

The Seventh Pacific Science Congress was held in the first and third weeks of February 1949 in Auckland and Christchurch respectively. At Auckland there was a memorable excursion to Rangitoto Island. On a beautiful sunny day we were landed at Islington Bay and worked inland from there (perhaps the geologists were landed at Rangitoto wharf to prevent traffic jams). I remember that Dr Allan was there (perhaps collecting lichens?), and that he was being asked by two American botanists, Drs Carl Fosberg and Egbert Walker, for identifications, and I remember him suggesting that I help them. Dr Walker had an amputated hand – probably a war wound – and pulled branches toward him with a hook.

Since leaving Auckland in 1951 to join the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research at Lincoln, I have only visited Rangitoto twice.

On 31 May 1972 I set off by car from Lincoln for Auckland, via Picton, Wellington and Taupo. On the evening of Friday, 2 June, there was a Field Club reunion, and then on Saturday, 3 June, we went to stay at the YMCA camp on Motutapu Island for the Queen's Birthday weekend. Old friends attending

were Frank Newhook, Joan Dingley, Dick Matthews, Charles and Peg Fleming, Bob Briggs, Nita Steele, and Jean Livingstone. On Sunday we climbed Rangitoto and had lunch on the top. And that evening, as Peg Fleming reported, 'we went to the beach where there was a huge bonfire, fireworks, singing with guitars – song books and all, and sausages cooked on the fire.' (McEwen 2005). On the Queen's Birthday we looked around Motutapu and returned to Auckland.

The last visit was described by Andy Thomson (Godley & Thomson 2000) as follows: 'A highlight of the Auckland University Centennial celebrations in May 1983 was an ascent of Rangitoto on Sunday, 8 May by a large party of participants at the celebrations (including Lucy Moore, Charles and Peg Fleming, Eric Godley, Jack Rattenbury, Warwick Silvester, and Diane and Andy Thomson) led by Laurie Millener, who gave us the benefit of his observations on the vegetation over many years. In a somewhat characteristic manner Laurie, grasping a sheaf of notes, arrived at the Auckland wharf just before the boat left for Rangitoto. Laurie had perhaps the greatest knowledge of anybody about the botany of Rangitoto'.

#### Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are usually devoted to people or organisations, but here I would like to say: 'thank you Rangitoto for becoming part of me; please don't get angry with us – we mean well'. I also thank Mike Wilcox and his committee for so kindly giving me a copy of the lovely book on Rangitoto produced under his editorship by the Auckland Botanical Society. I also thank Maureen Young (Warkworth) and Peter Heenan (Christchurch) for help with references, as well as Wendy Weller (Christchurch) for her typing.

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## Reminiscences of Muriel Fisher

### As told to Maureen Young

As a child in Wellington I was not at all good at schoolwork but I was always interested in plants. Often on Sundays, instead of going to Sunday school, my father would take me for walks over the hills. He didn't know many plants, but taught me what he knew. There was rangiora, tutu, fuchsia and prickly shield fern. The fuchsia was always known as konini down in Wellington – it was the name of the fruit. One day I collected some of the plants and took them to school to show my teacher. For once, instead of being ridiculed for not being able to do my arithmetic, or not completing my homework, I was held up as an example to the rest of the class – "Oh, look at what Muriel has brought along." It was a tremendous boost to my confidence and made a difference to my attitude and my schoolwork. At secondary school my

mind was made up to matriculate and go to university to major in botany, but in 1931 the great depression hit and my father could no longer afford to keep me. I had to leave school and work in an office, which I hated.

Although I had walked all around the low hills, I longed to get up in the mountains and see the alpine plants. I had a fight on my hands with my Victorian parents – "No daughter of mine is going to don khaki shorts and go tramping in the mountains!" I joined the Tararua Tramping Club, despite my father's protestations. Within the club was a little botanical circle, and this became the nucleus of the Wellington Botanical Society, which was founded on 18 July 1939. I was a founding member and am now the

only one left living. When I turned twenty-one I got provisional matriculation and was able to do some papers at Victoria University, but because of my work commitments I was unable to attend labs, so I couldn't do botany.

