

# Viscount Bledisloe and the Society trophies

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Lord Bledisloe was Governor General of New Zealand from 1930 to 1935. He is perhaps best known nowadays for his association with a trophy of local Rugby Union fame, the Bledisloe Cup. His interests in New Zealand were broad, including a strong awareness and love of the New Zealand flora. When he returned to his home in Gloucestershire, England, he was created Viscount Bledisloe of Lydney [1]. He continued to take an interest in what was happening in New Zealand and even took steps to establish some New Zealand plants in part of his garden.

Eighteen years after his return to England and in his mid-eighties, he read an article from New Zealand published in the March 1953 issue of *The City Beautiful*, the official magazine of the Christchurch Beautifying Association. There was reference in the article to a new society. Viscount Bledisloe wrote to this society in April 1953 and referred to it as the "Christchurch Native Flora Society". Without a record of the March 1953 issue it cannot be determined what the exact wording in the article was. However, an article in *The Press* at the time also referred to a new society called the Canterbury Native Flora Society, which had exhibited for the first time at the Canterbury Horticultural Society's spring show, attracting "much interest" [2]. The formal name of the new society was indeed the Canterbury Native Flora Society (N.Z.). This would later become our Canterbury Botanical Society as explained below.

The following is a transcript of the letter of 21 April 1953 from Viscount Bledisloe P.C. GCMG KBE of Redhill, Lydney, Gloucestershire, England [3].

*Dear Mr Murray*

*I'm perfectly delighted to read in the March number of the 'City Beautiful' of the inauguration of the Christchurch Native Flora Society and wish it all possible success and a large and enthusiastic membership. No country in the world has a more interesting or lovely flora. They were an abounding inspiration to me when I sojourned for five supremely happy years as Governor General of New Zealand in your delectable country and many of them flourish well in a small area set apart for them in the garden surrounding our humble home in the old country.*

*Permit me to symbolise my joy at this good news by providing a small trophy for competition among the members of your Native Flora Society. I enclose a cheque for £40 with this object. I am unfortunately in fact of heavy taxation and many unavoidable commitments - "badly off" nowadays or the enclosed donation would be much larger. It is in no way commensurate with my keenness that this new venture shall prove a big success.*

*With cordial good wishes to my fellow New Zealand botanists.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Bledisloe*

The letter and cheque arrived in Christchurch in May, and by June the fledgling committee had decided that three trophies would be made – a senior, and two junior trophies. The trophies were formally referred to as the Bledisloe Native Flora Trophy (Senior), the

Bledisloe Junior Native Flora Trophy (Post Primary), and the Bledisloe Junior Native Flora Trophy (Primary). However, subsequent minutes and reports often referred to them as the Senior, Intermediate, and Junior trophies, respectively.

### **Selection criteria**

Lists of criteria for the Senior Trophy and the two Junior Trophies to be awarded were drawn up based on the objects of the newly formed Society. The April 1954 newsletter recorded these objects as:

- a. To develop interest in, and knowledge of Native Flora.*
- b. The cultivation of native plants as horticultural subjects.*
- c. To co-operate with such other organisations whose objects are wholly or in part similar to those of the Society.*
- d. To co-operate with educational authorities in furthering the interest in native flora amongst school children.*
- e. The promotion of meetings, field trips, lectures, demonstrations, exhibitions and such other activities as are from time to time appropriate.*
- f. Preservation of native flora in its natural habitat.*

The 28<sup>th</sup> September 1954 newsletter stated that the Senior Trophy could be awarded to members for any of the following:

- *For outstanding or meritorious work in popularising and extending an interest in and knowledge of the native flora, e.g. lecturing, writing, photographic and other arts, demonstrations, displays, herbarium collections, administrative and organisational work, assistance and help of a general kind to the work of the Society etc.*
- *For outstanding or meritorious work in the preservation or regeneration of native flora.*
- *For outstanding or meritorious work in the cultivation of native plants and/or the establishment of living collections of native plants.*

Society members could nominate themselves or be nominated by two other members. Each year the committee would invite nominations accompanied by a supporting statement on work done. Particular reference would be made to work done in the year to which the award applied. The committee was not obliged to award the trophy if it was considered that there was no nomination of merit. The committee aimed to make it possible for the “average” member and not just the “expert” to secure the award. No person could be awarded the trophy more than once in a ten year period.

