

To mark the 25th Anniversary of its founding the Canterbury Botanical Society has authorised the issue of this additional Journal.

It is appropriate that the progress of the Society should be reviewed at this time. We thank Mr. L.J. Metcalf for providing the short history of the Society.

Much has been written on the botany of Canterbury but no easy reference to these publications has been available. We appreciate the work that has gone into the Bibliography of the Botany of Canterbury and extend our thanks to Miss Bryony Macmillan for her article.

It was a kind thought that prompted Mrs. May Browne to leave a legacy to the Society. This sum is being used towards the financing of this Journal.

John Thompson
Editor

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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS ON

A short history of the
Canterbury Botanical Society

L.J. Metcalf

Twenty-five years ago May Browne, wife of the then Secretary of the Canterbury Horticultural Society, conceived the idea of forming a society to bring together people who were interested in the native plants of New Zealand. The idea arose at a meeting of one of the numerous garden clubs in Christchurch, affiliated to the Canterbury Horticultural Society, when Mrs. Browne asked the question - "Why shouldn't we have a Native Flora Society? We have a Rose Society, a Lily Society and so on, why not one for native flora?"

Accordingly a public meeting was held on November 28th, 1952 to discuss the formation of such a society. The meeting was attended by forty-three people who readily accepted the idea and unanimously decided to form the Canterbury Native Flora Society. A provisional committee was appointed to draft rules and draw up a programme for the coming year. The following were appointed to the provisional committee :- Mrs. P.C. Browne (Patron), Mrs. J. Watling, Miss I.M. Barter, Messrs. C.E. Foweraker, S.A. La Roche, J.O. Taylor, R. Wilson. Subsequently Mr. La Roche was elected as the Foundation President and Mr. F.J. Murray as Secretary at a formal meeting in February, 1953.

Immediately the Society set to work and one of the first formal activities was a display in the Canterbury Horticultural Society's Gladiolus Show of February, 1953. There is no record as to whether the display was actually entered, but the minutes do mention the intention to enter a display of berrying plants in the Chrysanthemum Show in April of the same year.

In April 1953 Lord Bledisloe wrote expressing his joy at the formation of the Society and sent a donation of £40 to provide a trophy for competition among the members of the Native Flora Society. Eventually it was decided that the donation be used to provide a Senior Trophy and two Junior Trophies; the Senior Trophy to be awarded to any member of the Society who had done outstanding or meritorious work in popularising and extending an interest in and knowledge of the native flora. The Junior Trophies were known as the Primary and Post Primary Trophies respectively. These trophies were to be awarded in the Canterbury Education Board's area and could be awarded for a diary of observations of Native Flora, an essay, original drawings or paintings, or a collection of pressed specimens.

Initially there was some enthusiasm for these trophies, but gradually, because of restrictions in the conditions of award and the lack of interest in natural sciences in the schools, the enthusiasm waned and the finding of suitable awardees became more and more difficult. In some years only one or two of the three trophies were awarded. At various times there were discussions concerning ways to arouse more interest, but little ever came of them. When Lord Bledisloe sent the money for the trophy he specifically wrote that it was for a trophy for competition among the members of the Society. In deference to Lord Bledisloe's wishes it has always been felt that the terms of the trophy or even the whole concept could not be altered. This is probably the main reason why the trophy foundered and today has been quietly shelved.

The trophy was designed by Mr. J.K. Forbes of Waiau and made by Mr. A. Lamb from native timbers donated by the late Mr. Charlie Barrell. It was first awarded in 1954 to Mr. Oliver Hunter of Church Bay. The Junior Trophy was awarded to Kathleen Gallettly of St. Andrews, South Canterbury and the Intermediate Trophy to L.M. Kyle of Christchurch. It is fitting that the second award in 1955 was to the designer, Mr. J.K. Forbes for his work at Waiau.

