of Belfast' (Fig. 13), 'Molly McGredy', 'Matangi', 'Priscilla Burton', and 'Solitaire' (Fig. 14). He received 15 Gold Medals from the RNRS, the Queen Mary Commemorative Medal (twice), fourteen Gold Stars of the South Pacific at the Palmerston North rose trials in New Zealand, Gold Awards at the Belfast rose trials, the Gold Medal of the Royal Irish Horticultural Society and the Golden Rose of The Hague in Holland with 'Jan Spek', 'Satchmo', 'City of Belfast', and 'Rock 'n' Roll' (Fig. 15).



Fig. 13 *Rosa* 'City of Belfast'.



Fig. 14 *Rosa* 'Solitaire'.



Fig. 15 *Rosa* 'Rock 'n' Roll'.

Sam was awarded the CBE (Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the British Empire) in 1994 for services to horticulture, the Dean Hole Medal by the Royal National Rose Society in 1983, the New Zealand Rose Award for 1986, the Australian Rose Award for 1988, an Honorary doctorate by Massey University in 1996, the Gamble Medal from the American Rose Society, the Gold Medal of the World Federation of Rose Societies in 1997, an Associate of Honour from the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture in 1994 and the OBN (Order of the Blue Nose) founded by Niels Poulsen of Denmark.

The British Post Office had a commemorative stamp issue in 1977 for the "Year of the Rose". One of the stamps featured was Sam's rose 'Elizabeth of Glamis'. Another of Sam's roses, 'Aotearoa-New Zealand' (Fig. 16), bred as his gift to New Zealand to celebrate the country's 150th anniversary in 1990, featured on a joint stamp

issue between New Zealand and the People's Republic of China. Other roses from Sam that have been seen on postage stamps include 'New Year' and 'Candella' in New Zealand, 'Kronenbourg' in Uruguay, 'Piccadilly' in Romania, and 'Old Master' (Fig. 17) in Norway and Belgium.



Fig. 16 *Rosa* 'Aotearoa-New Zealand'.



Fig. 17 *Rosa* 'Old Master'.

### Breeding in New Zealand

By the time Sam and his family had settled in New Zealand, progress had been achieved with breeding climbers; 'Dublin Bay' (Fig. 18) was released shortly afterwards in 1975. It is still a major part of the New Zealand gardening scene today.



Fig. 18 *Rosa* 'Dublin Bay'.

'New Penny' and one of its seedlings, 'Anytime' (Fig. 19), were to play a major part in the breeding of miniature types. 'Stars 'n' Stripes' became the background for striped roses. A 'Little Darling' x 'Goldilocks' seedling was to become important for breeding



floribundas. 'Freude' important to Sam for breeding the Hybrid Teas 'Harmonie' and its seedling 'Aotearoa-New Zealand' for fragrance, while 'Sexy REXY' (Fig. 20) was to play a dominant part in increasing flower numbers on roses. Other important parents for Sam included 'Arthur Bell', 'Piccadilly', 'Eyeopener', 'Mary Sumner' and 'New Dawn'.



Fig. 19 Rosa 'Anytime'.



Fig. 20 Rosa 'Sexy REXY'.

#### Hand-painted roses

One of Sam's objectives was to breed novelty. Back in the 1950s he had made a series of crosses using the *Rosa spinosissima* var. *altaica* hybrid 'Frühlingsmorgen' to find hardiness and disease resistance. One seedling with an unusual flower did attract attention in 1963; it had dull pink flowers with a marked white edge to each petal. This was crossed to 'Evelyn Fison' to produce 'MACjose' which, together with a seedling from *Rosa macrophylla*, 'Coryana' ('MACcortan'), formed the background to what was to become known as the "hand-painted" series of roses. These roses are of one colour splashed with another.

'Picasso' (Fig. 21) was the first of the hand-painted series and marketed in 1971. Its red petals are splashed and edged with a silver white colour. From this followed 'Matangi', 'Old Master', 'Eyepaint' (Fig. 22), 'Priscilla Burton', 'Sue Lawley', 'Regensburg', 'Maestro' and 'Rock 'n' Roll'. Hand-

painted miniature-types included 'Rag Time' and 'Mighty Mouse'. The hand-painted Hybrid Teas included 'Derek Nimmo' and 'Candella'. One feature of the hand-painted types is that they may not be completely stable with their colour. A number of them only produce the characteristic edge to the petals under cooler weather conditions.



Fig. 21 Rosa 'Picasso'.



Fig. 22 Rosa 'Eyepaint'.

#### Miniature-type roses

'New Penny', an orange-red *R. wichuraiana* seedling from Ralph Moore was one of the original miniature parents used by Sam. He was looking to develop a free flowering plant. From 'New Penny' he bred 'Anytime'. These two roses were to have a huge influence on breeding miniatures. A series of miniature types were introduced in New Zealand and elsewhere in the late 1970s with New Zealand place names: 'Kaikoura', 'Takapuna', 'Wanaka', 'Otago', 'Waitemata', 'Hauraki' and 'Manapouri'. The advantages of these plants was their freedom of flowering, marvellous foliage and rounded growth habit. They could also be grown as standards and made attractive container plants.