I was terrified of earthquakes, having experienced the 1931 Napier earthquake while visiting my brother there, and in 1942 there was a series of earthquakes in Wellington. I looked up the records and found that earthquakes were less likely to occur in Auckland and Dunedin, so I applied to the Transport Department where I worked, for a transfer to one of those cities. I was transferred to Auckland, and there I did more university papers, though again not in botany. After the war there was a call for people to apply to become special teachers, and I applied and was accepted for training.



**Fig. 1. Muriel Fisher at her book launch, at Fernglen. The Loder Cup on her right was brought by Ewen Cameron, the 2005 cup holder. Photo: Romily Atkinson, 19 Dec 2005.**

I was introduced to Bill Fisher by his sister Nell. The Fishers were a family of gardeners, and their home at Birkdale was an old house (built 1888) in the bush and had no conveniences. It was approached by a rough track through the tea tree – now Kauri Road, and I have lived there ever since our marriage. After our marriage we joined an Auckland Tramping Club trip to Ruapehu; this was our so-called honeymoon.

In the mid 1950s I visited the Cheeseman Memorial Flower Show. At that stage the Auckland Botanical Society had taken over responsibility for “the

Cheeseman” and thus commenced my involvement with Bot Soc. In those days prominent members were Phyl Hynes, Kathleen Wood, Arthur Mead, Joan Dingley, and Marguerite Crookes. The following year I was a committee member, a position I held for several years, and was secretary in 1961–62. I remember having to meet the train from Whangarei to pick up Marge Maddren, who was carrying boxes of flowering carmine rata destined for the flower show. I also printed the Newsletters on a great jolly Gestetner. At this time there began to be dissension within Bot Soc; some of the university people suggested that we move our meetings from the university to the horticultural rooms – “After all, you're not botanists!”

Forest and Bird held their AGM up here, and Bill and I were bowled over by a talk by Roy Nelson about preserving what was left of our forests. I asked myself at that point; wouldn't it be better to save the forests rather than concentrating on tiny little plants? As the Bot Soc leadership was no longer to my liking, I changed my allegiance to Forest and Bird. I was infuriated about the destruction of beech trees on the edge of Chatswood Reserve, and wrote to Prime Minister Keith Holyoake about it. He replied that it was uneconomic to do otherwise. I gave up my teaching job and tried to get the gardening public involved in growing New Zealand plants, the “Cinderellas” of the plant kingdom, to make up for the destruction. This was the catalyst that saw the beginning of Fernglen, and it changed my life forever. Bill and I dreamed of the 12 acres of native plants eventually becoming an open air plant museum, much like Otari in Wellington.

Before writing my gardening book (“Gardening with New Zealand Plants, Shrubs and Trees” (Fisher et al. 1970)) I travelled the length of the country looking at gardens and native plants, and I was thrilled to find street plantings in Invercargill of *Celmisia lindsayi*. I found that New Zealand plants were highly valued in England but largely ignored here. After the death of Bill, Fernglen was acquired by the former Birkenhead City Council, and it was opened to the public in 1991.

People with an all-absorbing interest are the lucky people!

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## Awards

- 1970 Loder Cup
- 1971 Wattie Book of the Year Award for the first edition of *Gardening with New Zealand Plants, Shrubs and Trees*.
- 1985 QSM for community work in spreading the "gospel" about native plants.
- 1989 Award of Merit from the City of Birkenhead for volunteer service.
- 1991 Associate of Honour of the Royal Institute of Horticulture in recognition of service to New Zealand Horticulture.
- 2009 North Shore City Council named an area of several hectares of reserve land near Island Bay in Birkenhead as the Muriel Fisher Reserve.

## The Lucy Cranwell Lectures – 25 years on A personal view

Maureen Young

During the tenure of Ross Beever as President of the Auckland Botanical Society it was decided that a special lecture, to be given by a prestigious scientist, should be sponsored each year to commemorate the life and work of our founder and patron, Lucy M Cranwell. Lucy had lived in the USA since the war years, following her marriage to Watson Smith, then a Major in the American Armed Forces. Over the years she had continued to take a close interest in the society that she founded in 1937, and had made many generous donations whenever a project needed funding.