The Society continued to flourish with membership growing steadily and numerous field trips being held to various parts of Canterbury. In 1956 a start was made with building up a collection of colour transparencies which could be used by members for illustrating talks, and in the same year it was also decided to commence a library of reference books.

In 1957 the Society decided to start an herbarium. With no permanent headquarters and no facilities for making and storing an herbarium it was not surprising that this project never really got started. Initially one or two members such as Mr. John Martley were sufficiently enthusiastic to persevere with collecting specimens, but eventually the whole thing lapsed.

For the next few years the Society continued at a reasonable level and it is interesting to note that in 1957 membership totalled 167, little different from what it is today.

Mr. S.A. La Roche, the foundation President and the late Mr. C.E. Foweraker, a foundation Vice President, were both elected Honorary Vice Presidents in 1961, in recognition of their services to the Society. Both were well deserved.

During the 1960s membership of the Society began to dwindle until by the late 60s it had fallen to 78. Field trips were poorly supported and generally the Society was at a very low ebb. It was during this period that the Society made a very significant move. For some time it had been felt by some members that the name "Native Flora Society" did not convey quite the correct image of the Society and its aims and objects. Accordingly they suggested that the name be changed to that of the Canterbury Botanical Society in order to bring it into line with similar societies in Auckland and Wellington. It was also thought that the change of name might help to increase interest in the Society.

On July 1st 1966 the proposed change of name was debated and after considerable discussion adopted. Quite a number of members were opposed to the change, some feeling it would give the Society a rather high-brow air and rather than attracting new members would tend to frighten them off. They argued that the Society might appear to be too professional and that there would be no place for the novice. However, as is now known, that was not so and membership of the Society now comprises a happy mixture, ranging from the top professional to the rankest of amateurs.

Mrs. Browne, unfortunately, was against the name change and she never really became reconciled to it. It was her Society and with the change of name she felt that something had been taken away from her. She continued as the Society's Patron until the time of her death, but she never took quite the same interest in the Society again.

From about 1969 onwards membership steadily increased and the vitality of earlier years returned. Today the Society is in a very sound state and it can truthfully be said that it is playing an important part in building up and recording a knowledge of the botany of Canterbury. Its other role of introducing people to the study of botany and native plants must not be forgotten either.

One of the first activities of the Society was tree planting on the Port Hills, the first recorded instance being on June 6th, 1953 to commemorate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. This planting was between the Sign of the Takahē and the Sign of the Kiwi and at the time it was stated that a special area devoted to natives would be set aside for members of the Society. Further plantings took place over the next few years, but it is now many years since the Society undertook any serious tree planting. The Society assisted with some of the early reforestation plantings at Kennedys Bush, the first ones being just below the remains of the old Sign of the Bellbird. These plantings at Kennedys Bush are now starting to attain a degree of maturity and they are making a considerable impact on the general appearance of the area.

The highlight of the Society's activities in those early years was the large exhibit which was staged in the Canterbury Horticultural Society's outdoor show in the woodland area of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. This exhibit represented a cross section of the vegetation of Canterbury from the high mountains to the sea coast. Quite a number of members assisted with gathering the necessary material for it, the help of the late Frank Gough, Arthur Cooney, Jack Forbes and Ray Clelland being particularly valuable. The

exhibit was an ambitious project but turned out to be a great success. The Royal Horticultural Society's Silver Gilt Medal was awarded to that exhibit and a decorative exhibit staged in the same show received a Silver Medal.

Exhibits were staged at various shows over the following few years, but as the emphasis on the Society's activities changed, interest in staging exhibits waned.

In November 1956 a two-day native flower show was held in the National Party rooms in Lichfield Street. Material was sought from all over the country. Organisations such as the Levin Native Flora Society, Auckland Botanical Society and various private individuals being particularly generous with their help. This show was a great success and no doubt helped to stimulate the interest of many people in our native plants. The Society has never again attempted such a show, presumably because they fell into disfavour through people plundering too much material from the wild. It is, perhaps, a pity that the occasional native flower show is not held in order to stimulate interest and today it could be done almost entirely with cultivated material.