#### Striped roses

Ralph Moore's 'Stars 'n' Stripes' was the origin of Sam's striped strain which all started from just one season of pollen from 'Stars 'n' Stripes'. It was said to be pollen sterile but during one season in the early 1970s did produce pollen for Sam. From this came 'Hurdy Gurdy', 'Roller Coaster' and 'Pandemonium' and, in the larger roses, resulted in 'Michelangelo' (Fig. 23), 'Oranges 'n' Lemons' (Fig. 24), 'Maestro', 'Rock 'n' Roll' and 'Marville'.



Fig. 23 Rosa 'Michelangelo'.



Fig. 24 Rosa 'Oranges 'n' Lemons'.

#### Floribundas and Hybrid Teas

The rose 'Sexy REXY' was an important development in Sam's breeding. Its progeny were very floriferous and its origins went back to the miniature 'New Penny'. When 'New Penny' was hybridised with 'Elizabeth of Glamis' it produced 'Seaspray' which in turn produced 'Sexy REXY' with pollen from 'Dreaming'.

From 'Sexy REXY' came 'Jillian McGredy' (Fig. 25), 'Spek's Centennial', 'Dame Cath', 'Rock 'n' Roll', 'Fosters Wellington Cup' ('Mount Hood'), 'Auckland Metro' (Fig. 26) and many others. 'Auckland Metro' crossed with 'Harmonie' produced 'Aotearoa-New Zealand' and more fragrant roses.





Fig. 25 Rosa 'Jillian McGredy'.



Fig. 26 Rosa 'Auckland Metro'.

'Auckland Metro', 'Aotearoa-New Zealand', 'Lantern' (Fig. 27) and others were a newer type of Hybrid Tea that have flowers in large trusses, with each bloom on its own stem and producing continuous flushes throughout the season. 'Sexy Remy' also produced floribundas and miniature rose selections with increased flower numbers that were seen in the Hybrid Teas.



Fig. 27 Rosa 'Lantern'.

The Hybrid Tea rose 'Freude', bred by Reimer Kordes was used extensively by Sam in his breeding house when it first came out. From 'Freude' Sam bred 'Nobilo's Chardonnay' ('Chardonnay'), 'Tess', 'Maria McGredy', 'Louise Gardner' and 'Solitaire'. From 'Solitaire' came 'Aloha', 'Emperor' (Fig. 28), 'Heart of Gold', 'Paddy Stephens' (Fig. 29) and the sport 'Hamilton Gardens' (Fig. 30). From 'Louise Gardner' came 'Marville', 'Maggie Barry', and 'Lantern'.



Fig. 28 Rosa 'Emperor'.



Fig. 29 Rosa 'Paddy Stephens'.



Fig. 30 Rosa 'Hamilton Gardens'.

Sam's early Hybrid Tea line from 'Piccadilly' and 'Arthur Bell' produced 'Fragrant Hour', 'Yellow Pages', 'Typhoo Tea' and 'Benson and Hedges Gold'. The combination of 'Yellow Pages' and 'Benson and Hedges Gold' produced 'City of Auckland' and, a generation later, 'Kathryn McGredy'.

## Fragrance

Fragrance in roses for Sam had always been an important objective for breeding. Parents used included 'Elizabeth of Glamis' which produced 'Courvoisier' and from that came 'Tess' and 'Carolyn'. 'Harmonie' produced 'Aotearoa-New Zealand', 'Super Bowl' and 'Spiced Coffee'. 'Aotearoa-New Zealand' produced 'Clodagh McGredy' (Fig. 31), 'Titanic', 'Emperor' and the sport 'Land of the Long White Cloud'. 'Starlight' ('Lagerfeld') produced 'Super Bowl' while pollen from Pat Stephens' 'Big Purple' produced 'Old Port'.



Fig. 31 Rosa 'Clodagh McGredy'.

## Summary

Sam McGredy IV passed away 25th August 2019, aged 87. 'Hamilton Gardens', a sport of 'Paddy Stephens', released in 2008, was the last of the McGredy roses to be introduced. This brought to an end Sam's rose breeding as well as an end to four generations of McGredy rose breeders. Sam IV's contribution to the world of roses included the introduction of novelty with the "hand-painted" and the striped roses, improved plant health, increased flower numbers from the influence of 'Sexy Remy', fragrance with 'Aotearoa-New Zealand', the modern Hybrid Tea with increased freedom of flowering and many, many other new roses over a fifty-year period. Through his numerous rose selections, providing pleasure to growers across the world, Sam McGredy's rich and proud legacy lives on.

**Obituary prepared by Doug Grant, based on his 2018 article 'Sam McGredy and his roses' published by the WFRS in the Proceedings 18th World Rose convention 'A Fairy Tale of Roses', Copenhagen 28th June to 4th July 2018.**

**Hayden Foulds kindly supplied most images used in this obituary.**