The obvious choice for the first lecturer was her dear friend and the other half of the duo known affectionately as "the two Lucys". This was Dr Lucy B Moore MBE, MSc, DSc, FLS, FRSNZ. Lucy Moore, after a distinguished career with the Botany Division of DSIR, had by this time retired to her home town of Warkworth. Thus it was that on 4 September 1985 the first Lucy Cranwell Lecture was to be given by Lucy Moore in the Zoology Lecture Theatre, Auckland University. There was much excitement and preparation in Warkworth beforehand. Letters were exchanged with America, with advice and questions from both sides. LMC wanted to know what was LBM going to wear? What was to be the title of the lecture? What visual aids would she use? Watson weighed in with advice to not be too scientific, but to be light-hearted and embroider the facts a little.

Lucy had no slides, so she borrowed transparency sheets and pens from Mahurangi College and made overhead projector transparencies showing the localities of the various excursions the two had undertaken in the late 1920s and the 1930s. She wore a maroon knit suit with a high neckline, and over this hung a little gold frog pendant that had been given to her by LMC during their "Moehau" years, to commemorate the tiny native frog, *Leiopelma archeyi*, then so common on the summit. The title of the talk was changed at the last minute from "Auckland botany in the Cranwell years" to "Cranwell botany in the Auckland years".

My friend, Frank Hudson, provided the wheels to get Lucy down to Auckland. She was by this time

becoming frail and a little unsteady on her feet, but pride dictated that this fact should be kept from others, so I had my orders to walk just in front and to one side of her, then if she stumbled she could put her hand on my shoulder to steady herself. The talk was less than inspiring, as her light voice, without assistance from a microphone and competing with the drone of the overhead projector, was lost in the large and rather gloomy lecture theatre.

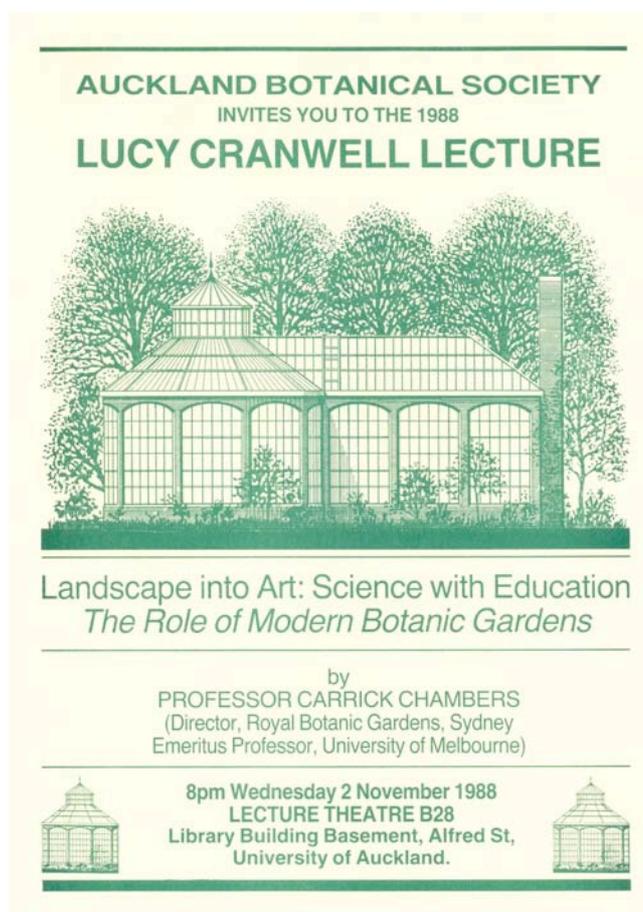


Fig. 1. Advertising flyer for the 1988 Lucy Cranwell Lecture.

Fortunately for posterity a transcript of the lecture was published in the ABS Newsletter Volume 41(2) July 1986, outlining the amazing adventures of the two young women – especially amazing when one considers not only the travel difficulties, but more especially the social restrictions of the time. As