The junior trophies could be awarded to pupils in the Canterbury Education Board area for work based on any of the following:

- *A diary of observations of native flora in the school district and natural and other factors influencing e.g. birds, animals. The diary to be kept over a stated period 3 to 6 or 9 to 12 months.*
- *An essay on the native flora of the school district including, if desired, a discussion of the natural and other factors influencing it e.g. birds, animals etc. Field notes could be used in essay.*
- *Original drawings and/or paintings (not copies) of a stated number of plants (say 10) to be found in the school district accompanied by a brief (say 100 word) description and discussion in each case.*
- *A collection of a stated number of dried, pressed specimens of native plants to be found in the school district. The collection may be a general one, or deal with a given group of plants or with some given association (ecological).*

At the start of each year or at the end of the previous year, the committee would send a circular to schools with the requirements outlined for that year's competition. Requirements for the competition could be varied from year to year. Head teachers were asked "if they would be so kind as to draw attention of likely pupils to the existence of the trophies and to encourage them to become interested in native plants". They were also asked if "they would be so kind as to select the best three (or at most the best five) diaries" and post them to the Society by a given date.

### **Trophy design**

While the criteria for trophy awards were being finalised, members were asked to submit designs for the trophies. This process resulted in Mr J.K. Forbes being tasked with trophy design, and Mr A. Lamb with their construction using some native timber provided by Mr G. Barrell. A specimen trophy was available for display to members by early 1954, and three trophies using the same design were completed by the end of September that year. Mr Lamb was paid £10 for his work and Mr Barrell was thanked for the native timber he provided. The species of timber used were not recorded in the minutes.

The trophies had a fern frond made of silver attached to the front. The senior trophy had (and still has) "Canterbury Native Flora Society New Zealand Bledisloe Trophy Senior" engraved on a plaque attached to the base. It is assumed that at this stage the other two trophies had a similar plaque attached with the appropriate wording for each trophy.

The donation from Viscount Bledisloe was mentioned by S.A. La Roche (President) in the Society's Annual Report presented at the May 1954 AGM. He wrote "Nothing helped the Society to get away to a flying start, more than did the Donation of £40 from Viscount Bledisloe". £58 had been collected in subscriptions from the 122 members that year so a donation of this size was significant.

Viscount Bledisloe was sent a copy of the First Annual Report and his reply was reported in the August 1954 newsletter.

*Warmly do I congratulate you and all members on the very satisfactory First Annual Report of the Canterbury Native Flora Society received here to-day. I trust that its membership, its enthusiasm and especially its crusade among the young may continue to develop satisfactorily.*

A 90<sup>th</sup> birthday card was sent to the Viscount in 1957. The main body of the reply is written by another hand, but underneath his signature Viscount Bledisloe had written "I am profoundly interested in your activities" [4]. The tone of this response indicates there may well have been other correspondence.

