

OPENING ADDRESS

NEIL O'BRIEN

President, Canterbury Botanical Society

Good morning everyone and welcome to you all on the occasion of the Canterbury Botanical Society's 50th year celebrations. May I extend a special welcome to our visitors and those of you who are to present your papers and to chair the various sessions of our very full programme.

This symposium would not have been possible without your input, nor would it have eventuated except for the sub committee headed by Peter Wardle, assisted by Mary Korver, Trevor Blogg, treasurer, and Margaret Geerkins, secretary. The committee, as a whole, along with other members, has also played a significant role in organizing this function. I thank them all together with Rosalie and Megan O'Brien, for attending to our catering needs, and to Terry Thomsen, our visual aids expert here today. I also wish to acknowledge the significant role played by Landcare Research in providing much valuable assistance.

Let us for a few minutes go back fifty years to the time when the Canterbury Native Flora Society was founded in 1953. That very first committee meeting was held on Friday 13th February at 8pm in the Overseas League Rooms. I have little information on just how that group functioned over those early years but Messrs Basil O'Connor and Miles Banks, who are both here today, have assured me the CNFS thrived, gaining in strength and knowledge. It filled a need, providing a platform from which it was now possible for lay people to study the native flora of Canterbury. It certainly found a niche in the community.

Ten years later in June 1966, a meeting was held at Basil's home where the committee, after some consideration, decided that a name change was timely. At a meeting held one month later, on July 6 1966, the Native Flora Society voted to change its name to the Canterbury Botanical Society. Present at that momentous meeting were, President Basil O'Connor, Secretary Joan Edgar, Margaret Hunter, Miles Banks and others.

There were two reasons for the name change. Firstly, the new name was to reflect not only the Society's prime interest in the native flora of Canterbury but also in the native plants of New Zealand as a whole. At that time there was also a growing interest in and recognition of the adventive flora. Secondly, it was believed that another organization in Christchurch was also considering forming a botanical group. The implications of this happening were all too obvious.

The first guest speaker at the newly named Canterbury Botanical Society was Professor Bill Philipson.

The Canterbury Botanical Society's first Journal was published in November 1968. This Journal was a slim volume of a mere 23 pages, with a line drawing of *Corokia cotoneaster* by Mr. Cecil Dunn, on the cover. On page one, the President, in his initial comments, said, "I hope that this is the first of many journals to come and that we have here set a reasonable standard to emulate and improve on, as our experience increases."

Mr. John Thompson, Editor, in his first of many editorials wrote, "I feel that there is a place for a Botanical Journal, sited somewhere between the highly technical Journal of Botany and the type of newsletter which records "Mesdames Blank and Blank provided the refreshments."

Happily, it turns out that both Basil's and John's hopes for the Journal were, fortunately, fully realized.

John Thompson, served as editor for several years, and produced some fine journals. He is perhaps best remembered as being one of our most notable amateur botanists, making significant contributions to our knowledge of ferns and orchids.

Anyone perusing the next 35 editions of the Journal would soon see just how far we, as a Society, have indeed progressed.

I believe there are two factors that underpin the whole structure of the Society.

The Society has always been fortunate in the support so generously given by the professional botanist. You have made significant contributions to the Journal, presented countless talks at monthly meetings, led field trips, assisted at camps, run workshops. You have made submissions, on our behalf, for the preservation of our native plants and their habitats. Despite the demands of your professional duties, several of you have given of your time to serve on the committee and in some cases to hold office.

On the other hand it is the enthusiasm and dedication of the lay or amateur botanist that has ensured the Society remains a viable and active group. Over the last fifty years many of you have shown that it is possible to make a valuable contribution to botany, write articles, talk to kindred groups, and generally spread the gospel. It is the amateur who has largely supported the many field

trips and attended all those wonderful camps into various parts of the South Island. Together, we have set the Society on a sound base.

What of the future? Will the Society be here to celebrate its 100th Year? While I prefer to take the optimistic view, society, as a whole is living through more difficult and changing times. It is no longer easy to attract new members. There are so many other commitments and demands on our time. Subsequently, members willing to hold office or to serve on the committee are harder to find. At present, membership numbers remain static.

Whatever the future holds for us, let us celebrate this occasion, making it a most memorable day.

Thank you

Neil O'Brien,
President



Akaroa daisy, *Celmisia mackaui*, is notable not just for its handsome foliage and flowers but also for its very limited natural range; it is endemic to the south-east corner of Banks Peninsula. (del. Hugh Wilson).