

naming of the Hen and Chickens and the Poor Knights. Her grandfather Mair had settled in the Bay of Islands in 1825 and in 1827 had married the daughter of William Gilbert Puckey, carpenter/missionary. In the small settlements of the day there would still be talk of the great man Cook, with legends handed down to become almost family tradition. As the Hon. Kitty Vane spoke to me about these names I was aware that to her they were indeed Mair family "treasures".

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## THE WILDFLOWERS OF WAIKUMETE CEMETERY

A.E. Esler

Waikumete cemetery is 102 years old. When the expanding settlement of Auckland no longer had space to bury its dead near by, it acquired a 108 acre hill beside the railway at Glen Eden. The grave diggers' shovels were not the first to turn over this pale, grey clay that is sodden in winter and like concrete in summer. The surface was already pitted with holes left by the gum diggers. These gumlands were burnt frequently and grew stunted scrubland with manuka, ferns, sedges and orchids. Now the remaining manuka has overwhelmed the small plants, but some linger on in open places.

By 1970 the large numbers of garden plants established on the graves no longer needed to be tended because they had become naturalised. Many are African plants well accustomed to poor soils. They sprout from bulbs, corms and rhizomes, grow vigorously in winter, and blossom in spring into the greatest profusion of African plants growing together anywhere outside their homeland. As well as these, there are many from other countries adding to the splendour of Waikumete.

The bleakness of winter is brightened mainly by Mediterranean plants - first by the white, scented Narcissus tazetta and others of the same genus including the diminutive N. bulbicodium. This is also the time for snowflake (Leucojum aestivum), and for drifts of Allium triquetrum (onion weed to Aucklanders). The white Naples onion (A. neopolitanum) and the dainty pink A. roseum ssp. bulbiferum come later. All the while the African Oxalis purpurea spreads mats of pink-flowered plants in some places, and mauve in others.

Spring has arrived when the creamy Freesia refracta fills the air with its perfume. As it fades in September the similar-looking Sparaxis takes over. Watch for the rather ragged brown bracts beneath the flowers that helps to identify them. S. bulbifera, with flowers mostly whitish with streaks, has stamens on one side of the flower facing inwards. S. tricolor, with stamens around the style, has a yellow throat and a dark blotch above it, and is normally three coloured, as the name suggests.

By October the display is at its peak. There are still some Freesia and Sparaxis adding to the profusion of Watsonia flowers in white, cream and various pinks. They are mostly hybrids not clearly separable into

species. At this time too, Tritonia is showing up - T. lineata with lemon flowers with dark lines, and T. crocata with clear orange flowers, together with some of its colour variants. Coming into their display about this time are species of Ixia (stamens on one side of the flower, not symmetrical as in Tritonia). The most abundant is I. maculata in a range of colours but always distinguished by the black throat that gives it the name. Petals may be cream to orange-yellow, others pink or cerise. I. polystachya begins flowering now and makes good bluish displays until January. I. paniculata, with flowers like little orange trumpets appearing later in October, is becoming more plentiful. Babiana stricta, with distinctly hairy leaves, puts on a magnificent show at this time. In 1972 a few with the common blue-purple flowers were seen. Now there is the whole range of colour from white to deep purple. The common Romulea rosea fades into insignificance beside an unidentified species with enormous pink flowers that is worth a place in any garden. In the last few years it has developed into quite large patches. The clearest blue flowers at this time belong to Aristea ecklonii now seen in many open places about Auckland. The hardy Gladiolus natalensis with yellow and red flowers, and the smaller pink Gladiolus nanus are increasing their hold.

Flowering is not all over by November. While many are making their last efforts, Ixia polystachya is reaching its peak, and the salmon flowers of Watsonia bulbifera are making a brief appearance soon to be replaced by up to 100 small corms along each stalk. In 1972 there were a few clumps; now it obscures graves and pushes out more desirable species.

By December these iridaceous plants are on the wane but to fill a gap the pale yellow Gladiolus undulatus blooms for a few weeks. Unspectacular as it may be, it found its way onto markets up till about 1964 when there were few other cut flowers available just before Christmas. When montbretia (Crocasmia x crocosmiiflora) begins flowering in January most other flowers of its kind have retreated underground with their replenished stocks of food. If the few competing plants on this poor soil can be kept in check in autumn the African plants can appear again in spring to produce what must be New Zealand's finest display of wildflowers.

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## TWO HYDROCOTYLE WEEDS

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