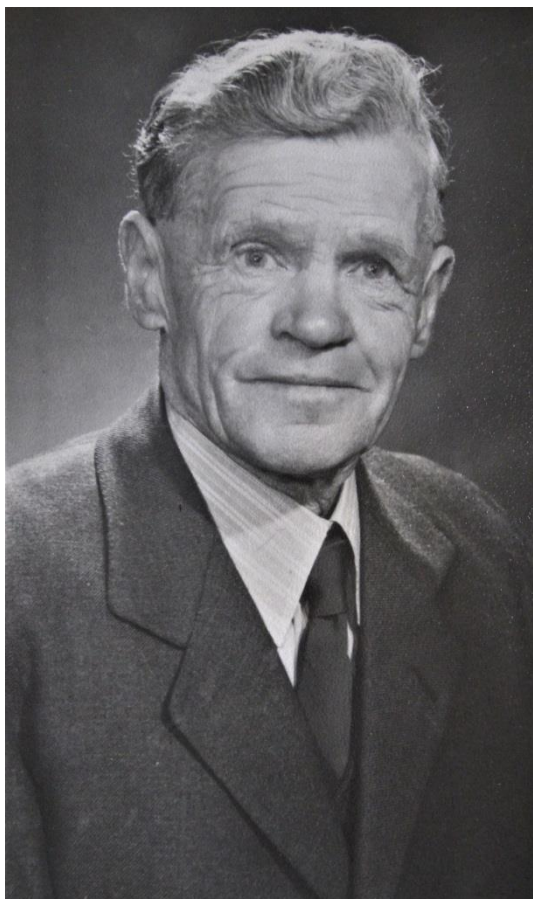
### **Awarding the first trophies**

The Senior Bledisloe Trophy was awarded seven times from 1954 to 1961. There were two nominations for the very first Senior Trophy in 1954 for equally worthy candidates who had both worked on projects preserving and regenerating different areas of deteriorated native bush. The President wrote "our task in choosing between them was a most difficult one – it verged upon the invidious". The issue was resolved by awarding the trophy first to O. Hunter (Fig. 1, p. 6) as he had been working on his project for longer (60 years). There

was an assurance that J.K. Forbes would be nominated and the trophy duly awarded the following year, which he was (Fig. 2).

The May 1958 AGM minutes referred to the awarding of the Senior Bledisloe Trophy in 1957 to the fourth recipient L.W. McCaskill. This recipient had recently visited England and had called on Viscount Bledisloe at his home. One of the topics they reportedly spoke about was the activities of the Society in the first few years. Sadly the Viscount passed away soon after, in July 1958.

After 1961 the trophy was not awarded for another sixteen years (Table 1, p. 9).



**Figure 1.** Mr Oliver Hunter, first recipient of the Senior Bledisloe Trophy in 1954.



**Figure 2.** Mr J.K. Forbes holding the Senior Bledisloe Trophy, which he was awarded in 1955.

When the Junior Trophies were first awarded from 1954 to 1956, an eight month diary was required from pupils, with pressed specimens or drawings optional. By 1958, a five month diary was preferred but a shorter duration would be considered. Pressed specimens or drawings were still optional. In 1959 there was no time requirement for diaries.

From 1961 to 1963 [5] the post-primary pupils were provided with two lists of plant genera and asked to choose three species from each list of genera for their study. Clematis, kowhai, totara, ribbonwood, lancewood, cabbage tree, wineberry and orchids were on the first list, and pittosporum, coprosma, fuchsia, and ferns (added in 1962) were on the second list. In this same year, primary pupils were asked to press up to 10 specimens with a short description of where they were found, when they flowered, their use etc.

There were 80 entries from 10 schools in 1961 but this level of interest was not sustained. It was suggested in 1962 that the top 10 entrants in the primary competition be taken on a botanical outing, but there is no record of whether this happened. In 1963 there were 47

competition notices posted to schools but the number of entries that resulted was not recorded. Two awards were made this year, then there was a gap until 1980 before the Junior Trophies were awarded again (Table 1).

### **Changing times**

1966 was a busy time for the Canterbury Native Flora Society when it changed its name to the Canterbury Botanical Society, became incorporated, and altered its rules. In 1966 the President noted "A great deal of time and energy is spent on the Junior and Intermediate trophies for very little response". The following year it was recorded in the November newsletter that "the Senior Trophy was a possibility but the Junior and Intermediate Trophies were difficult to administer".

The Bledisloe Trophies were not forgotten and in 1969 efforts were made to resuscitate them. There was a suggestion that the award criteria be changed. The Junior Trophy could be awarded for a photographic competition, the Intermediate Trophy for members doing a lot of background work for the Society, and the Senior Trophy for contribution to the understanding and knowledge of New Zealand flora. It appears nothing came of this suggestion. The Annual Report in 1969-70, noted "the future of the Bledisloe trophies" as one of the items on the list of "matters still not resolved".