Sometime about 1956 the Society helped to establish a small native plant collection at the Glenelg Health Camp on Murray Aynsley Hill and later a small native plant corner was planted in the Cerebral Palsy School in Worcester Street.

Up until 1957 all of the Society's outings were of one day's duration and it was in that year that the first weekend outing was held. A group of members visited Arthur's Pass and stayed in the Temple Basin hut. Members were so enthused by that trip that it was followed in February 1958 by a weekend outing to Lake Taylor. This latter area is one which would be well worth further visits by the Society. Other weekend outings, following that period were to Moana, Mitchells and Craigieburn Valley. Since then there has been quite a number of weekend outings to various localities and not only are they informative and help to improve the botanical knowledge of the area, but they have done a great deal to foster a spirit of fellowship amongst members. The weekend trips to Moana and Mitchells marked the Society's first venture outside Canterbury. Since then it has ranged over quite a large portion of the northern half of the South Island.

In 1960 study groups for novices were formed under the leadership of the late Peg Aiken. These groups ran for quite a number of years under Peg's dedicated and able guidance, and there is no doubt that they were of great assistance to the newer and novice members.

The first issue of the Society's Journal was published in 1968 and that can be regarded as another significant milestone in the Society's history. Mr. John Thompson was one of the prime movers in this venture and became the first editor, a position which he has held ever since. From rather humble beginnings the Journal has now become a very professional publication which is making a major contribution to a knowledge of the vegetation of Canterbury. Interestingly, it reflects that happy harmony which exists in the Society between the professional and the novice with material being

contributed by both kinds of members. One can, perhaps, look forward to the day when more than one Journal a year is published.

Another great innovation has been the summer camps which have always been great occasions with a wonderful spirit of fellowship. As well as having a good family atmosphere they have always been hard-working affairs and have made a good contribution to the botany of the area visited. They were started in the early '70s and the idea first came from a suggestion put by Dr. Lucy Moore.

The first camp was to the Black Birch Range in Marlborough and since then they have become an annual event. Areas visited include the Amuri Ski Field, Staveley, Westport, Mt. Olympus, Hari Hari, Lake Rotoiti and the Hawdon River. From the varying interests came the discovery that there was sufficient interest and enthusiasm to be able to run two summer camps concurrently. The first occasion when that happened was in 1975 when one camp was held on Mount Olympus and another at Westport. Both were a great success and so interesting was the Westport area that a second visit was made there the following year. Statistically, there is the interesting fact that in 1976 approximately one third of the Society's members attended the summer camps.

For many years the Society has made a practice of compiling species records of areas visited and more recently some of these lists have been published in the Journal. These lists are making a valuable contribution towards an improved knowledge of the vegetation of Canterbury and of other areas visited. With more people in the field doing recording there has been an amazing number of new plant records.

In the late 50s L.J. Metcalf proposed that the Society should compile a check list of the flora of Canterbury as a continuing project. It was never received with any great enthusiasm, although the species lists aforementioned were commenced. However, in due course they will form the basis of such a check list. It is pleasing to note that as a jubilee project the Society is to compile a bibliography of the botany of Canterbury and that it is also contemplating doing a check list of the flora.

The Canterbury Botanical Society commenced with a burst of enthusiasm and twenty-five years later the enthusiasm is still there. It has had its ups and downs, but always it has increased in strength and it will be interesting to see how it has prospered at the end of the next twenty-five years. The Society is firmly established and now can only go from strength to strength.

Presidents of the Canterbury Botanical Society

S.A. La Roche	1952-1959
C. Moore	1959-1960
B.H. Wilson	1960-1962
J. Thompson	1963-1963
M.R. Hunter	1963-1965
B. O'Connor	1965-1969
R. Elder	1969-1973
L.J. Metcalf	1973-1976
B.H. Macmillan	1976-