

“More recent history of Otari-Wilton’s Bush” — Transcript of 2003 talk by Lindsay Poole

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In 2003, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry, a rimu tree was planted and a plaque (Fig. 1) unveiled in the formal garden area of Otari-Wilton’s Bush. As part of that celebration, several addresses were made to the gathering on the lawn adjacent to Cockayne’s grave. The article that follows is the transcript of the talk given by A. Lindsay Poole.



Figure 1. Plaque unveiled in 2003 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry.

During his career Lindsay was director of Botany Division of DSIR, Director-General of the New Zealand Forest Service and Chairman of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council. He was a life member of the New Zealand Institute of Forestry, a foundation member of the Wellington Botanical Society and its president from 1947 to 1949, and a member of the Otari-Wilton’s Bush Trust. He was the author of several books covering botany and forestry and a distinguished public servant. He died in January 2008.

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Lindsay wrote out his talk before delivering it. Those pages found their way to Barbara Hampton, a local historian. They give glimpses of the influence of Dr Leonard Cockayne on the development of Otari-Wilton's Bush as written by a person who knew Cockayne and grew up during the development of Otari.

Mrs Barbara Poole, Lindsay's widow, has graciously allowed the society to publish this annotated transcript.

Some headings have been introduced and some minor editing done to convert the text into an article. A few phrases that Lindsay deleted have been shown struck-through, as these give a flavour of the presentation and of Lindsay's thoughts at the time. Some text was underlined by Lindsay for emphasis. Footnotes, giving references to work that Lindsay mentioned, have been added.

TRANSCRIPT

More recent history of Otari-Wilton's Bush

Cockayne the ecologist

History of the main directions of developments [of Otari-Wilton's Bush] from about the time the Wellington City took over in 1919(?)², is inextricably involved with the influence of Leonard Cockayne. By that time he was a leading world contributor to the development of the science of ecology. Within New Zealand he had come to be used by various organisations to gather ecological understanding of what was happening, or could happen, to much of the natural vegetation. Indeed, because of these very wide world interests and demands on his time within New Zealand, he had moved from Christchurch to Wellington in 1914. He found this more central in coping with these activities.

People had changed the natural vegetation rapidly and would continue to do so for good or bad. The time was overdue when changes to come be planned, and Cockayne's conception of ecology included the effects of human beings.

Remnants of the commoner native forest, like Otari, within cities were rare. So here was a 'work shop' to study the changes going on within it – the ecology. And there was enough vacant ground around that forest remnant, where clearing had been made for farming and settlement, to experiment with the growing of native plants from almost anywhere in the country. Cockayne must always have been an exceptionally keen grower of plants. His first interest indeed seems to have been growing them and discovering

2. Lindsay had a question mark against the date. The reserve passed to the Wellington City Council in 1918.

their variation. Otari could be a gathering place for native plants. If horticulturally promising, their variation could be studied and propagation carried out.

By that time, too, Cockayne had built up wide rapport with some Government Departments. With Lands Department, for example, in connection with its settlement of the South Island tussock grasslands; the setting aside of National Parks and Reserves; the occupation of sand-dunes, etc.

Cockayne had close connections with forestry, at first through Lands, the department that initiated many of the early major developments. Then, in 1913, he was appointed member of a Royal Commission on 'Forestry and the use of Native Forests.' Although interrupted by the First World War the findings of this Commission led to the formation of the State Forest Service in 1919. Almost immediately Cockayne was asked to become the Honorary Botanist. He already knew a number of senior Lands officers who transferred to the new Department.

Just a reminder that by this time Cockayne's writings had become prodigious and were amongst the classics of early ecological literature.

The initial studies and follow up (Reid and Marjot)

His first obvious task on the Otari/Wilton site was to obtain as accurate a record as possible of the remnant of native 'bush'. It had survived the sawmilling onslaught. He could obtain all the assistance he wanted from the associations he had developed; but it had to be effective assistance.

- There was an important Botanical Garden not far away³ and its administration. Parts of this area had been moulded out of remnant native forest.
- There was a University with a Professor (Prof. Kirk⁴) and School of Botany.
- There was the Forest Service Head Office and Stan Reid, an early recruit to the new Service, was studying botany at the University. He was looking for a thesis for a masterate degree.

He met Cockayne; they must have talked Otari/Wilton because both of them lived not far from the reserve.

An ecological survey would be an ideal project. If it could be done, it would be a record that could be used as a basis for many subsequent studies; and would provide an example for other such studies around New Zealand.

So Stan Reid set to work in 1932 on this study for botany honours under Prof. Kirk and, no doubt, with a great deal of help, advice, etc (and

3. The Wellington Botanic Gardens, which James Hector had been instrumental in setting up. By the 1920s, this was well established.

4. This was Harry Borer Kirk, the son of Thomas Kirk.

interference) from Cockayne!