In 1978 the Senior Trophy was reactivated and a new plaque was possibly added at this stage to reflect the Society's earlier name change to Canterbury Botanical Society. The Trophy was awarded to Mabel Hunter for the best journal article by a non-professional that year. After this the committee had second thoughts about judging journal articles. It was felt that it spoiled the traditional feeling about writing by bringing in the competitive feeling. The next year Harry Talbot was awarded the Senior Trophy for helping and inspiring people to become botanists, followed two years later by John Thompson in recognition of his work as editor of the first fourteen journals. Hugh Wilson received the Trophy in 1984 in recognition of his contribution to botany. It is not clear why the Trophy was not awarded again until 1996 (Fig. 3, p. 8). There was meritorious work being done by members at this time.

In 1980 the Junior and Intermediate Trophies were again awarded but this time at the Canterbury/Westland Science Fair. One year the trophies were awarded to projects with a zoological flavour rather than those with botanical content. After some discussion the committee decided that the Society would need to provide its own judges, to maintain more control. Whilst this would increase the workload for the committee it was a relatively small burden compared with the administration the Society had faced in the 1950s and 1960s when it ran its own competition.

The engravings on the Junior and Intermediate trophies were upgraded in 1983 to "Junior Bledisloe Trophy awarded by the Canterbury Botanical Society" and "Intermediate Bledisloe Trophy awarded by the Canterbury Botanical Society". There is another plaque on the base of the Intermediate Trophy that reads "Canterbury/Westland Science Fair Senior Biology". This is likely to have been attached at the same time. These trophies were regularly awarded at the Science Fair until 1988 when it appears that after this year the committee decided to award books and vouchers instead. In most years, the Society still provides judges for the Science Fair, and books and vouchers are still awarded. In some years projects with botanical content are thin on the ground,

After 1988 the Junior and Intermediate trophies sat somewhere in a cupboard. In October 1997 there is mention in the minutes of asking “the Science Fair organisers for the Bledisloe Trophy to be returned”. It is not clear why there was not mention of two trophies. Minutes in February 1998 state that the Junior Bledisloe Trophy “needs a new name plate to identify this award. There are [sic] a strange mixture of labels at present!” “We should keep all these labels.” The trophy referred to as the Junior Bledisloe trophy in these minutes was in fact the “Intermediate Bledisloe trophy awarded by the Canterbury Botanical Society”.

It is unknown what happened to the Junior Bledisloe Trophy awarded by the Canterbury Botanical Society (originally referred to as the Bledisloe Junior Native Flora Trophy (Primary)), but perhaps it is still sitting in a cupboard somewhere.

An additional plaque, “Bledisloe Award restored 1997”, was put on the Intermediate Bledisloe Trophy. The 1998 Annual Report states that “The Bledisloe Trophy will be presented to any person aged under 30 who is deemed to have presented the best talk or demonstration at a monthly meeting during the preceding calendar year”. What had previously been referred to as the Intermediate Bledisloe Trophy was to be referred to as the Bledisloe Trophy.



**Figure 3.** the Senior Bledisloe Trophy in 2020.

The first recipient of the restored Bledisloe Trophy was Louise Cullen in 1999. She was a recipient of the Society Student Grant for postgraduate students, which had been established in 1995. The restored Bledisloe Trophy continues to be awarded to recipients of the Student Grant after they make a presentation to a monthly meeting. To confuse matters this trophy is now referred to as the Junior Bledisloe Trophy in records even though it has “Intermediate” written on the plaque.

Meanwhile the Senior Bledisloe Trophy has been awarded most years since 1996. In 1997 the criteria were updated to:

*This award is presented to a member of the Society who has made a notable contribution to the advancement of botany in New Zealand, with particular emphasis on the understanding and preservation of the indigenous flora of New Zealand.*

The history of the trophies reflects the history of the Society. There have been changes of name, and changes to objectives; times of enthusiasm, and times of low ebb. When things have been floundering there has always been a revival driven by a few dedicated individuals. I hope Viscount Bledisloe would be proud that the trophies are still being awarded and that the Society has adapted to changing times.

## Acknowledgements

This article is based principally on records held by the Canterbury Botanical Society (Canterbury Native Flora Society and Canterbury Botanical Society Annual Reports, Minutes and Newsletters), and Society archives held at the Canterbury Museum. Some of the early records are currently missing, and later records do not always state what happened regarding the Bledisloe Trophies. Best effort and some detective work have been involved to create this account of the history of the trophies from 1954 to the present. Any information to correct errors or add to this article would be appreciated by the Society.

## References

- [1] Russell Marshall. 'Bledisloe, Charles Bathurst', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1998. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4b39/bledisloe-charles-bathurst> (accessed 8 September 2022).
- [2] Anon. 1953 (6 March). Dahlia Society. High standard of exhibits. The Press 89(26982): 5.
- [3] Letter to Mr Murray from Viscount Bledisloe 21 April 1953. Viscount Bledisloe author. Canterbury Museum.
- [4] Letter to Native Flora Society from Viscount Bledisloe 21 September 1957. Viscount Bledisloe author. Canterbury Museum.
- [5] References used from 1960 to 1970 from Canterbury Museum.

**Table 1.** Bledisloe Trophy recipients 1954 – 2022. Note that the dates and spelling of names on the trophies in some cases does not match those in Annual Reports.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Senior</b>	<b>Intermediate - Post Primary</b>	<b>Junior - Primary</b>
1954	O. Hunter	L.H. Kyle	Kathleen Galletly
1955	J.K. Forbes	L.H. Kyle	Rosemary Menzies
1956	M.J. Barnett	C.C. Fearon	Catherine Ramsay
1957	L.W. McCaskill		
1958	R.K. Wilson		
1959			
1960	L.H. Metcalf	S. Johnston	
1961	Dr M. Bevan-Brown	Anne Ballinger	Cheryl Bastion
1962		Virginia Matson	Jenifer Timm
1963		Virginia Matson	Graham Cox
1964 to 1977 - No trophies awarded in these years			
1978	Mabel Hunter		
1979	Harry Talbot		
1980		Vincent Luisetti	Bruce Dowrick

<b>Year</b>	<b>Senior</b>	<b>Intermediate - Post Primary</b>	<b>Junior - Primary</b>
1981	John Thompson	Michael Robertson	Elissa Cameron, Sarah Quigley
1982		Stephen Robertson	Michelle Hawthorn
1983		Dwane Gidall, Rodney Fuller, James Swanson, Yang Pengtay	J. Hayes
1984	Hugh Wilson	D. Butterfield, T. Dodd	J. Lamplough, W. Beveridge, K. Dellaca
1985		Katie Crestani, Sally Thomson	T. Messervy
1986		S. Byrne, Beckie Robertson	Gregory Fletcher, Adam Hine
1987		P. Rossiter, R. McIlraith	Anthony Bedgood
1988		Matthew Doocey, Brian McErlain	Annabelle Studholm

1989 to 1995 - No trophies awarded in these years; no Junior – Primary Trophy after 1988

1996	Ross & Yvonne Elder	
1997	Daphne Banks	
1998	The Giller Family	
1999	Brooke Dawson	Louise Cullen
2000	Lammert (Max) Visch	Olga Nikora
2001	Dr Colin Burrows	Jesse Wells
2002	Derek Cook	Terry Thomsen
2003	Graeme McArthur, Gillian McArthur	Chris Berry
2004		Robin Mitchell
2005	W.R. (Bill) Sykes	Kerry Ford
2006	David Rossiter	Debra Wooten
2007		Richard Pender
2008		
2009	Anthony Holcroft	Amber Sciligo
2010	Dr Brian Molloy	Alwyn Williams
2011	Bryony Macmillan	Lizzie Wandrag, Ellen Cieraad
2012	Margaret Geerkens	Arash Rafat
2013	Trevor Blogg	

Year	Senior	Intermediate - Post Primary	Junior - Primary
2014	Joy Talbot	Jess Hill	
2015	Eleanor Bissell		
2016	Alice Shanks	Sarah Wright	
2017	Diane Carter	Anna Henderson	
2018	Sally Tripp	Yuriy Malakhov	
2019	Peter Joyce		
2020	John Clemens	Zoe Lunniss	
2021	Geoff Henderson		
2022	Dean Pendrigh		



*Podocarpus totara*. Drawing by Hugh Wilson