This, indeed, would have been one of the earliest surveys of its kind (if not the earliest) in New Zealand. Fortunately, there is a copy on record, including some vegetation maps, and some notes of Stan's compiled from subsequent records of interviews and later studies by him.⁵ More important still was the follow-up of the original survey by another, 60 years later in 1992, by Yvonne Therese Marjot.⁶

This later study recorded the major changes as: "...a podocarp-broadleaf forest remnant, bounded by *Dysoxylum spectabile* / *Melicytus ramiflorus* forest and *Ulex europaeus* / *Myrsine australis* scrub. Areas of secondary forest have increased in size and areas which were grassed in the 1930s have developed a dense cover of scrub, containing both native and introduced species."

Lindsay Poole's introduction to Cockayne

Perhaps I can interpolate here and record that in 1934 I worked for a year in the Forest Service Head Office in Wellington as a 'Student Trainee' under C. M. Smith, the then Chief Inspector of Forests who was a friend of Cockayne. A few years earlier (1930) I had graduated B.(For.)Sc. from the Auckland School of Forestry. About half of that course consisted of basic science subjects and the other half forestry and related subjects. In a number of ways I had found Cockayne's pioneering papers and books on sand dunes, kauri forest, and beech forest in particular of fundamental assistance. We soon became well aware of his New Zealand name and, of course, his world name in matters ecological.

In Wellington I was to meet Cockayne and see him frequently. It was the year of his death and he had become partly blind. But before he died he used to come to the Forest Service room occupied by Mary Sutherland, a professional Forest Officer trained in Wales. I had a temporary desk in her room and could listen to the half-blind Cockayne dictating his last scientific papers to Mary. ~~Then my job was to take him back to the tram on Thorndon Quay. We used to have arguments on the way, Cockayne loved argument and controversy.~~

Cockayne's last paper was a list of natural hybrids in New Zealand species.

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5. Some of these have been published in Bulletins of the Wellington Botanical Society. See for example:
Reid, J.S. 1985: Changes over 50 years in a native forest quadrat in Otari Reserve, Wellington. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 42: 41–57.
Reid, J.S. 1989: Bracken fern and scrub communities in Otari Reserve, re-observed after fifty years. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 45: 100–114.
Reid, J.S. 1996: Otari vegetation. *Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin* 47: 34–53.
 6. Marjot, Y.T. 1992: Sixty years of change in a forest reserve: Otari Plant Museum, Wilton, Wellington. Unpublished M.Sc., Victoria University of Wellington.

Basic to all his ecology was the need for the most accurate observation and naming of plants. He kept close contact with taxonomists especially, it seemed, with H.H. Allan who, a few years later, was asked to found the Botany Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Dr Allan brought with him his private herbarium which contained many specimens collected by Cockayne.

Lindsay, Stan Reid and Cockayne

I came to know Stan Reid very well. He introduced me to Otari. Indeed, when Cockayne died, we considered that he loved nature so much and studied it so closely and intelligently that he would prefer being buried at Otari and in a grave marked as naturally as possible, in the place of a marble tomb. So we chose the largest natural boulder we could find on the hills near Otari and the City Council agreed to move it to the proposed site of the grave.

Cockayne's name had become so outstanding and his work so applicable to our living that the New Zealand Governor General of the day, Lord Bledisloe, gave an oration at the funeral. Cockayne is buried, with his wife, on a high spot in Otari with the simple boulder as a tombstone. There is little in the nature of an epitaph. I am sure Stan Reid would agree with me that there should be a ringing one!

The words that always seem to convey most about Cockayne in a few lines were written by Sir Arthur Hill, Director of Kew Botanic Gardens, who came out to see New Zealand and travelled here in company with Cockayne. They read: "Unrecognised and unlabelled at first, Cockayne in New Zealand was already an ecologist waiting for the term to be adopted by botanists, and fully trained, with his keen insight, to lead the way not in New Zealand only but in the world".

Might I also add that in his speech at Cockayne's funeral the Governor General said this: "Much of Dr Cockayne's work had been directed towards the greater productivity of the land and the country."

Apart from his thesis Stan Reid has left a very brief record of "OTARI STORY – Information about Wilton's Bush" (1992). And in 1993 a transcript from a tape record; "Stan Reid talks about regeneration of the forest in the Wilton – Wadestown – Ngaio Gorge area to Gwenyth Wright". In this are some interesting comments on the fact that in the early days of settlement there was some good milling bush in the district surrounding Wilton. There was a timber mill between Ngaio and Khandallah and a mill, driven by water power, at Kaiwharawhara.

In this record Stan Reid also mentions associating with a "blind Cockayne" in the 30s, showing him around Wellington, reading to him and listening to him "libelling" acquaintances. One he libelled most was his own son (Alfie Cockayne) who later became Director of Agriculture!

The final extremely interesting record from this tape reads “G.W. [Gwenyth Wright] The patterns would tend to repeat in a fairly wide region?”

Plants at Otari

Cockayne sought and obtained from many friends and acquaintances around the country, plants to grow at Otari. This collection has continued until it is now probably by far the largest collection of New Zealand plants. (An updated list is kept.)

In Cockayne’s day, too, he considered that kauri and southern beech would undoubtedly be managed on a sustained yield, forestry basis by the new Forest Service. To show people what these trees were and how they grew he had small areas of them planted. [A note, concerning the kauri seedlings sent from an area near Auckland by a Forest Service officer (W.A. Cowan) in 1929, is attached—see Appendix 1.]

In spite of Cockayne’s liberal use of libel, might I end this record by quoting his own words from a paper in the 1927 Journal of Agriculture in which he lays out broad principles for “Otari Open-Air Native Plant Museum”⁷, remembering too that in 1927 the Wellington City Council had “set the area aside”. He wrote: “In the arrangement of the species and the general design of the Museum, the first consideration must be beauty...” Here was the grower’s love of plants!

Summary

In my opinion, because of plants and records already collected, and studies made, Otari has become a most important place for continuous studies and collections of native plants. Some of the long-term changes so far that are of special importance include:

- Record of damage done to the tall rimu trees by the 1968 Wahine storm;
- Kohekohe encroachment;
- Opossum damage;
- Geological history going back to the dominance of southern beech in the area.

Apart from these basic matters the recent changes that have been made make Otari a most attractive place to visit.

“The first consideration must be beauty.”

7. The quotation comes from the 1932 publication authored by Cockayne, *A Scheme for the Development and Arrangement of the Otari Open-Air Native Plant Museum*, page 2. The paper Lindsay refers to in the (May 20) 1927 Journal of Agriculture is *The Otari Open-Air Native Plant Museum*, written by J.G. MacKenzie (Director of Parks and Reserves, Wellington) and Cockayne. That summarised the first proscription for the development of the ‘Museum’ but was in a more prosaic style.

APPENDIX 1: NOTES BY W.A. COWAN ON THE KAURI AREA WITHIN OTARI-WILTON'S BUSH.

During 1929 Dr L. Cockayne endeavoured to encourage the public to plant more N.Z. trees as an alternative to the usually faster growing foreign species. He always made a point that young native trees were freely available and no special care was necessary.

A rather exposed and treeless area on the edge of Wilton's bush was made available to Dr Cockayne for the planting of selected species. A photo of Dr Cockayne in this rather barren area is held in the staff library of Otari office. He requested the Forest Service to supply him with suitable Kauri plants, and this request was passed on to the Auckland office of the Department during the winter of 1929.

I was instructed to gather these plants from any source handy to Auckland and was fortunate to remember a likely area N.E. of Riverhead Forest; probably unoccupied Crown Land. I cannot recall that any particular number of plants was requested but as this was a one day job and the source more than a mile from vehicle transport the number of Kauri plants supplied would be less than 100.

Small Kauri were wrapped in sphagnum moss and those larger with the usual lack of branch roots were balled in wet clay. In his letter of acknowledgement Dr Cockayne stated that this extra care was not necessary, an opinion not shared by Auckland officers. The late Mr Stan Read of Forest Service Head Office told me that some replacement blanking was done in 1930 - 1933 - source of plants unknown.

My first visit to the Wilton bush Kauri grove was I think in 1948 with the guidance of Mr Stan Read. Most Kauri at that time were only slightly higher than the sheltering Kanuka - 2-2½ metres (from memory). I do not recall on that occasion or on later visits prior to 1956 seeing any gorse plants although they must have been present. However in 1970 I found it too difficult to penetrate the Kauri area due to dense growth of gorse, or judge the height of the trees.

With the assistance of Otaki Botanic Garden staff to locate this Kauri grove I next saw this area on 17th May 1995 and was surprised to find that most of the gorse had been replaced by N.Z. species with a high dense canopy excluding almost all sunlight. Mr K. Craven of Otari staff drew my attention to a number of Kauri saplings 1½ to 2 metres in height. Due to the lack of available time and poor visibility at ground level I did not try to count the number of second crop Kauri trees or find out the total area and relation to possible parent trees.

The survival of the young Kauri may depend on the light available with the present dense overhead canopy. The month of May is an unsuitable time to form an opinion on this point and I hope to visit the area again in October or November when visibility within the forest will be better.

I venture the opinion that if it is accepted that Kauri has naturally regenerated in the latitude of Wellington it is worth some study by a competent person or group.

W. A. COWAN.

WA Cowan
26/9/95

When Cowan visited the area in 1995, he must have been unaware that Walter Brockie had planted young kauri in 1954. Brockie's diary for August 1954 records "*Most of the trees originally planted in the Kauri Section were destroyed or mutilated by cows, sheep and horses. Some of the survivors are at this date doing very well, two trees close alongside the bush being about 15 feet high...*" In that month Brockie and his assistant, Robert Everett, planted 116 seven-year old kauri trees. "*The trees are somewhat whippy and average about four feet high.*" In 1957 a further 100 kauri were planted by Brockie.